THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT: *Congratulatory messages are a type of greeting in which members of a society express their joy and happiness to one another as a result of an accomplishment, success, or good fortune. Several studies have been conducted on oral greetings from both pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives, with little attention paid to written forms. The goal of this paper is to look into the connections between the sociolinguistic behaviours of Nigerian (L2) English speakers in newspaper congratulatory messaging and the specific social norms, values, and beliefs they convey. The paper will investigate the structural patterns as well as the functions of these messages, to determine what kind of sociolinguistic information they attempt to communicate. The framework for the paper is Ethnography of Communication. Data were subjected to sociolinguistic analysis. Findings reveal that English has a distinct cultural element in relation to the society where it is adopted as official or additional language. Social interactional norms in the Nigerian context emphasised status and power instead of solidarity. The sociolinguistic import of these messages conveyed sociocultural orientations to spirituality, adulations, and veneration of the aged, and solicitation. The results discussed in this paper have implications on how people think about the value of studying language as a communicative instrument in relation to the society in which it is used and the sociocultural function it tries to perform.*

KEYWORDS: Ethnography of communication, sociocultural norms, Greetings, Society, Sociolinguistic behaviours

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the forms and functions of congratulatory messages in the Nigerian sociocultural context. It shows how congratulatory messages relate to the people's specific sociocultural norms and values. Language behaviour varies among linguistic groups and different social contexts. Thus, the norms governing speech behaviour which enables speakers to know what is appropriate to say to whom and under which conditions show variation from language group to language group and from society to society. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how social norms, values, and beliefs influence the linguistic choices of Nigerian English speakers in newspaper congratulatory messages.

Given the social communicative changes and demands of the twenty-first century and globalisation, which are compelling on people who do not share a common cultural experience to interact with one another in intercultural communication, knowledge of the sociolinguistic practices and habits of congratulatory messaging in given contexts is an important part of the

sociopragmatics of language that deserves at least some attention. According to *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th Edition* (2003:26), to congratulate means "to express sympathetic pleasure (at an event), to express vicarious pleasure to a person on the occasion of success or good fortune". From the above definition, congratulations can be said to involve the expression of joyous feelings towards somebody on account of his/her achievement or success. It is a phatic communion showing solidarity, goodwill and respect. It is a fundamental sociolinguistic phenomenon in which people reach out to others to show their support and approval of one's achievement. As a form of greeting, congratulatory messages convey a significant aspect of values that facilitate interpersonal relationships (Adeyanju, 2003). As a result, people feel obligated to congratulate their relatives, families, neighbors, and coworkers on their birthdays, new baby arrivals, weddings, awards and conferment chieftaincy titles, promotions, electoral victories, graduation, and so on.

Congratulatory messaging has been around for a long time and it is an important part of social life. It is a communicative event in which members of a community express their joy and happiness as a result of another member's achievement, success, or good fortune. It is customary for members of a society to rejoice and share in others' joy by sending congratulatory messages to show solidarity. Searle, (1976) describes congratulations as an expressive speech act, by which the speaker expresses his/her feelings and emotions towards the addressee. It is an act which is desirable to the addressee. Such affections and good wishes are expressed through creative use of language. Congratulatory messages are also seen as pieces of advertisement that for the most part, appear in newspapers on purpose to commemorate special occasions, or to congratulate someone for a remarkable achievement or success or good fortune (Al-Khatib, 1997). Congratulatory messages (henceforth CM) may feature in several pages of a single edition of a newspaper. Messages for a particular individual could also feature many times in one edition of a newspaper, and in some cases, these messages could continue to feature in subsequent editions for many more days.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED WORKS

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the ethnography of communication. Propounded by Hymes (1972) and modified by Saville-Troike (1989), ethnography of communication addresses the order of information in the structuring of communicative behaviour and its role in the conduct of social life. It focuses on discussions of locally distinctive means of communication with attention primarily on situated uses of language. Ethnography synthesises the relationship between language and culture within the framework of communication. It is an approach for analysing language which has been designed to heighten awareness of culture bound practices. Saville-Troike (1989:2) posits that: "the subject matter of ethnography of communication is best illustrated by one of its most general questions": which is, "what does a speaker need to know so as to communicate effectively in a particular community, and how does he or she learn"? What this implies is that the social communicative rules are learned through socialisation, and this includes the cultural norms, values and belief systems that are the basis for the context and the content of communicative event and interaction processes.

Hymes' (1972) ethnography places priority on modes and functions of language. It emphasises that what language is cannot be separated from how and why it is used, and that considerations of use are often prerequisites to recognition and understanding of much of linguistic form. In this regard sociolinguistics can be said to share the goals of the ethnography of communication which, in the view of Saville-Troike (1989), takes language as a socially situated cultural form which gives prominence to the analysis of the code and the cognitive processes of its users. This in effect expresses the relevance of ethnography in the investigation of CM in the Nigerian context, as it studies 'communicative form and function in integral relation to each other' (Al-Khatib & Salem, 2011).

As ethnography deals with the study of a particular society or culture, it is likened to the study of how features of language correlate with the characteristics of the context, setting or situation in which a communicative event takes place. Language is rule governed behaviour. These rules are of various types and differ from one community to another. Saville-Troike (1989) posits that the task of ethnography is the discovery and explication of the rules for contextually appropriate behaviour in a group or community. To this effect, communicative activities are divided into discrete units for description and analysis. Hymes (1972), suggested three units namely: communicative situation, communicative event and communicative act. He also proposed some components which involves the exploration of dimensions of each such communicative practice. He used a mnemonic device known as *SPEAKING* (S-speaking, P-participants, E-ends, Act sequences, K-key, Instrumentalities, N-norms and G-genre), to represent these components which are utilised to analyse speaker's language use in relation to the communicative situation.

Ethnographers in the view of Carbaugh (2007) explore language in communication as something locally patterned and practiced as part of social life, and as something crucially important, being formative of all societal and cultural communities. Understanding and interpreting an utterance in discourse depends largely on these components, and the participants' mutual contextual sociocultural beliefs. Based on these, the ethnographer is able to discern what is appropriate and inappropriate in a given community. Congratulatory message is one of the mediums in which people publicly express and make known their feelings and emotions towards their families, friends, well-wishers and associates on the occasions of their birthdays, conferment of chieftaincy titles, wedding anniversaries, graduations, etc. Many scholarly studies have been conducted on the concept of greetings in spoken (oral) forms, both from a sociolinguistic and pragmatic standpoint. However, little attention has been paid to written forms, which have the potential to expose cultural practices of different groups, thereby raising awareness and fostering intercultural understanding and communication.

Scholars have attempted to examine beyond the literal contents of CM in different ways. For instance, Al-Ali (2005:6-8) identified congratulatory announcement genre as "happy ceremonies" and one of the "important genres…easily recognisable socially constructed text genres of everyday life." Researchers believe that a close examination of these types of messages reveal social, cultural, and religious information. Congratulatory messages are regarded above all as "friendly social acts." They are also regarded as "items or advertisements" that, for the most part, appear in

newspapers on purpose to commemorate special occasions, greet individuals for outstanding performances, or congratulate someone on a specific achievement or success (Jubril et al., 2015). For example, upon attaining the age of fifty (50) which is always significant in many cultures, and also regarded as the golden age, family, friends and associates may decide to sponsor congratulatory messages to announce their support, approval and to share in the joy of the addressee. Such messages may feature once or more and, in some cases, could possibly continue to feature for some days to come (Al-Khatib, 1997:157-159).

One of the earliest studies in which congratulations were examined was Austin (1962), in which he describes congratulation as 'behabitives'. Searle (1969) classifies it as an expressive speech act, in which the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed. Consequently, he proposed the following rules for congratulation:

> There is an event that is related to the hearer.
> The event is in the hearer's interest and the speaker believes the event is in the
> hearer's interest.
> The speaker is pleased at the event.
> It counts as an expression of pleasure.

Bach and Harnish (1979:41), in their taxonomy of communicative illocutionary acts classify congratulation under the category of "acknowledgements." The idea is that such occasions are mutually acknowledged by the interlocutors, and the speaker's acknowledgment of those occasions is not only appropriate but also expected by the listener. As a result, most of the time, even if the speaker does not have genuine feelings about the occasion, he or she acknowledges and expresses congratulations to meet social expectations. Brown and Levinson (1978) see congratulation as a positive politeness strategy, while Leech (1983) describes it as 'convivial'.

Wierzbicka (1987), Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989), and Tannen (1993) distinguished between compliments and other speech acts. A compliment, according to these scholars, is something (an attribute) that is specifically associated with the addressee, such as his outfit, vehicle, or appearance. When performing a complimenting act, the focus is on the person being complimented; however, when using congratulatory messaging, the focus or emphasis is on the positive event, occasion, or thing that has happened to the addressee, about which the speaker believes the addressee is pleased. For the same reason, the speaker conveys to the addressee the message that he or she shares in the speaker's enjoyment. This is expressed in the cultural script formulated for English 'congratulate' by Wierzbicka (1987:229) as follows:

> Congratulate
> I know that something good has happened to you.
> I think it wouldn't have happened if you didn't do something.
> I assume that you feel something good because of that.
> I want to say that I feel the same because of that.
> I say! I feel something good because of that.
> I say this because I want to cause you to know how I feel because of it.

I assume that you would want me to say this.

Although these speech acts (compliments and congratulations) differ slightly, they all share one thing in common: the expression of approval.

Studies that examined congratulations within a specific context or speech event/situation includes, Al-Khatib (1997) 'Congratulatory announcements in newspapers', in which he described congratulatory announcements from the sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on the cultural and communicative functions of 'Congratulations and Thank You Announcements in Jordanian Newspapers'. He submitted that the act of congratulation is primarily and essentially a friendly social act which aims at establishing and maintaining good relations between individuals. The speaker's act of praise and adulations are addressed to satisfy the addressee's face-needs of wanting to be recognised, cared for and supported.

Some of the studies deal with differences and similarities in the meanings and uses of congratulatory messages in specific cultures, see (Tsilipakou (2001)- Greek culture; Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011)- Iranian/Persian culture and Wierzbicka (1986)- Australian culture). Can's (2011) work titled 'A cross-cultural study of the speech act of congratulation in British English and Turkish', examines the culturally different conceptualisation of congratulation in British culture and *tebrik* and *kutlama* in Turkish culture using a corpus approach. Using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), the study showed cultural dissimilarities and similarities in the conceptualisation of the speech act of congratulation in terms of its contexts of use and strategies.

These works, without a doubt, are as insightful as they are interesting; additionally, they are united with this current study in their contention that greeting is a universal phenomenon whose expression is language and culture specific, a politeness strategy, and a means of facilitating social relationships. However, there is a notable absence of studies in African languages and societies on the preceding list. Similarly, no significant attention has been paid to the speech act of congratulations (which is a type of greeting) in the analysis of existing studies on greetings in general. Despite the greetings speech act, attracting many research works both locally and internationally, such as Irvine (1974), Egblewogbe (1990), Ameka (1991), Nwoye (1993), Duranti (1997b), Akindele (1997, 2007), Bello (2002), Dzameshie (2002), Adeyanju (2003), Sekyi-Baidoo & Koranteng (2008), Taiwo (2010), Olaoye (2013), and Udeagha (2020) and many others, only a few of the works made cursory statements of congratulations. Al-Ali (2005:6) echoed this sentiment when he stated that while CM is an important genre, it has "received little attention from researchers". Jubril et al. (2015) backed up this claim by declaring that studies on congratulatory messages are scarce and fall within the Arabian continuum. According to their (Jubril et al.) analysis, there is little or no evidence of similar empirical studies on congratulatory messages conducted outside of the Arab world in the literature, which also demonstrates that researchers are not paying enough attention to this type of greeting.

Furthermore, far too many existing works on greetings are based on observation, interviews, or field notes, with little regard for the written genre, which effectively mirrors the propositional content of the messages while also combining features from various traditional written registers. Written CM has the potential to reveal the senders' identities as individuals and social groups.

Duranti (2008:66) describes the consequences of failing to consider the propositional content of greetings as posing "considerable empirical problems." Thus, this research was conducted in response to the fact that, despite being the fastest growing and most popular form of literary exchange among the elite, there is a general lack of knowledge about congratulatory messages, particularly in Nigerian newspapers.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how specific sociocultural norms, values, and beliefs in the Nigerian context influence L2 English speakers' linguistic choices in congratulatory messaging. This research has the potential to shed more light on the complexities of the language situation in new modern African states, as well as in many third-world and developing countries where a formal, typically European language coexists with indigenous languages and cultures. The interaction between indigenous languages and these foreign languages has resulted in a variety of sociolinguistic and pragmatic manifestations that differ from the native variety. English is prominent among these European languages, having been described by Quirk et al. (1985:2) as "the world's most important language and the world's most widely used language." The intense contact situation of English with Nigerian indigenous languages and cultures, for example, has resulted in the evolution of English expressions that are uniquely Nigerian in the sense that they reflect phonological, structural, and semantic properties of Nigerian languages and cultures that differ from the native variety. According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), this variety of English has undergone a process of "indiginisation and nativisation" and thus lacks the characteristics of the native variety. Congratulatory texts in Nigerian newspapers are an example of this type of English. In light of this, an examination and analysis of these realizations would be beneficial, as it could enlighten members of the English-speaking community about the communicative strategies found in written congratulatory messages in the context of the newspaper.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Samples of congratulatory messages from four (4) Nigerian national newspapers (*The Guardian, The Punch, THISDAY, and Vanguard*) were collected for this paper from June 2018 to December 2019. These four newspapers were chosen for their widespread circulation and abundance of congratulatory messages. The first section of this study's analysis focuses on the components that make up the structures and functions of congratulatory messages in relation to the Nigerian sociocultural context. We define structural features as any element that contributes to the structural organisation of congratulatory messages (for example, the layout, message size, number, frequency, and graphological features such as font size and type, photographs, symbols, and punctuation marks), with the goal of identifying obligatory and optional features. In other words, we investigate the arrangement of communicative acts (act sequence according to Hymes (1972), within CM in Nigerian newspapers. The communicative event is then linguistically and sociolinguistically analysed, with a focus on the culturally embedded and contextually dependent knowledge of addressers' and addressees' social statuses, identities, relationships, social norms, beliefs, values, societal expectations, and needs. The themes of the messages include birthdays, conferment of chieftaincy titles, electoral successes, and graduation. Such messages are typically sponsored by families, friends, and associates (political, business, etc.) in order to convey solidarity, express joy and emotions, and fulfill other personal goals.

The primary goal of this research is to highlight the forms and social communicative functions of congratulatory messages, as well as the sociocultural information they are attempting to convey. Second, the study seeks to determine whether social factors such as gender, educational attainment, status, occupation, and religion influence the form, size, propositional content, pattern, number, and frequency of the messages as well as the language used. Based on data collected from selected Nigerian national newspapers, the study will provide insights into the foregrounded issues. Speech acts such as greetings are considered to be one of the most revealing aspects of culture (Wolfson, 1990; Adeyanju, 2003; Ekechi, 2018). This paper is primarily predicated on the idea that the meaning of specific communicative acts should be investigated in relation to those who use and produce them (Hymes 1972; 1974; Philipsen 1992).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

This section focuses on the analysis and discussion of the structural, linguistic and sociolinguistic features of CM in Nigerian newspapers.

Analysis of the Structural Features of CM
The data analyses will look at the structural characteristics of CM. First, we look at the typical structural pattern (ordering of events/act sequence) found in congratulatory messages. We examine the ordering of communicative acts (structural patterns) in the data, accounting for two main types of features: obligatory and optional, using the same taxonomy used by Awonusi (1996) and Al-Khatib (1997) in their works on 'political campaign advertisements' and 'congratulations and thank you announcements', respectively. Following that, we investigate the linguistic and sociological implications. A closer look at the data reveals that CM has both mandatory and optional features. The obligatory features are those that must be present in all messages, whereas the optional features are those that are up to the addresser's discretion. Data analysis reveals that congratulatory messages in Nigerian newspapers are a communicative event with the following structural pattern: Opening/caption/heading/attention getters, Introduction, Body of the message, Conclusion and Signature line.

The following illustration showing the obligatory and optional parts represents the usual pattern of CM found in Nigerian newspapers.
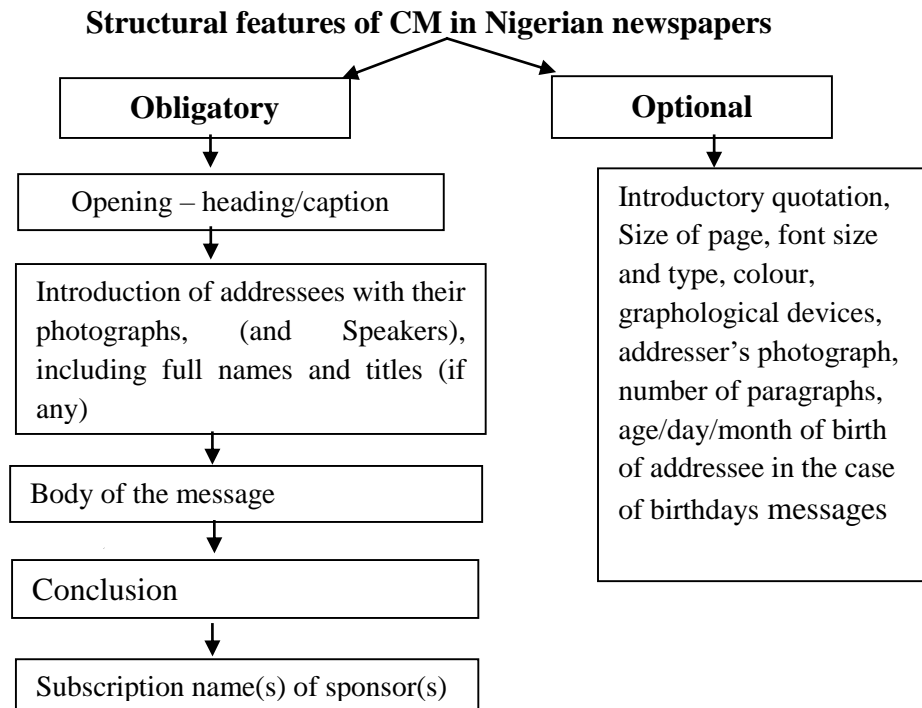
Structural features of CM in Nigerian newspapers

Obligatory	Optional

Opening – heading/caption

Introduction of addressees with their photographs, (and Speakers), including full names and titles (if any)

Body of the message

Conclusion

Subscription name(s) of sponsor(s)

Introductory quotation, Size of page, font size and type, colour, graphological devices, addresser's photograph, number of paragraphs, age/day/month of birth of addressee in the case of birthdays messages

Figure 1: Summary of the structural features of congratulatory messages in Nigerian newspapers.

The opening of CM in Nigerian newspapers is the section where captions, headlines and attention getters are evaluated. All the congratulatory messages in Nigerian newspapers have captions. These messages employ a variety of opening techniques to capture the attention of the reader, and to convey their messages quickly. The most visible of these techniques is the manipulation of graphological devices (bold prints, photographs, symbols and logos, capitalisation, italicisation and exclamation marks to name a few). These devices serve as attention grabbers while also revealing the commemorated events. Minor and short sentences, as well as ritual phrases, are written and highlighted using various graphological instrument indicating the start of CM. Consider the following illustrations: *'HAPPY BIRTHDAY OUR MUMMY!', '50 HEARTY CHEERS TO A WORTHY FRIEND!', 'FELICITATION TO A VISIONARY LEADER!', 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY BABA!'.*

Other valuable graphological devices used to reinforce the bold prints and extend the semantic scope of the captions are pictures and photographs of the addressees, with full names, titles, and honorifics (if any), which represent different symbolic attributes. While addressee identification is always accompanied by photographs, speaker identification is not always accomplished through the use of personal information. For obvious reasons, the inclusion of emblems, logos, and other signs representing the addressers' business organization, products, and services is a distinguishing feature of the majority of the messages. All messages in Nigerian newspapers included photographs of the addressees, but only 24% included those of the addressers, and 54% included their business addresses and contacts information.

Some of the opening phrases or sentences are captivating and intriguing, and they contribute to the dramatic mood in the messages. They are typically written with the aim of arousing the readers' curiosity and interest. They also reveal the ability of the Nigerian L2 speakers of English to generate creative congratulatory messages employing innovative English usages. Some of these captions make use of indigenous languages which is especially noteworthy. This activity gives sociolinguistic significance to the local languages in the realm of congratulatory messaging. Some of the messages use code-mixing, and some are allusive or metaphoric and clearly complemented the meanings represented of the addressees, as seen in the following examples: *'WELL DONE ALABI1!; 'The People's GSM is 52'; 'An icon @ 81; '62 Hearty Cheers!'; ALL HAIL the PRESIDO!'*

All of the messages discovered have an introduction. It is also important to note that the names of all addressees and addressers, as well as their titles if any, are disclosed (e.g., Chieftaincy titles, Traditional titles, Professional titles etc.). Nigerian social interaction patterns are asymmetrical, emphasizing status and power. Titles are important to Nigerians because they demonstrate clout and status of the participants. Failure to use these titles, or using them incorrectly, can ruin a relationship. However, in some messages, speaker identification appears only in the signature line, implying that, while speaker identification is required in the Nigerian press, it can appear at the beginning or end of the message.

The message is contained in the body content. This is the stage at which the speaker's feelings and emotions toward the addressee are revealed. The body copy includes a brief profile and information on the addressee's personal characteristics that earned him/her the recognition, as well as recorded achievements and successes. The body content contains the message proper. This is the stage where the feelings and emotions of the speaker towards the addressee are revealed. The body copy provides a brief profile and information on personal attributes of the addressee that earned him/her the recognition, recorded achievements and successes. This is the section of the message in which the addressee's qualities are extolled through glowing tributes that include panegyric expressions, adulations, and even flattery. The addressee is portrayed in this context as someone who promotes a specific ideology and uses his intellectual, economic, and spiritual resources to benefit the common man and society as a whole. The body copy also allows speakers to address some sociopolitical and economic issues. Aside from these, the body copy allows for the use of CM as an instrument for expressing the speakers' worldview. The majority of the messages are lengthy and divided into paragraphs.

The conclusion/ending consists primarily of supplications, wishes, and reaffirmation of loyalty and love for the addressee. Some of the messages conclude with ritual phrases that are also characterised by bold prints similar to those seen in the first stage. These graphological devices serve to reinforce and sustain the earlier drawn attention. They also serve to leave a lasting impression on the readers of the messages. The final section is also where the majority of code-mixing and code-switching from English to indigenous and other languages occurs. It is important to note that the majority of Nigerian indigenous greeting expressions presented in CM do not have a direct English equivalent. Since they are very important features of the type of occasions found in CM, the speakers have no choice than to code-switch or code-mix. Consider the following

example: '*As our son', we say 'Ma a jo lo a n wo eyin re'!* (meaning- 'continue the good work, we totally support you').

 In the case of messages sponsored by political parties, or messages that are politically motivated, the endings usually restate both the party's name, and slogan and the name of the addressee who is either a party chieftain or flag bearer. There are also party logos and symbols inserted. The endings of messages sponsored by organizations provide a good opportunity to display their logos, trademarks, goods and services, and contact information. These serve as attention getters, as part of a potential marketing strategy aimed at announcing and positioning the organization, and as part of a strategy for soliciting patronage. A hundred percent of the messages have concluding parts.

The signature line is where the sponsor(s) of a congratulatory message are officially revealed with full names, titles, and designations. Every CM in Nigerian newspaper has a signature line separate from the conclusion. It is not necessary to include the addressee's photograph, an introductory quotation, the color and size of the page, or the font size and type. This is determined by the preferences of the sponsor. Because all CMs in Nigerian newspapers are heavily paid for, the page size of the messages varies depending on the sponsor(s) and the socioeconomic status of the addressees. The larger the size of the page, the higher the socioeconomic status of both the addressees and the addressers, it is believed.

Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Features of CM in Nigerian Newspapers

The analysis of data reveals not only people's sociocultural norms and values, but also the characteristics of a variety dictated by language contacts and bilingualism. As a result, code-switching and mixing are two distinguishing linguistic characteristics of Nigerian CM. These traits can be found throughout the messages, but they are more prevalent in the final sections. Because English is a second language in Nigeria, speakers of Nigerian English may find it difficult to express some of their thoughts and feelings in English. Furthermore, the majority of indigenous Nigerian greeting expressions have no direct English equivalent, and when they are translated, the meanings are not accurately represented. Nigerian English speakers used code-switching and mixing in CM to express group identification, solidarity, or the intensity of their emotions, as well as to remove ambiguity (Saville-Troike, 1989). In 45 percent of the messages examined, code switching and mixing were used. Consider the following scenarios: *Kade pe lori ki bat ape lese'* (Yoruba form of greeting meaning – 'May your reign as King be prolonged')*, 'May God keep you healthy and happy, O ga adili gi mma'* (greeting in Igbo language meaning – 'it will be well with you'*) '50 GBOSA for a brother, A jolly good fellow' - '50 hearty cheers to a brother', 'Bon anniversary, Sir' (Good anniversary Sir).*

Significant linguistic instruments used at the introductory stage are Circumlocution and Appositives which are usually employed to show the clout of the interlocutors as well as create effects, and add colour to the messages. This is illustrated in the following example: 'I Hon/Chief/Dr X (FSP, CIN), The Chairman of XYZ group of companies, on behalf of my family and the entire people of Y of Z LGA, Congratulate Chief/Hon… Y, The Managing Director of X group of companies on the occasion of the conferment of Chieftaincy title of ZZZ on him by the

distinguished (Oba/Igwe/Emir – these are titles of traditional rulers from different Nigerian tribes) of Y Community, His Royal Highness XYZ.

Another salient feature of the CM is supplications. 94 percent of the messages either made direct supplications to God on behalf of the addressee or included faith-based expressions to buttress the belief and faith in God. Some of these religious expressions take the form of allusions. Christians, Muslims, and traditional worshipers all make references or direct supplications to God in one way or another to demonstrate their belief in the existence of a supreme being who gives life, good health, protection, and wealth. Consider the following example: 'For a prophet is with honour…', 'The Lord hath done great things for us'- ps. 126:3. The preceding expressions are religious allusions to Biblical injunctions. In CM, an allusion is an implied or indirect reference in discourse to a person or event in history, literature, culture, politics, or religion. Allusive language is used by speakers in CM to emphasise their meaning intentions. The appropriate use of allusion in the preceding contexts demonstrates the importance of the participants' social characteristics and their interaction with one another in determining how we speak. One of the most important components proposed by (Hymes, 1972) for the analysis of speech events is the participant. Communicative competence entails knowing what to say and how to say it to different kinds of people at different situations (Hymes, 1972). The speaker's description of the addressee reflects his relationship with her as a "parent-child," "superior-subordinate," or "equals," among other things. Sixty-four percent (64%) of CM in Nigerian newspapers use allusive expressions to support their points.

The use of titles and honorifics is also prevalent in CM in the Nigerian press. They are used to convey status, distance, respect, politeness, age differences, and authority. The extensive use of family role-based terms of address such as (*mummy*, *daddy/baba*, *uncle*, *aunty sister* and *brother*) to address non-kin relations, as well as honorifics (*egbon*, *aburo meaning senior and junior respectively in Yoruba language, Southwest Nigeria*), simply reflect the Nigerian sociocultural norms, values, beliefs and worldviews which are different from those of the target language. Obayan (1995:254) describes the exclusive and extensive nature of the Nigeria family system as group reality rather than individual reality. For instance, the socio-cultural belief in Nigeria is that children belong not just to their parents but the entire community. This justifies the address forms such as **'our son' 'our daughter', 'our jewel', 'our illustrious son'.** The most important feature of address forms, according to Medubi (2010), is that they are constructed in accordance with the dictates of the culture in which they are found. In other words, they carry social meanings that reflect the society's sociocultural values and worldview. In the Nigerian sociocultural context, personal address forms serve different functions. Thus, the use of these address terms demonstrates how specific permutations elicit specific norms (for example, to express love, reverence, or politeness), as well as indexing specific Nigerian cultural premises about personhood and relationships. We discovered that the titles (Academic, professional, traditional, religious, etc.), of the addressees were included in 100 percent of congratulatory announcements in Nigerian newspapers.

Furthermore, we discovered that metaphorical expressions are frequently used as well to construct specific social identities. Seventy-five percent of the 120 CM studied contained metaphorical

expressions. In this regard, metaphors can be defined as linguistic manifestations in which the quality of one object is attributed to another object that has no direct connection with it in order to elaborate, express thoughts, behaviours, experiences, sociocultural concepts, and meanings. As a result, metaphors are used in CM to guide the process of thinking when interpreting messages. For example, we identified expressions such as 'The Avatar is 75,' 'The eagle renews its strength!' and 'Happy Birthday to 'my Crown' as metaphorically used to describe sociocultural concepts as well as the characters, personalities, and strengths/statuses of the addressees. Thus, meaning is interpreted by taking into account the participants' relationships, the context, speaker's communicative purpose, common knowledge, applicable cultural predisposition or mutual understanding which enables inferences about what is appropriate and acceptable to be made.

CM in the Nigerian press are expressed in a distinct form of English; this variety of English, according to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), had been "cultivated, domesticated and indigenized to accommodate the culture and tradition of the people." As a result, peculiarly Nigerian expressions (modifications that express their cultural values) abound in congratulatory messages. For example, pidginised and slangy expressions derived from a mix of English and indigenous languages. Consider the following illustrations: *'original contriman' (patriotic citizen), 'the man whey know our mata' (the man who understands our plight/problems), 'carry go', 'no shaking' (expressions to show approval, support or solidarity), 'gbosa'* (cheers). Whereas pidginised expressions were found in 12% of the CM, slangy forms were found in 8%.

Praise forms, intensifiers, and proverbs can be found throughout the language because the primary goal of CM is to establish and reinforce positive relationships. In 38% of the announcements, proverbial expressions were used. Proverbs are linguistic tools that Nigerian English speakers use to communicate meaning intentions while upholding traditional values and beliefs. These proverbs contain wisdom that is linked to community members' sociocultural norms, values, and beliefs, and thus require social and cultural knowledge that participants are assumed to have in order to interpret the intended meanings.

Exaggerations and intensifiers are also common in our data; they embellish the truth-value of expressions and thus serve the dual purpose of enhancing politeness and impressing the readers. Benzinger (1971) defines intensifiers as words used to express degrees or values. Any linguistic signal that heightens or strengthens the meaning conveyed by a specific utterance is an intensifying element. They serve the purpose of exaggerating the actual state of affairs, reinforcing the proposition's truth value, or emphasizing a portion of the entirety of a claim (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Intensifiers are a class of lexico-syntactic devices that are used as structural and stylistic techniques to enhance or boost the meaning of the ideas, objects, or people that they modify. The majority of them are associated with adjectives and adverbs that serve as modifiers. These include, Qualifiers *(adjectives- entire, meticulous, great, exceptional and* Adverbs- *very, absolutely, so, miraculously and clearly)*. We also have words that are inherently intense which are words that possess essential characteristics of intensifiers. They include, *gigantic*, *colossal/colossus*, *titans/titanic*, *amazon*, *vampires*, *magnificence*, *icon/iconic*, *giants/gigantic*, *enigma/enigmatic*, *predators* and *insurgents*. According to Bezinger (1971), even when these words are literally appropriate, their semantic associations are themselves powerful, and they are mostly used by

speakers who wants to persuade and sway the audience or readers to see the validity of their point of view.

Socio-cultural factors affecting CM Messaging in the Newspaper

This section discusses the socio-cultural factors that influence the placement of CM on newspaper pages. We will investigate whether factors such as occupation, gender, religion, age, occasion being celebrated, and family background have an impact on the frequency, size of the page, propositional content, colour, and content of the messages.

Occupation /Socio-economic status
An examination of the data reveals that the frequency/size/color of the messages is directly related to occupation/socioeconomic status. It was discovered that the political class (including class aspirants), top civil servants, academia, wealthy families, and business moguls outnumber CMs on Nigerian newspaper front pages. Given the high cost of placing a message in the newspapers, it is obvious that only the wealthy can afford it. It was discovered that those in positions of power and authority receive more messages. A typical example is a case in which a political Godfather received messages that took up more than two-thirds of the entire publication on his birthday anniversary, leaving only a few pages for discussions of important social issues. The data also revealed that majority of the messages (94%) were in colour, 72 percent were full page, and 28 percent were half page.

Sex
According to our findings, there is no significant difference in the size and colour of the messages based on gender. However, the distribution of messages by gender revealed that males received slightly more messages (68%) than females (52%). Despite the fact that Nigerian women, particularly those from the south, have equal opportunities and access to education as their male counterparts, men are more dominant in political and economic life than women. Women have fewer chances of obtaining political appointments than men due to economic disadvantage as well as some socio-cultural factors. Perhaps this explains the slight difference in the number of messages received by men and women.

Occasion
A careful examination of the data reveals that occasion has a direct influence on the number and frequency of CM. Birthday anniversary celebrations have been found to elicit the greatest number of messages of any other occasion. In Nigeria, birthdays are the most common and elaborate person-oriented events. Literate families begin celebrating their children's birthdays as early as the age of one. These celebrations usually take a new turn in adulthood, especially around the ages of 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80. Nigerians consider reaching these ages to be a watershed moment, hence the elaborate parties. In recent years, the celebrations have included newspaper advertisements congratulating the celebrants. The major sponsors of these messages are family members, friends, political and business associates, industrial and commercial establishments, political parties, contractors and political class aspirants among others.

Depending on the status of the celebrant, many pages of praise singing CMs could be recorded in a single edition of a newspaper and may appear for many days afterwards. For example, on the occasion of a particular influential politician's 60th birthday anniversary, a particular newspaper published 133 pages of CMs in one edition, and the messages continued to pour in days later. It was also noticed that public occasions attract many CM (e.g., the announcement of new political appointments, formation of a new cabinet, conferment of chieftaincy awards etc.). The frequency of CM is usually high on occasions mentioned in the preceding sentence. These messages are mostly in colour, but they come in a variety of sizes depending on the socioeconomic status of the participants. As a result, occasion is identified as one of the determinants of message frequency and number.

The Communicative Functions of CM
The study of social man assumes the study of language and social man, the most important aspect of which is how the social man employs language to accomplish his goals and interact with one another in order to maintain a harmonious social relationship. The functions of language affect its forms (Halliday, 1973). We select one form over another to convey our messages. Given a wide range of forms in a society's repertoire, knowing the rules of language usage in a given society is required to know the appropriate forms to use in any given context. This is usually accomplished through socialisation. Different speech communities place different emphasis on different functions and convey different information. Holmes (2008:271) classified the following language functions as useful in sociolinguistics:

1) Expressive – utterances express speaker's feelings/emotions
2) Referential – utterances provide information
3) Directive – utterances attempt to get someone to do something
4) Metalinguistic– utterances comment on language itself.
5) Poetic – utterances focus on aesthetic features of language
6) Phatic - utterances express solidarity and empathy with others.

Language, according to the preceding classification, is used to convey not only referential information but also information about social relationships, and any stretch of discourse can express more than one function. According to the above classification, the subject of this analysis, CM, is an expressive speech act that also performs referential, phatic, and poetic functions. However, considering how these functions are articulated in different contexts necessitates thinking about politeness. Choosing the appropriate linguistic forms to convey feelings and emotions, provide information, express empathy for others, and express aesthetic values, necessitates an understanding of the social and cultural values of a given society. Being polite involves taking into account the feelings of others, and making other people feel comfortable. It involves speaking to people appropriately in accordance to their relationship to you (Holmes, 2008). Politeness is thought of in the same as congratulatory notes are. Congratulatory expressions, for example, have certain linguistic conventions associated with them such as mode of address, which denotes sociocultural norms and values, solidarity, status and influence. Our culture, without a doubt, influences not just our worldview but also how we communicate. The

impact of these social influences on the ways and manner in which CM is expressed is perceived as a matter of politeness.

Thus, congratulatory messages help to demonstrate a speaker's relationship with the addressee as well as his (the speaker's) objectives, in addition to facilitating unity and social bonding among members of a society. According to Crystal (1997), cited in Bello (2008), the markers of solidarity may relate to family, sex, ethnicity and social class or to any of the groups and institutions that define the structure of society. As a result of a thorough analysis of the results, the following explains the functions of congratulatory messages in greater detail.

1. Congratulatory messaging goes beyond showing politeness and demonstrating solidarity. It serves as a means of fostering and sustaining social relationships through the use of adulations and flattery to enhance the addressee's social status.

2. They serve to fulfil societal expectation. In Nigerian culture, communal life is emphasised, so people feel obligated to show others that they care for them. What our friends, families, colleagues, and associates think of us is also important to us. Failure to congratulate someone who wants you to recognize his good fortune or accomplishment can be misinterpreted as jealousy, hatred, or rejection, resulting in bad blood, resentment, and strained relationships. As a result, people congratulate each other from time to time in order to keep up with the trend.

3. They serve as a means for advertisement and solicitation. Some speakers use this platform to not only express unity, but also to promote their social and political power, market themselves as potential political aspirants, or place themselves for patronage in the Nigerian sociopolitical and economic context. Sponsors of CM also provide photos of themselves, their products and services, logos, contact information and addresses in order to achieve their personal objectives.

4. It is gratifying to have one's accomplishments recognised and respected by others, especially when the subject matter involves selfless service to humanity. A person who has his or her accomplishment recognised and celebrated in public will undoubtedly feel honoured and good about himself. It's an act that can raise someone's pride and self-esteem while also encouraging them to do more. On the other hand, this act could inspire others to do good deeds and provide selfless services that will help others in their communities. According to Holmes (2008), language is used to create and convey social reality. In other words, if such people are publicly praised, lauded, and encomiastic for their patriotism, philanthropy, honesty, and other virtues. Thus, it has the potential to positively influence people's perceptions and thinking processes.

5. They aim to remind not only the recipients, but everyone, of the importance of reflecting on one's life journey and appreciating God for who he is and what he has done. Speakers have used congratulatory messages, especially birthday messages, to remind both the addressees and the general public that birthday anniversaries are not only a time to celebrate, but also a time to reflect on life and acknowledge God's blessings, as well as to assess themselves to see how they have impacted the lives of those around them and society at large.

6. They are a reliable source of knowledge about a society's culture. They often convey a great deal of information about the addressee, the addresser, their relationship, and their socioeconomic statuses and accomplishments. They serve as a useful means of disseminating referential information.

7. Our findings also reveal that the functions of congratulatory messages go beyond conveying solidarity. These messages provide more information about the identities of the addressees and addressers than the occasions being celebrated. Thus, Nigerian elite use CM vigorously as a tool to propagate power and class distinction. It therefore serves as a status symbol, mainly used to promote social prestige; they also serve as a means of advertisement or publicity; they could help to reinforce or challenge existing norms; they could motivate, encourage, as well as sound a note of warning to the participants. Speakers deliberately exploit the medium to advance their socio-economic standing in the group by sponsoring a congratulatory message and connecting their names or businesses to those of the addressees' (who are usually prominent people in the society).

Pedagogical implications

This paper contributes to the growing importance of sociolinguistics in the teaching and learning of a second language. The study demonstrates that a people's culture influences how they use language; cultural patterns of cognition, conceptualization, and custom are frequently explicitly coded in language. This study has implications in the area of foreign language learning and teaching. Globalisation and technological advancement in the twenty-first century have increased students' opportunities to live and study abroad. This study's cultural information will assist such students in gaining not only the ability to communicate, but also the cultural awareness required to acculturate and make sense of the world around them. This type of research assists members of global networks in developing competence and mastering new ways of using a language they already know. For example, those who mistakenly regard English as a culturally and pragmatically neutral language due to its widespread use internationally will discover, through an examination of congratulatory messages in Nigerian (L2) contexts, that this is not the case, that English has a distinct cultural element in relation to the society in which it is adopted; additionally, Anglo English is a "linguaculture" whose concepts and norms must be articulated (Wierzbicka, 2005; Wolfson, 1990).

From the foregoing, sociolinguistically speaking, communicative competence means different things to different people, depending on the speaker's identity. One of the factors identified as being responsible for poor English language performance by Nigerian students is a general lack of emphasis on teaching Anglo culture to Nigerian English learners. The emphasis in the classroom has typically been on the acquisition of grammatical rules rather than a combination of grammatical and communicative rules. The acquisition of grammatical rules is not sufficient for effective communication. The rationale for our findings in pedagogy is that a teaching method that works for one group may not work for another, even if the two groups share a similar language. Thus, the sociocultural and sociolinguistic information about Nigerian English speakers highlighted in this study can aid in the development of materials for English as a second/foreign language. Non-native speakers, as well as native speakers, will gain awareness of what is

appropriate in the realisation of CM in their own speech communities, because for non-native speakers such knowledge is often unavailable at a conscious level.

According to Can (2011), "An awareness-raising approach using research data can sensitise learners to cultural differences and variables involved in language use". The findings and information presented in this study will benefit both teachers and students from a pedagogical standpoint, because metalinguistic instructions have been shown to be effective in making learners aware of the sociolinguistic similarities and differences between the native and L2 varieties. Greeting acts have proved to be one of the most revealing aspects of culture, and attractive areas in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Therefore, the study of CM which is a form of greeting, is important to interlanguage research. Unless the strategies of both the L1 and L2 are known, it is difficult to know whether sociopragmatic failure results from L1transfer or from another source. Currently, most research works on interlanguage sociopragmatics refers frequently to native speaker norms.

This study could assist teachers in identifying sources of sociopramatic failures and areas of transferability from the L1 to L2 varieties and vice versa, thereby contributing to teachers' pedagogical development as well as their sociolinguistic competence. Considering that the main goal of language education is for both learners and teachers to acquire sociolinguistic competence, understanding the relationship between language and culture which is fundamental to the development of linguistic and cultural competence could be a strong starting point for any approach to language education. However, many teachers and students seem to overlook the fact that grammatical competence (knowledge of a grammatical system) must be complemented with culturally relevant meanings. The principles of linguistic and cultural competence must be clearly stated and introduced together in the classroom for the benefit of teachers and students. Understanding the relationship between language and culture from the start and structuring lessons to reflect this connection are more likely to produce better results in language education.

Furthermore, this study elucidates how social factors present in the context of communication influences linguistic choices made by individual speakers, as well as how these relate to social relationships. As a result, this research has the potential to clarify and provide solutions to practical social relationship problems. This research not only ensures an appreciation of general pattern of sociolinguistic behaviour, but also provides insight into the broader cultural and communicative values. It could help in the identification of socio-cultural knowledge a second language learner must acquire in order to communicate appropriately in a speech community. The study has explained a culturally distinct system of meanings and communication patterns for a specific communicative resource as expressed and interpreted by the interlocutors and members of their society.

Unlike scholars such as Wikkins (1976), Youssouf et al. (1976), Bowen, Madison, and Hilfenty (1985), Searle and Vanderveken (1985), and Kasper (1989), who believe that greetings are merely formulaic routines with no semantic or propositional value, this study establishes the fact that greetings elicit a number of significant results, which contribute to sociolinguistic theory, potentially leading to a better understanding of the interdependence of language, culture, and

communication. This idea is supported by Akindele's (2007) view of greeting as "…extremely important strategies for the negotiation and control of social identity and social relationships between participants in a conversation" and Duranti's (2008:88) idea that "…the tendency to see greetings as devoid of propositional content…is too limiting and, in fact, inaccurate …they can also communicate new information to participants through the kinds of questions they ask and the kinds of answers they produce". Furthermore, by presenting the content of verbal greetings in CM, this study was able to successfully establish links between social functions and the messages used to achieve them. This paper has also provided evidence that supports Hymes' (1972) contention, that only situated ethnographic data of speakers' communicative styles, choices of expression and their interpretation of these choices can enhance our understanding of the distinctive and complex systems of social interaction across-cultures. Thus, this study raises awareness that will be useful not only in strengthening intercultural communication, but also in providing sociopragmatic information that can be applied in the educational context. The findings of this study may serve as a starting point for future research that compares and contrasts the sociolinguistic interactional patterns derived from CMs in newspapers.

CONCLUSION

The principal issues discussed in this paper which were the structure and communicative functions of CMs in selected Nigerian newspapers has revealed a number of things about Nigerian culture. Although congratulatory messages are primarily used to maintain social harmony and rapport, they also serve some other social and referential functions based on the specific sociocultural norms, values, and worldviews of members of a particular society. As a result of our data analysis, we can conclude, like Hudson (1996), that society controls speech in two ways. First, it establishes a set of norms to which members of society learn to conform; these norms differ from society to society, with a few exceptions (some may be universal). Secondly, society provides the motivation for adhering to these norms. The expression and interpretation of CM in the Nigerian context depends largely on the sociocultural norms and values of members the society. Thus, communicative acts should center on the means of communication and their meanings in relation to those who use them in order to produce better results that expose cultural differences.

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