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What People Revealed through Greetings

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Abstract

Greeting is an important part of communicative competence that each member of speech community must know hence s/he can be function appropriately in the speech community. It is culturally bonded that it becomes the first and foremost part of language skill taught to children in learning in their native language and students in learning their second or foreign language. The study is aimed at finding out what people may reveal when they greet each other as well as the kind of greeting they used. The study is conducted to Indonesian who live in United States, by observing and filming their interactions during a party. During their interaction, the participants do not only used popular term of greetings such as 'hallo' or 'how are you' but they also greet each other by other forms such as giving compliments, hence it suggest more than acknowledging other's presence. Beside verbal greetings, there are also types of body gestures used as greeting suggesting the different types of background relationships. The most obvious observable fact is that greeting is consistently used as mark of solidarity with the consistent similar respond, though it may as well use to reveal power and authority. One of important means of greeting is that it is used to maintain their cultural identity. Male and female respondents also show different ways in using verbal greetings and gesture showing that they greet each other. They also use different ways in giving compliments and in responding toward them.

Key words: greetings, cultural identity, compliments

1. Introduction

One of the skills in communicative competence is greeting. Greeting is considered as one of the foremost important part of communicative competence taught to children learning their first language and also for students learning their second language. So significant is the function of greeting that it is always established in almost every society communication. As part of speech act (Searle, 1969), greetings are used as a recognition of others. Due to this reason, greeting may be established in different ways within a certain culture. How people greet others reflect their understanding of their own culture as well as the type of universality that is carried out across many different cultures.

In this article, the writer wants to discuss on how Chinese Indonesian greet each other, by focusing on whether their greetings also conform with the universality of greetings. The discussion will also focus on what can be revealed by greetings they uttered.

2. Greetings

Greetings are defined as rituals of appeasing and bonding that counteract potentially aggressive behaviour during face to face encounters (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1977). Greeting, therefore, is understood as the speech act that is established during face to face interaction. Goffman (1971) characterizes greeting as "access ritual" consisting of two types, passing greeting and engaging greeting. He further explains what is meant by ritual is "conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some objects of ultimate value". (p. 62), and passing and engaging greeting as "a switch function to open and close relation". Hence, greeting is not only used to establish recognition of initial encounters, it is also used as a sign of respect towards others.

Greetings are mostly established in the form of verbal salutation, with the tendency of saying a predictable words of salutation, such as hello, hi, or good morning in English. Besides recognizing verbal salutation, greeting is also established through non-verbal communication such as eyebrows flash, or handshake (Firth, 1972). This non-verbal type of greeting is important in defining the closeness of the participants.

Although greetings may be uttered differently in different language, their characteristics are quite universal across cultures. Duranti (1997) mentions that at least there are 6 criteria that define the universality of greetings, those are: (1) near-boundary occurrence; greeting are expected to be established at the beginning of the encounter; (2) establishment of a shared perceptual field; greeting is commonly exchanged as visual and/or verbal recognition which shows the idea that the participants are sharing the same perceptual field; (3) adjacency pair format; greetings are typically composed of two part sequences in which the first party invites, constrains, and creates expectation for a particular type of reply for the second party (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973); (4) relative predictability of form and content; greetings are mostly seen as index of properties of the context, and only few show the need for exchanging further information; (5) implicit establishment of spatiotemporal unit of interaction; greetings are exchanged as part of interaction which may be re-established on the re-encountering of others within the same interaction; and (6) identification of interlocutor as a distinct being worth recognizing; in an unequal status of relationships greeting may be used to distinguish different status of interlocutor, in an equal status of relationship, however, different type of greeting may be used to distinguish different closeness of relationship.

3. Participants and settings

The participants of the research were the Chinese Indonesian who studied in the University of Texas, at Austin. There were 27 students who were filmed and recorded to get the data of greetings that they made. The setting taken was the party to celebrate the valentine day. The party was set to be in formal party, hence the people coming also wore formal outfit. The students originally were active in two different student organizations, Mudika, for catholic students, and ICR for Christian students. Therefore, there is different degree of closeness among the students who are actively engaged in different organization. However, though they do have different degree of closeness, all of them know each other as they often hold gathering such as parties or other celebrations because all of them are enlisted in one non-religious based organization called Permias. In this organization, every Indonesian studying in UT Austin may join the organization without considering their religious interest. Hence, there are many participants who only slightly knew each other as they seldom involved in activity held by the religious based organization.

4. Findings

4.1. The universality of greeting

As mentioned by Duranti (1997) of the universality of greeting, the greeting uttered by these Chinese Indonesian students also showed the typical universality of greeting. The first common universal thing was that the greeting was always said at the beginning of encountering others. It was also common to see that the participants did not only greet other individual but may also greet a group of people altogether. This beginning type of utterance marked the near-boundary occurrence, in which the participants acknowledged the others' presence.

Once the greeting was established, it was followed by hand shake or other comment that suggest the establishment of a shared perceptual field. The type of handshake or the typical comment uttered usually showed different degree of the relationship. This was also a way for the participants to show "acknowledgement" of universal feeling and attitude (Bach and Harnish, 1979). The typical greeting was also conducted by the participant in adjacency pair format, in which the greeting uttered would commonly replied or exchanged.

The form and content of greeting was also relatively predictable. Some of them represented acknowledgement or recognition of the other's presence although they did not suggest any further information exchange. The 'hello' greeting was predictably exchanged by the word 'hello' as well. The type of greeting which required further information was also predictably exchanged by the given of the necessary information, without any stimulation of giving more answer than what was asked nor exchanging any further questions.

The greeting exchanged by the participants also showed that greeting was actually considered as an implicit establishment of a spatio-temporal unit of interaction (Duranti, 1997), in a way that greeting was considered as part of longer interaction, although it was just an initiation of discontinue interaction. It was common to see that the participants were exchanging greeting at the first sight of meeting, then

parting and greeting again, and then continuing the talking – at the second time of meeting instead at the first sight of meeting.

Another point considered as the universality of greeting was that it was considered as the identification of the interlocutor as a distinct being worth recognizing (Duranti, 1997). This could be seen by the different type of greetings exchanged by the participants. The different intensity of talk exchanged after greetings were established also showed the identification of different type of recognition.

4.2. What are revealed through greetings

4.2.1. Cultural identity

In most occasion, the participants greeted each other at the beginning of their meeting. The most common ways of verbal greeting was done by uttering the word 'hello' when the participants entered the room and sighted the other participants. In some cases the verbal greeting of 'hello' was either accompanied or followed by nodding head. There were some cases, however, when the verbal greeting was replaced by nodding head only. It is worth noted that the word 'hello' that they uttered was considered as part of their habits in showing their identity, though some participants might not show that intentionally. The word 'hello' was pronounced as /haləʊ/ instead of /hə'ləʊ/ - the American English accent of pronouncing 'hello'.

The way the participants pronounced 'hello' is actually the same way of pronouncing 'hello' for most of Indonesian people. Therefore, though the participants were not in Indonesia, they still pronounced 'hello' in the same way as when the Indonesian people say it along with their utterances in Bahasa Indonesia. The fact that the party was attended by Indonesian who would converse in Bahasa Indonesia also supported the cultural context in pronouncing 'hello' as /haləʊ/, as the participants realized that they would converse in Bahasa Indonesia hence they also uttered the word 'hello' as /haləʊ/. The case is differentiated with the case when they have to converse in English as what is shown in their telephone message. In their message they used English and therefore said the word 'hello' as /hə'ləʊ/. Some of them also prefer to use the word 'hi' /hai/ in their telephone message to the word 'hello' due to the reason that 'hi' is more common to be said for greeting in English. However, during the party, it is only the word 'hello' used as the short type of greeting uttered by the participants. This suggests more that when there is possibility to converse in their first language, the participants were more comfortable to greet by using the word that is more common used in their first language as well.

4.2.2. Power and solidarity

Once the greeting was delivered, both verbally or visually, it was usually accompanied by hand shake. This suggested the solidarity among the participants. Both men and women did the hand shake right after they said 'hello' or nodded their head, however more men did the handshake than the women. There were differences in their ways of doing hand shake too. For female participants, only a few of them who did the typical hand shake of gripping the other participant's hand, and when they did, they did that normally to the male participants. This type of hand shake, especially when it was done by female participants, showed a formal type of hand shake and therefore showed a lower degree of closeness. This idea is supported by the fact that they do such hand shake to the male participants, and to the other participants who are not involved in the same organization, and therefore had a lower degree of closeness.

Most of the female participants would raise their hands, nod their heads, smile, and start chatting, right after they delivered their verbal greeting. The intensity of their chatting depended on their degree of closeness. They would involve in longer chat when they encountered participants who were their close friends. Yet, to those who were not considered as close friend, they would just ask their being and make some lip service, such as recorded in the following data:

- (5) A: hi (,) gimana kabarnya?
(hi ... how are you?)
B: hi juga (,) baik aja kok
(hi too I am just fine)

- (2) A: eh (,) gimana?
(eh ... how was it?)
T: oke (,) kok (,)

For male participants, all of them did the hand shake, though in different ways. The typical type of hand shake – gripping the other participant's hand – was done to most of the other participants. This type of hand shake showed general degree of friendship. There was a particular type of hand shake – by first shaking the hand, then raising their elbow, and making a grip as a fist – which was done only to those of a very close friends, such as ex-roommates, or a long no seen close friends. With this type of hand shake, mostly it was followed by a longer chat of not just merely asking their being but indeed asking for further information, such as shown in the following data:

- (6) R: hei (,) gimana sekarang tinggal dimana?
(hei.... where do you live now?)
AN: masih ditempat yang lama (,) aku extend sampai tahun depan
(still in the same place, I extend it until next year)

The participants also showed their solidarity by delivering visual greeting. The most common way of visual greeting given was nodding head, some were accompanied by the verbal greeting such as 'hello' but some were merely the nodding head. By nodding their heads, the participants acknowledged the other participants' presence. One thing to notice was that the participants greeted everyone by nodding their head, although they only slightly knew the other participants. Hence, this nodding head was considered as the least way of acknowledging others' presence.

Besides showing solidarity, participants also showed power while establishing their greeting. This can be examined from two ways. The first was that when the head of Permias who was also the head of the committee often acknowledged his own presence by tapping someone's else shoulder while walking behind them. This power showing was commonly responded by taking a look at who was tapping their shoulders and when noticing that it was the head of the committee who was doing that, they would turn and at least smiled back, because often time the head of the committee would just tap their shoulders without stopping to talk to them.

Another type of power showing was shown through greeting established in questions given by the members of the committee. The members of the committee attached blue ribbon on their chest, hence the participants would notice that. Instead of just saying hello, when they encountered someone for the first time – but not when the person was just entering the room – they would greet them by giving question about the party, as what is shown in the following data:

- (3) D: hei (,) piye partinya oke nggak?
(hey... how was the party? is it great?)
C: ya (,) ya (,) great banget lah
(ya ... ya... so great..)

4.2.3. Compliments and responds

The participants also gave compliments as the respond to greeting, especially to the greeting which was not addressed to one particular person, but to the group of people who were encountered. The compliments are addressed to both male and female participants, because the participants were all wearing the formal outfit and dressed beautifully. The compliments were all delivered by female participants. There are differences in giving compliments for male and female participants as well as the responds. The compliment addressed to male participants were mostly said directly, as shown in the following data:

- (7) T: Hallo (,)
S: wih (,) Cakepnya yang pake jas (,)
(wih... how handsome you are in a suit...)
T:
- (15) N: hei (,) nek dipotong cepak gitu keliatan lebih cakep lho
(hei.. having shorter hair cut, you look more handsome lho)
C: eh iya kali ya (,)
(eh.. probably..)

As can be seen in data (7) S (female participants) responded T's greeting by giving compliment to T on how handsome he is in a suit. In data (15) N gave compliment to D by directly saying that C was more handsome in his short cut hair. In responding to the compliment, the male did not respond verbally, as shown in data (7) that T did not say anything, though he might a little bit look shy, and pretend as if he did not hear it. In data (15), C responded to N's compliment by reluctantly agree with N. Although he seemed to agree with N, actually C did not really respond her compliment.

The compliments addressed to female participants were said indirectly and some of them were accompanied by touching part of the body which is being complimented, as shown in the following data:

- (10) S: Hallo (,) maaf ya agak terlambat
(hello... sorry ya I am a bit late...)
A: ehm (,) ehm (,) duh flat sekali ya (while touching S's stomach)
(ehm..ehm .. duh how flat (your tummy) is)
S: ah engga? Kok (,) ini pasti karena bajunya bikin keliatan langsing
(ah not really, ... this must be because the dress makes me looks slimmer)

As seen in data (10), S (female participant) gave compliment to A (female participant) as the respond for A's greeting. The compliment was not given directly as S only touched A's tummy while saying that it is flat, hence suggesting that it looked good because she was slim. In responding to her compliment, S denied that she was slim, instead she pointed out that she looked slim due to the dress that she wore.

5. Conclusion

Chinese Indonesian greeted each other in approximately similar way as the universal type of greetings. Besides acknowledging others' presence, their greetings also revealed their identity, as there is a tendency to use particular type of word showing how they should be seen differently. Their greetings also showed solidarity and power. There were differences in exchanging greetings to show different closeness of relationships. Besides using typical form and content, they also greeted each other by using compliments words. There were also differences for male and female participants in exchanging their greeting, in giving compliments, as well as in responding the compliments.

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