

## Value Assessment of Greeting Scripts in the Interpersonal Disposition of the Yoruba and the Igbo Cultures of Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** This study examined empirically the attitude of the Yoruba and the Igbo cultures of southern Nigeria to the instrumentality of greeting as a social interaction facilitator. Subjects consisted of 97 males and 67 females, aged between 27 and 60 years. They were randomly drawn from the two target cultural settings (the Igbo and Yoruba cultures of Nigeria). When tested on the criterion measurement scale designed for the study, the two groups showed a non-significant difference at the six levels of measurement, thus debunking the age long stereotype that suggested that the Igbos may be less socially outgoing than their Yoruba neighbours because of an assumed deficiency in a behavioural practice considered potently prosocial.

### INTRODUCTION

Greeting is a script that is universally employed as a standard social interaction facilitator. This script, however, has a social focus that has been adapted to various cultural interpretations which in most cases have become concretized into stereotypes. In this connection, specific greeting scripts have become identifiable with religious ceremonies, commercial enterprises and political rallies. In certain cultures, greeting behaviour has been scripted into interpretations that transcend the ordinary needs of social interaction. For example, in the Yoruba culture of Western Nigeria it is culturally mandatory for a child to greet his parents in the morning where they live under the same roof, for a wife to do same reverently to her husband and her husband's people in the morning, and for the subordinate to do same to his superior each time they encounter one another in a work place etc.

Greeting script in the Yoruba cultural context is largely used to express more than a social approval of either the object interactant or the situation. It is often extended to cover cants of piety that reflects the past chivalrous daring and exploits cherished in the family line of the recipient to whom the greeting is intended. It is therefore nothing strange when a grandmother for example, reels off series of cognomen in a show of approval and warmth to say, a grandson just for showing love and using an early morning ritual of greeting as an opportunity to remind the child of the great exploits of his forebears. What in

other cultures would just be a perfunctory good morning. Or for a wife to use the same instrumentation to show appreciation and love to her husband at the instance of a particular achievement or a sudden burst of euphoria experienced by either of them.

Greeting script in the Yoruba culture conveys rules and observances, though subtle, that guide social conduct in interpersonal relationship. These rules and observances have often served to betray the identity of strangers who may be encountering the culture for the first time, particularly, as they are likely to fail to notice the existence of the rules and observances or disregard their import. The Yoruba, for this reason, often scorn the implied indecency and antisocial impulse that could have warranted this assumed flagrant misconduct in strangers. Even though strangers are warmly accommodated, hope is never lost as to an eventual learning expected to be undertaken by them in the right greeting direction given a little while.

The Igbos of the south-eastern part of Nigeria have been actively involved in trade relationship with their Yoruba counterparts since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century following the trading initiatives of the British U.A.C. company in the Niger Delta Area of the then Southern Nigeria protectorate. The contact between the two cultures, rather than promote active intermarriage, has indeed emphasized the sharp differences in things that ordinarily seem minor but which nevertheless inform social attitude. For example, the Yoruba see the Igbo as quite deficient in the ability to

effectively utilize greeting as a necessary weapon for initiating a smooth interpersonal relationship. This does not, in any way, reduce from the stereotype of aggressiveness and disrespect for age often ascribed to the the Igbo person by his Yoruba counterpart.

This Igbo individual, on the other hand, has a behaviour script which contradistinctively attaches religious value to greeting behaviour. It is often assumed by the Yorubas that the Igbo parents, for example, care less whether their wards greet them in the morning or any time of the day. Whereas the same Igbo person abhors the idea of prostrating or bowing to greet an elderly person, a boss or a superior (which is integral to the Yoruba greeting behaviour). They see this as giving to mere mortals what should be the exclusive preserve of the gods. Greeting is unimportant at the interpersonal level (it is assumed) to the average Igbo person for as long as a wife knows her place and does not operate beyond it, and a subordinate performs his obligations while a superordinate does not shirk his responsibilities.

These assumptions may be grossly biased, particularly considering the culture from where the person doing the analysis comes from. However, the need to confirm or discountenance these assumptions has prompted this study which essentially aims to ascertain how much of interpersonal relationship is facilitated by greeting behaviours as it is perceived by the Yoruba and the Igbo subcultures of Southern Nigeria.

#### **RELATED LITERATURES**

Klineberg's (1982) essay which focused on the historical perspective of some aspects of theory and research in the area of contact between ethnic groups would be an appropriate reference material here. It is through this context that one can begin to properly understand the score of the serious studies that have been carried out in the attempt to replace stereotypes with the acquisition of more accurate knowledge about the psychological characteristics of ethnic groups. In this work, Klineberg took a slightly different position from the thrust of the argument that existed between those who believe that it is the existence and nature of stereotypes that determine individual's perception and judgement of others. And those, on the other hand, who

believe that it is the content of such stereotypes that is the epiphenomenal i.e. which acts as the consequence rather than the cause of existing intergroup relations. Klineberg's position sought to explain stereotype as being shaped by social, economic, political and historical antecedents. And they are used in order to justify the subjugation, exploitation and even the elimination of others. Stereotypes in this dispensation therefore serve as rationalizations of the status quo.

In order to resolve the argument neatly, Klineberg took refuge in agreeing with the conclusion of an experiment carried out by Lambert et al. (1960), the object of which was to find out the ability to judge character, intelligence and other qualities from the sound of the voice. In the study it was concluded that stereotypes could be both consequences and causes, i.e. a result borne out of circular relationship.

Klineberg concludes that, stereotypes may at times contain a kernel of truth but research has revealed that they may be completely false. This assertion was based on the study (quoted in Klineberg, 1982) carried out by La Pierre.

It is also suggested that stereotypes may change with time. However, standing as a complement to Klineberg's attempt at de-emphasizing the tendency to apply stereotypes indiscriminately and at the same time acting as a philosophical base for this present study is the opinion aptly enunciated by Izard (1977) to the effect that fundamental emotions have the same expressions and experiential qualities in widely different cultures from virtually every continent of the globe, and that people of different social background and different cultures may learn quite different facial movements for modifying what is considered to be innate expressions.

Also processes in cross cultural interaction which is the main anchorage for this study has received more than just a passing mention in the studies variously conducted by Argyle, Collect, Bickely; Jaspars and Hewstone and edited by Bochner (1982). In these studies, the rules governing interpersonal conduct in a particular context, the social-psychological connotations of the language employed, the non-verbal codes of the respective cultures and the inferences that person make about the causes of their own and others' behaviour were conceptualized. And the inference was drawn that all of these processes may take quite different forms in different cultures. And that when there is a meeting of

cultures, mutual misunderstandings and intergroup hostility may occur if the societies differ with respect to the processes underlying interpersonal communication and conduct (Bochner, 1982).

In recent times, intergroup social transactions have received considerable attention, particularly in connection with attitude change and development (Olson and Zanna, 1993). In this direction, it was concluded that attitudes develop spontaneously and once formed can be quite resistant to change. In a subsequent research carried out on value-attitude-behaviour relations, Maio and Olson (1994) discovered that the direct measures of attitude functions can be used to predict the strength of value-attitude-behaviour relations. In the Yoruba culture, greeting is valued as a potent facilitator of interpersonal relationship. For this reasons, it is often adapted to perform the function for which it is meant. Whereas in the Igbo culture, greeting is hardly used as a social interaction weapon, hence the attitude to it appears to be less impassioned than that of their Yoruba counterparts.

In other dimensions, it has been found that in-group identity has to be maintained by specific stereotypes to ensure the continuity of the group. (Argyle 1982. Rubiini and Semin 1994). Important among such stereotypes is the language spoken and the way it is used to perform value expressive functions. In their book on Social Psychology and Health. Stroebe and Stroebe (1994) discussed extensively on how people can be influenced to change behaviours that are detrimental to health, well being and intergroup unity.

One hopes that this study would be a welcome addition to the literature on the misconceptions that may arise from stereotypes that are probably based more on sentiment than reality.

#### METHOD

**Subject:** One hundred and Sixty-four (N=164) subjects out of the three hundred on whom the Greeting Behaviour Questionnaire was administered returned their completed questionnaires within the stipulated study period of four weeks. It was this number that constituted the effective subjects of the study. These subjects were however drawn randomly across the two ethnic groupings (Igbo and Yoruba).

The lowest age limit for qualifications to respond to the questionnaires was fixed at 27. This age (27) was considered ripe enough for an individual to have become properly integrated into his cultural environment. The age range of respondents was between 27 and 56 years. Interested respondents with an age gradient that is lower than 27 were not encouraged, because they may yet have had little cultural experience to justify their inclusion in the study. The selected subjects were expected to have lived for more than ten years at a stretch in their cultural milieu. In sum. Ninety-seven (male, N=97) males and Sixty-seven (female, N = 67) served as subjects for the study. Numerical balance was ensured between the randomly selected subjects from the two cultural groups

**Procedure:** Questionnaires were administered in towns adjudged to be representative of the cultural centres of the two ethnic groupings rather than in the cosmopolitan cities that serve as their modern state capitals. For example, the Igbo respondents were drawn mainly from cultural towns like Umuahia, Uzobulu and Mgbidi. While those of the Yorubas were drawn chiefly from cultural centres, such as Ile-Ife, Osogbo and Ikere-Ekiti towns. Respondents were thoroughly briefed in regard to the questionnaire should be filled. Where language acted as a barrier, prompt interpretations were given. To avoid a high rate of attrition, respondents were encouraged to fill the questionnaires and return them within the stipulated study period of four weeks.

**Instrument:** The questionnaire used in sampling subjects responses to questions bordering on their attitude to greeting behaviour as a cultural phenomenon was designed by the author and tagged Greeting Behaviour questionnaire (which will here untoward be referred to as GBQ). GBQ was structured into three domains which are believed to bear directly on what informs people's attitude to any particular cultural stereotype. These domains are the cognitive, affective and motoric domains. These domains were tagged A.B.C. and such like of questions as 1) What is your attitude to the concept of greeting? A-just a social facilitator, b – A cultural obligation and c- An expression of well being. 2) when greeted, do you feel a-happy b-unhappy, c-neither happy nor unhappy. 3) which of the following physical expressions accompany greeting in your culture, a – mouth

(through verbalization), b – handshake plus verbalization, c-hugging, d-bowing etc. are representative samples of the three domains respectively. In all, the questionnaire contains 36 question items with twelve question items to each section.

Three response options varying from the perception of greeting behaviour as 1) facilitating social interaction, 2) a cultural stereotype and 3) a behaviour that cannot be placed (i.e. ordinary) were attached to each question item out of which the respondent is expected to pick the one that closely reflects his perception of greeting behaviour. Options that portray greeting behaviour as facilitating social interaction attracts a score weight of 3, while the cultural options attract a score weight of two and options that see greeting as not belonging to either of the above categories (i.e. whether social or cultural) attract a score weight of one.

The least score obtainable was 24 while the highest obtainable was 72.

GBQ was validated jury style by first giving it to twenty prominent academics in related disciplines (such as sociology and anthropology, Psychology and Institute of African Studies) who are from the two target cultures to comment freely and record such comments on a scale given to them. Necessary changes were made in line with the comments where such is considered important.

**Data Analysis:** Subjects' responses were arranged into six different categories, which depict the specific levels of measurement. Each category was compared with the other along the six levels with the aid of the student t-test.

## RESULTS

The six categories into which subjects were

arranged were: the Yoruba and the Igbo respondents as a whole, male and female respondents, male and female Yoruba, male and female Igbo. Adults and Youths and high socio-economic level and low socio-economic level (these last two levels were determined by the annual income bracket of individuals). When the scores of the Igbo and the Yoruba respondents were compared, a non-significant difference ( $t=0.24, p<.01$ ) was found with a mean score of (Igbo)  $60.38 < 60.20$  (Yoruba). Among all the categories, non significant differences were found, such as between male and female respondents ( $t=1.41, p<.01$ ) with a mean score of 9male)  $59.37 < 60.53$  (female); between male and female Yoruba respondents ( $t=0.17, p<.01$ ) and a mean score of (male  $60.20 < 60.35$  female); between Igbo male and female respondents ( $t=1.16, p<.01$ ) and a mean score of (male)  $60.00 > 60.94$  (female); Adults (i.e those above the age of 35) and Youths (i.e those between 27 and 35 years of age)  $t=0.93, p <.01$ . with a mean score of (Adult)  $60.65 > 60.00$  (Youth); Between High Socio Economic level and low socio-economic level respondents ( $t=0.34, p<.01$ ) and a mean score of (HSEL)  $60.20 > 59.00$  (LSEL). The table below gives a more graphic view of how the categories compare with one another.

It should further be pointed out that a mean score that is above 36 indicates a response that favourably tilts towards the consideration of greeting behaviour as essentially social interaction facilitating. And all the categories seem to share this sentiment.

## LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

A study of human behaviour of whatever type cannot but be flawed by the very fact that human behaviour itself cannot be equated with

**Table 1: Greeting behaviour as socio-interaction-facilitating**

Categories	N	X Score	SD	T	P	
Yoruba	74	60.20	4.89	0.24	<0.01	NS
Igbo	90	60.38	5.38			
Male	97	59.37	5.20	1.41	<0.01	NS
Female	67	60.53	5.08			
Male Yoruba	46	60.20	4.29	1.17	<0.01	NS
Female Yoruba	28	60.35	2.99			
Male Igbo	53	60.00	4.65	1.16	<0.01	NS
Female Igbo	37	60.94	5.90			
Adults	65	60.65	5.10	0.93	<0.01	NS
Youths	99	60.35	5.10			
HSEL	32	60.20	6.13	0.34	<0.01	NS
LSEL	24	59.00	4.54			

t critical = 2.660

or be treated as a characteristic phenomenon. It is suspected that the caliber of respondents in this study is weighted in favour of the elite class whose enlightenment level may have significantly eroded their inclination towards stereotype beliefs. And the sample size may be considered not large enough. With more time, sufficient fund and communication networking, the result may slightly have shown a little difference but definitely not in any way significant. A future replication of this study should take cognizance of these pitfalls and avoid them.

### DISCUSSION

Kineberg (1982) recommends that it would be educationally significant if stereotypes could be replaced by a more accurate knowledge of the psychological characteristics of ethnic groups rather than emphasizing the role of stereotype (which most often may be incorrect) in intergroup contact. The outcome of this study quite confirms the need to empirically review the content of stereotypes from time to time so as to ascertain the veracity of their claims and assertions as regards ethnic behavioural dispositions. There appears to be a deep-rooted mutual misunderstanding of what attitude towards greeting behaviour the two target groups of this study have. While the Yoruba strongly believes that greeting hardly has any role to play in the social interaction processes among the Igbos; the Igbo on the other hand, could not quite understand what his Yoruba counterpart is effusive about when it comes to greeting one another, a habit that at best should be perfunctory and devoid of ceremonies.

The evidence obtained from the data collected in this study confirms an attitude contrary to the one described above. There is, indeed, no significant difference in the end to which greeting behaviour scripts are meant to achieve in the two ethnic groups. The results show that subjects from the two ethnic groups essentially identified similarly with the interpersonal and interaction – inducing properties contained in greeting scripts as they are used in interpersonal encounter. It is interesting to note that neither sex, socio-economic level nor age factors diminished this similarity.

One then wonders; could an age long

stereotype, the kind that has induced serious misunderstanding and distrust between the two groups, be mere attempt at wrongly justifying as superior the variations that exist in the different forms of expression and use of greeting scripts? This question becomes pertinent when viewed from the perspective of either of the two groups. In any case, there is no doubt that greeting scripts do serve to facilitate social interaction processes among the two groups as has been attested to by this study. It probably would be complementary if the mimic signals or emblems that accompany greeting profiles can be further analysed so as to be able to pin-point the details in variation that may have fed the greeting stereotypes ascribed to one another by the two ethnic groups.

In conclusion, it is heartening to discover that greeting behaviour as it is construed by the two ethnic groups serve similar social interactional purposes, even though the scripting symbols or emblems may be different as shall be determined in a subsequent study.

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