

**A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GREETING PATTERNS IN NGWÀ  
DIALECT OF IGBO**

**BY**

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**BENIN CITY,**

**NIGERIA**

**OCTOBER, 2025.**

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**BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
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## APPROVAL

I, **OLUEBUBECHUKWU JOSEPH NMEROLE**, a student of the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin with Matriculation number **ART2100796** completed the requirements for the course work and research for the Bachelor of Arts Degree of the University of Benin. The work embodied in this project is original and has not been submitted in part or whole for any other degree or diploma programme of this or any other university or institution.

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## PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATION

I, **OLUEBUBECHUKWU JOSEPH NMEROLE** with matriculation number **ART2100796** declare that this work titled “**A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GREETING PATTERNS IN NGWÀ DIALECT OF IGBO**” has successfully passed the anti-plagiarism test (with a score of     %), and so does not violate any copyright regulations.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for His unfailing grace and mercy shows me in the course of my academic journey in the University of Benin. This journey would not have been easy and successful without you Lord.

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sociolinguistic patterns of greetings in the Ngwà dialect of the Igbo language, with the aim of identifying, documenting, and analysing the various forms, functions, and social variables influencing their use. The motivation for this research stems from the growing concern over the gradual erosion of indigenous communicative practices in Ngwà society due to modernization, language contact, and urbanization. The study adopts a qualitative ethnographic approach, involving participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and natural speech recordings from native speakers across different age, gender, and occupational groups. The analysis is grounded in Hymes' (1972) Ethnography of Communication theory, which provided the framework for understanding the cultural, pragmatic, and interpersonal dynamics of greeting exchanges. Findings reveal that greetings in Ngwà dialect serve vital functions beyond mere phatic communion; they reinforce social hierarchy, express respect, and sustain kinship solidarity. Moreover, factors such as age, gender, and situational context significantly determine greeting choices and strategies. The study concludes that preserving Ngwà greeting traditions is crucial for maintaining both linguistic and cultural identity within the broader Igbo community.

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 1.0 Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of culture, values, and identity. Within every speech community, certain linguistic practices, such as greetings, perform crucial socio-cultural functions. Greetings are among the most universal linguistic routines, yet their forms and functions vary significantly across languages and dialects. According to Malinowski (1923), greetings are not mere formulaic expressions but “phatic communion,” serving to establish and reinforce social bonds. Similarly, Goffman (1967) observes that greetings play a vital role in the ritual maintenance of *face* and interpersonal relations.

The Igbo language, one of the three major languages of Nigeria, belongs to the Niger-Congo language family and is spoken by over 20 million people (Emenanjo, 2015). Igbo is characterized by significant dialectal variation, often grouped into major clusters such as Ònìchà, Òwèrè, Nsúkkà, Ngwà, and others (Nwaozuzu, 2008). These dialects differ in phonology, lexicon, and pragmatics, but they remain mutually intelligible. Among these, the Ngwà dialect stands out as one of the most widely spoken dialects, covering seven Local Government Areas in Abia State, including Ìsìàlà Ngwà North, Ìsìàlà Ngwà South, Òbìngwa, Òsísìòmà, Àbà North, Àbà South, and Ùgwùnàgbò (Ugorji, 2010).

The Ngwà people, as the largest sub-ethnic group of the Igbo, are known for their rich cultural practices, which include distinctive greeting patterns. Greetings in Ngwà go beyond mere exchange of words; they serve as markers of respect, age hierarchy, kinship ties, solidarity, and communal identity (Odeh, 2024). For example, Ngwà greetings vary by time of day:

- Ùtùtù ómá → “Good morning”
- Chikete ómá → “Good afternoon”
- Abalì ómá → “Good evening”

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to document, analyse, and interpret the greeting patterns of the Ngwà dialect as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. By adopting a sociolinguistic perspective, the study situates greetings within the broader framework of language and society, showing how they encode respect, politeness, social hierarchy, and group solidarity. This research also fills an existing gap by focusing specifically on the Ngwà dialect, thereby contributing to dialect studies, pragmatics, and ethnography of communication within Igbo linguistics.

### **1.1 The Language and Its People**

The Igbo language is one of the three major languages of Nigeria, alongside Hausa and Yoruba. It belongs to the Benue–Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Igbo is spoken by over 20 million people both within and outside southeastern Nigeria (Emenanjo, 2015). Scholars such as Nwaozuzu (2008) classify Igbo into several dialect clusters, which, despite their differences, remain mutually intelligible.

Among these clusters, the Ngwà dialect is one of the most prominent and widespread. The Ngwà people constitute the largest single sub-group of the Igbo nation (Afigbo, 1981; Ugorji, 2010). They occupy seven Local Government Areas of present-day Abia State: Ìsìalà Ngwà North, Ìsìalà Ngwà South, Òbìngwa, Òsísìomà Ngwà, Àbà North, Àbà South, and Ùgwùnàgbò. The Ngwà area lies within the Igbo heartland, bounded by Ìkòt Èkpènè (in Akwa Ibom State) to the south, Ùmùàhịà to the north, and Ùkwà to the west (Afigbo, 1981).

The Ngwà dialect, though mutually intelligible with Standard Igbo, exhibits distinctive phonological, lexical, and pragmatic features. Okorji (1999) notes that Ngwà-Igbo has unique sound patterns, such as certain diphthongal realizations and tonal innovations, while Ugorji (2010) highlights variations in honorifics and communicative etiquette. Pragmatically, greetings are one of the areas where the Ngwà dialect is most culturally expressive. For instance:

- Ùtùtù ómá → “Good morning” (Ngwà and Standard Igbo)
- Chikete ómá → “Good afternoon”
- Abalì ómá → “Good evening”
- Í biàlà àhịá? → “Have you come to the market?” (localized Ngwà greeting in trading contexts)
- Órú ómá! → “Good work!” (used in work settings, a typical Ngwà innovation)

These examples show that the Ngwà dialect does not only transmit linguistic information but also encodes social values such as respect (*í vọ́ọ́la chí?* “Have you seen

the day?” → respect to elders in the morning), solidarity (*Nwánnē m, nde otu ìnu?* “My sibling, how are you?”), and community identity.

Culturally, the Ngwà people are known for their agrarian traditions, market systems, and extended kinship ties. Greetings therefore take on a functional role in reinforcing communal life. As Afigbo (1981) notes, Ngwà people have historically valued collective identity and kinship solidarity, and this is reflected in their communicative practices.

Today, however, these patterns face challenges from urbanization, Western education, and the dominance of Standard Igbo and English, especially in cities like Aba. Younger speakers may replace traditional greetings with shorter, modernized forms, as Udeagha (2020) observes in wider Igbo society. This ongoing shift underscores the urgency of documenting Ngwà greeting traditions.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Greetings are a universal communicative act, yet their forms, functions, and meanings vary across languages and cultures. Within Igbo society, greetings play a central role in expressing respect, fostering solidarity, and maintaining social relationships (Nwoye, 1992; Udeagha, 2020). However, despite the cultural significance of greetings, scholarly attention to dialect-specific greeting patterns has been uneven.

The Ngwà dialect, spoken by the largest single subgroup of the Igbo nation, is a rich variety with distinctive communicative practices. Everyday greetings in Ngwà often go

beyond time-of-day expressions to include situational and occupational salutations such as:

- Í biàlà àhíá? → “Have you come to the market?” (market-based greeting).
- Órụ ómá! → “Good work!” (addressing people in work contexts).
- Í vòóla chì? → “Have you seen the day?” (morning greeting, often to elders).

These greetings reflect cultural values of collectivism, industry, and respect for elders, which are central to Ngwà identity (Afigbo, 1981; Ugorji, 2010). Yet, many of these localized greetings are under-documented in mainstream Igbo linguistic literature, which often privileges Standard Igbo.

Furthermore, modern influences such as urbanization, English language dominance, Christian religious expressions, and media culture have begun to reshape the greeting system. Younger Ngwà speakers, particularly in cities like Aba, increasingly use shortened or hybridized forms, sometimes abandoning traditional greetings altogether (Udeagha, 2020). This creates a risk of language shift and cultural erosion, where the pragmatic richness of greetings may be lost.

The problem, therefore, is the lack of systematic sociolinguistic documentation and analysis of greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect. While there are general studies on Igbo greetings (Nwoye, 1992; Obeng, 1997), very little research has focused specifically on how greetings are structured, performed, and interpreted within the Ngwà context. Without such documentation, important aspects of Ngwà cultural heritage may remain unrecorded or risk extinction.

This study is therefore motivated by the need to identify, analyse, and preserve greeting practices in the Ngwà dialect, examining both their linguistic forms and their sociocultural functions.

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the sociolinguistic features of greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect of the Igbo language, with a view to documenting their forms, functions, and cultural significance in both traditional and contemporary contexts. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify and document the various types of greeting expressions in the Ngwà dialect, highlighting their phonological forms, tonal realizations, and situational usage.
2. Examine the sociolinguistic functions of greetings in Ngwà society, particularly their role in expressing respect, politeness, solidarity, and community values.
3. Analyse the influence of social variables such as age, gender, kinship, occupation, and context on greeting choices and strategies in the Ngwà dialect.
4. Identify the impact of modernization and language contact on these practices.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the various greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect of Igbo, and how are they linguistically realized (phonologically, tonally, and lexically)?

2. What sociolinguistic functions do greetings perform in Ngwà society, and how do they reflect values such as politeness, respect, solidarity, and identity?
3. How do social variables such as age, gender, kinship, occupation, and context influence greeting choices among Ngwà speakers?
4. In what ways do greeting practices in Ngwà dialect converge with or diverge from those in Standard Igbo, and what role do modernization, urbanization, and language contact play in shaping these practices?

## **1.5 Methodology**

### **1.5.1 Method of Data Collection**

This study adopts a qualitative ethnographic method (which focuses on studying people in their natural settings) rooted in sociolinguistics, since greetings are better studied in their natural social contexts. Three primary techniques will be employed:

1. Participant observation – observing how greetings are used in everyday interactions (e.g., markets, church gatherings, work environments, family settings).
2. Oral interviews – semi-structured interviews with Ngwà native speakers, eliciting information on greeting forms, meanings, and usage across different contexts.
3. Audio recordings – capturing real-time greeting exchanges to ensure accurate documentation of pronunciation, tone, and pragmatic cues.

This combined approach makes it possible to capture both structured responses and spontaneous, naturally occurring data.

### **1.5.2 Instruments/Tools for Data Collection**

To ensure systematic and accurate data gathering, the following instruments and tools will be used:

- Interview guide – with open-ended questions tailored to elicit greeting practices (e.g., “How do you greet an elder in the morning?”).
- Observation checklist – to note down situational greetings in specific domains (e.g., markets: *Í biàlà àhíá?* “Have you come to the market?”).
- Digital audio recorder – for capturing speech in natural contexts with tonal accuracy.
- Field notebooks and pens – for recording non-verbal cues such as gestures, handshakes, and posture that often accompany greetings.
- Mobile phones – as supplementary recording devices.

### **1.5.3 Reliability of Data Collection**

Reliability will be ensured by:

- Collecting data from a wide range of respondents across different social categories (elders, youths, men, women, traders, farmers, church leaders).
- Using triangulation, i.e., combining observation, interviews, and recordings to confirm consistency.
- Repeating some interview questions in different contexts to check for consistency of responses.
- Involving at least two native speakers as research assistants to review transcriptions and confirm accuracy.

#### 1.5.4 Validity of the Data

To establish validity:

- Data will be collected within natural communicative settings to ensure authenticity (e.g., actual morning greetings, market salutations, work-related greetings).
- Greetings will be verified by elders and cultural custodians in Ngwà land for authenticity.
- The analysis will be cross-referenced with existing scholarly works on Igbo greetings (Nwoye, 1992; Udeagha, 2020).
- Both traditional and modernized greeting forms will be included to reflect the full sociolinguistic reality.

#### 1.5.5 Method of Data Analysis

The data will be analysed using qualitative sociolinguistic analysis, with the following steps:

1. Phonological and tonal analysis – documenting greetings using IPA transcription with tone marks (e.g., *Í vò'òla chí?* “Have you seen the day?”).
2. Pragmatic analysis – identifying communicative functions such as showing respect, building solidarity, expressing goodwill, or marking transitions in interaction.
3. Sociolinguistic variable analysis – examining how factors such as age, gender, kinship, occupation, and setting influence greeting choices.

This layered approach ensures that greetings are not only studied as linguistic expressions, but also as social practices embedded in Ngwà cultural values.

## 1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the sociolinguistic investigation of greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect of the Igbo language and not an attempt to cover all dialects of Igbo language. The research focuses on documenting the forms, functions, and usage of greetings as they occur in selected Ngwà-speaking communities such as Osioma, Isiala Ngwà South, Isiala Ngwà North, Aba North, Aba South and Óbi Ngwà, all located within Abia State.

The study covers:

- Types of greetings – including time-of-day greetings (*Í vò'ola chi?* “Good morning”), situational greetings (*Í biàlà àhíá?* “Have you come to the market?”), occupational greetings (*Órú ómá!* “Well done”), and relational greetings (*Ìndé otu ìnu ñwànnē m* “Greetings, my sibling”).
- Sociolinguistic variables – age, gender, kinship, occupation, and setting, and how these influence greeting choices.
- Comparative analysis – identifying similarities and differences between Ngwà greetings and Standard Igbo greetings, to highlight areas of convergence and divergence.
- Cultural and pragmatic functions – such as politeness, solidarity, respect, and identity preservation.

## 1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant on several grounds:

1. **Linguistic Documentation and Preservation:** The Ngwà dialect, though widely spoken, is under-documented in terms of its communicative practices. By recording and analysing greeting expressions such as *Í vò'òla chì?* (“Good morning”), *Í bi'álà àh'íá?* (“Have you come to the market?”), and *Órú ómá!* (“Well done”), the research contributes to the preservation of linguistic and cultural heritage. This is important given the threats of language shift, urbanization, and globalization (Ugorji, 2010; Udeagha, 2020).
2. **Sociolinguistic Relevance:** Greetings are central to the study of language and society because they reflect norms of politeness, respect, solidarity, and identity. This research will provide valuable insights into how social variables (age, gender, kinship, occupation, and context) influence communication in Ngwà land. It also adds to broader sociolinguistic discussions on pragmatics and politeness theory (Nwoye, 1992).
3. **Educational and Cultural Benefits:** The findings can serve as a resource for schools, cultural organizations, and researchers who seek to promote indigenous knowledge systems. It will also assist younger generations of Ngwà speakers, many of whom are influenced by urban life and English-dominated environments, to reconnect with their cultural roots through language.

4. **Contribution to Research:** This work fills an existing **research gap** since most previous studies on Igbo greetings (e.g., Nwoye, 1992; Obeng, 1997; Udeagha, 2020) have focused on Igbo in general without paying detailed attention to Ngwà dialect-specific practices. Thus, the study provides original data and analysis that enrich Igbo linguistics and sociolinguistic scholarship.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

The study focuses specifically on greetings in the Ngwà dialect of Igbo, but due to time and resource constraints, data was collected mainly from a few communities within Aba and its surrounding areas. Only a limited number of respondents could be interviewed due to the time frame of the research and accessibility issues. A larger sample might have provided even more nuanced insights into age, gender, and occupational variations in greeting patterns. Some informants were reluctant to fully participate or could not recall certain greeting forms used in highly traditional contexts (e.g., farming rituals, age-grade meetings). This limited the range of contexts represented in the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The literature review examines existing knowledge related to greetings, sociolinguistic practices, and communication in Igbo society, with specific reference to Ngwà dialect where possible. The review highlights what scholars have contributed, identifies gaps, and situates this study within broader sociolinguistic inquiry.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Review**

##### **2.1.1 Politeness**

Greetings are deeply tied to politeness strategies, which reinforce respect, solidarity, and social order. Brown & Levinson (1987) proposed the Politeness Theory, emphasizing “face” (positive and negative) as a central aspect of communicative interaction. In Igbo culture, greetings often protect the interlocutor’s positive face by showing concern and acknowledgment. Nwoye (1992) observed that among the Igbo, politeness is not merely linguistic but also cultural and moral, as greetings are expected in virtually every interaction, from meeting elders to casual exchanges with peers. In Ngwà society, politeness is heightened by the use of proverbs, titles, and honorifics during greetings, reflecting social hierarchy.

##### **2.1.2 Language**

Language functions as a tool of identity and solidarity. Sapir (1921) noted that language is not just a means of communication but also a “symbolic guide to culture.”

For the Igbo people, and Ngwà in particular, greetings are markers of dialectal identity. According to Emenanjo (2015), the Igbo language is highly dialectally diverse, and greetings serve as a dialectal fingerprint that distinguishes one subgroup from another. Thus, when an Ngwà speaker greets with expressions like *Ì vòpòla chi?* (“Have you woken to the day?”), it signals both belonging and local identity.

### **2.1.3 Communication**

Hymes (1972), in his *Ethnography of Communication*, emphasized that communication should be studied in terms of both its linguistic forms and its social functions. Greetings exemplify this, as they are ritualized communicative acts that establish social relationships. Igbo greetings often vary by context—morning greetings, market greetings, or age-grade greetings. In Ngwà land, greetings are heavily tied to daily routines (e.g., farming, trading) and are context-sensitive, reflecting Hymes’ notion of the SPEAKING framework (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, Genre).

### **2.1.4 Power and Solidarity**

Brown and Gilman (1960) argued that language reflects power and solidarity through forms of address. In Ngwà society, greetings are one of the clearest linguistic markers of power relations—for instance, younger ones are expected to initiate greetings to elders, while the reverse is rare. Obiamalu (2013) observed that greetings in Igbo encode hierarchy, gender roles, and respect, reinforcing cultural values. Solidarity, on the

other hand, is seen when equals exchange greetings casually, often using shortened forms. Thus, Ngwà greetings balance respect for authority with closeness among peers.

### 2.1.5 Semantics

The semantic content of greetings is often less about literal meaning and more about pragmatic function. For example, the Ngwà morning greeting *Ì vóóla chi?* (“Have you seen the morning?”) is not a genuine question but a phatic expression (Malinowski, 1923). Akindele (2007) explained that in African societies, greetings serve as relational semantics, indexing social roles rather than conveying factual information. In Ngwà land, greetings often encode welfare concerns (*Nde otu Inu?* “How are you?”) which semantically mean “I acknowledge you” rather than a true inquiry.

### 2.1.6 Pragmatics

Pragmatics examines how meaning is shaped by context. Mey (2001) stressed that speech acts like greetings must be interpreted within social norms. In Igbo, greetings are classic examples of phatic communion (Jakobson, 1960), serving relational rather than informational purposes. Pragmatically, Ngwà greetings perform several functions:

- **Opening discourse** (*Ì vóóla chi?* “Good morning”)
- **Showing deference** (*Ndeewó nú!* “Well done!”)
- **Expressing solidarity** (*O dị la mmà!* “It is well!”). As Akinyemi (2016) noted in his study of Yoruba greetings, African greetings function as social contracts, and the same holds true for Ngwà Igbo greetings, where pragmatic force is inseparable from cultural expectation

## **2.2 Review of Previous Studies**

Several scholars have conducted sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies on greetings and related communicative behaviours in African and Nigerian contexts, including within various dialects of the Igbo language. These studies provide useful insights into the cultural, linguistic, and social functions of greeting expressions and serve as a foundation for the present research.

### **Study 1: Nwoye (1992) – “Linguistic Politeness and Socio-Cultural Variation of the Concept of Face”**

Nwoye (1992) examined politeness in Igbo communication, focusing on how social relations influence linguistic behaviour. His study explored the concept of face and the ways in which politeness strategies manifest in the Igbo language through greetings, requests, and forms of address. He employed a qualitative ethnographic method, relying on participant observation and informal interviews with native speakers from different Igbo communities, including Nsukka and Onitsha. Nwoye adopted Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory as the main analytical framework, adapting it to the Igbo socio-cultural context to explain how the notion of *face* varies according to age, status, and social role. The data were analysed descriptively and pragmatically, identifying politeness strategies such as positive politeness (showing solidarity and camaraderie) and negative politeness (showing deference and respect). The study found that Igbo greetings are central to maintaining social harmony and respect. Politeness in Igbo communication goes beyond linguistic form to include non-verbal gestures, tone, and culturally

prescribed behaviours. The study emphasized that greetings encode communal respect, hierarchy, and identity, and that the Igbo concept of politeness differs from the Western model by being collectivist rather than individualist.

### **Study 2: Okeke (2009) – “A Pragmatic Analysis of Greeting Patterns among the Igbo”**

Okeke (2009) explored the pragmatic dimensions of Igbo greetings, investigating how they function as speech acts that convey politeness, respect, and solidarity within various social contexts. Data were gathered through recorded conversational interactions and structured interviews with native speakers drawn from Enugu and Anambra States. The study adopted Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) as its theoretical bases. These frameworks were used to classify greetings as expressive and phatic acts that perform social rather than propositional functions. Okeke used pragmatic discourse analysis, categorizing greetings according to context (e.g., morning, occupational, ceremonial) and analysing their illocutionary force and politeness value. The study discovered that greetings in Igbo society are context-bound and socially graded. The type of greeting used depends on factors such as age, kinship relation, and time of day. Okeke concluded that greeting forms are linguistic reflections of the Igbo worldview of respect and communal identity, and that the violation of greeting norms is viewed as social deviance.

### **Study 3: Emenanjo (2015) – “Greetings as Markers of Social Identity in Igbo Speech Communities”**

Emenanjo (2015) investigated the role of greetings as markers of social identity and solidarity among different Igbo dialect speakers, including those of Ngwà, Nsukka, and Mbaise origins. The study aimed to show how greeting expressions signal belonging and differentiate one dialect from another. The researcher used interviews and participant observation during traditional events, markets, and family gatherings to collect naturally occurring greeting data. The study was anchored on Ethnography of Communication Theory (Hymes, 1972), which views language as a tool of social interaction embedded in culture. A qualitative comparative analysis was conducted, examining greeting forms across dialects and interpreting their pragmatic and cultural meanings. Emenanjo found that although the various Igbo dialects share similar greeting structures, each dialect possesses unique lexical items and tonal variations that reflect its cultural identity. In Ngwà, for instance, greetings are often more extended and expressive, showing higher degrees of deference to elders. The study concluded that greetings serve as identity markers and indicators of social alignment in the Igbo cultural system.

### **Study 4: Ugwueze (2019) – “Gender and Politeness in Igbo Greetings”**

Ugwueze (2019) analysed how gender influences the use and perception of politeness in Igbo greeting interactions. The focus was on differences between how men and women greet, particularly in rural versus urban settings. Data were obtained through focus group discussions, interviews, and audio recordings of spontaneous conversations

among speakers from Nsukka and Ngwà regions. The research utilized Gender and Language Theory (Tannen, 1990) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to analyse differences in greeting forms, frequency, and politeness markers. The data were analysed using discourse analysis, paying attention to patterns of address terms, intonation, and honorific usage. The study revealed that women tend to employ more positive politeness strategies — such as expressions of warmth and solidarity — while men use more negative politeness strategies that show respect and distance. It also found that traditional norms continue to shape gendered patterns of greeting, though urbanization and modernization are gradually blurring these distinctions.

**Study 5: Mmadike (2021) – “A Socio-Pragmatic Study of Greetings among the Owerri Igbo”**

Mmadike (2021) examined how greetings function as socio-pragmatic tools for sustaining interpersonal relationships and social order among speakers of the Owerri dialect of Igbo. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and direct observation during cultural events, family visits, and market interactions. The study adopted the Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to analyse how greetings convey respect, humility, and empathy. The researcher used qualitative content analysis, interpreting the sociolinguistic roles of greetings within the Owerri community. The study showed that greeting practices are influenced by age hierarchy, social roles, and context. Greetings to elders involve deferential tone and gestures (e.g., kneeling or bowing

slightly), while peer greetings emphasize solidarity. It concluded that greetings are performative acts that sustain community ethics and interpersonal peace.

While these studies provide valuable insights, most focused on Standard Igbo or broader African contexts. Very few have documented the Ngwà dialect in detail, especially regarding its unique greeting patterns. Moreover, comparative analyses between Ngwà and Standard Igbo are limited. This gap justifies the present study.

### **2.3 Concerns of the Present Study**

From the foregoing review, it is clear that many scholars such as Nwoye (1992), Okeke (2009), Emenanjo (2015), Ugwueze (2019), and Mmadike (2021), have made valuable contributions to the study of greetings, politeness, and communication within the broader Igbo speech community. Their works have examined greetings as markers of politeness, identity, solidarity, and gendered communication. However, most of these studies concentrated on other dialectal regions such as Nsukka, Onitsha, Owerri, and Anambra, with little or no detailed attention given to the Ngwà dialect of the Igbo language.

Consequently, the present study is primarily concerned with filling this research gap by focusing specifically on the Ngwà dialect, which possesses distinctive linguistic forms and cultural practices surrounding greetings. It seeks to examine how greetings function socio-linguistically in Ngwà society; particularly in relation to age, gender, kinship, occupation, and social context, using Ethnography of communication Theory as its analytical framework.

In contrast to the earlier studies that emphasized general politeness or gender-based analysis, this research aims to provide a comprehensive, dialect-specific investigation that highlights both the linguistic structure and social meanings of greeting patterns. It also seeks to document unique Ngwà greeting expressions (with tonal markings) and compare them with Standard Igbo, showing areas of convergence (shared Igbo identity) and divergence (dialectal uniqueness).

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.0 Introduction

Every sociolinguistic study requires a theoretical framework to guide its analysis. This study adopts the Ethnography of Communication (EoC), developed by Dell Hymes (1962, 1972), as its theoretical framework. The choice of this theory is based on the fact that greetings are not only linguistic expressions but also social and cultural practices that can only be fully understood within their communicative contexts. The Ethnography of Communication provides the tools to analyse when, how, and why greetings are used in Ngwà land.

#### 3.1 Ethnography of Communication

The Ethnography of Communication (EoC) is a branch of sociolinguistics introduced by Dell Hymes in the 1960s as an extension of linguistic anthropology. It emerged as a critique of Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence, which focused on abstract grammar without considering social use. Hymes (1972) argued that true communicative competence involves knowing not only the grammar of a language but also how to use it appropriately in different social situations.

The Ethnography of Communication is guided by the SPEAKING model proposed by Hymes (1972), which identifies the components of a speech event:

- **S – Setting and Scene:** The time and place of communication.
- **P – Participants:** The speaker, hearer, and their roles.

- **E – Ends:** The purpose or outcome of the speech act.
- **A – Act sequence:** The order and form of communicative acts.
- **K – Key:** The tone, manner, or spirit of interaction.
- **I – Instrumentalities:** The channel and forms of speech (oral, non-verbal, etc.).
- **N – Norms:** The rules governing interaction.
- **G – Genre:** The type of communicative event (greeting, prayer, storytelling, etc.).

In the context of greetings, the Ethnography of Communication helps explain why certain greetings are used in morning vs. evening, by juniors vs. elders, or in markets vs. homes, thereby capturing the socially situated nature of language use.

The Ethnography of Communication (EoC), developed by Dell Hymes (1972), provides a practical framework for studying speech as a social practice. Its SPEAKING model is particularly useful for analysing greetings in the Ngwà dialect, since greetings are not only linguistic forms but also cultural acts tied to social norms, respect, power, and solidarity.

In Ngwà society, greetings (*í vóola chi?* “Have you seen the day?”, *Útutu oma* “Good morning!”, *ndó* “sorry/condolence”, *imeela/oru oma* “thank you/well done”) are treated as ritualized speech events. Ethnography of Communication allows you to treat each greeting as a unit of analysis, looking beyond “what is said” to “what is happening socially.”

### 3.1.1 The SPEAKING model step-by-step

#### (a) Setting and Scene (S):

- *Útutu oma* (“good morning”) is only appropriate in the morning.
- Funeral greetings (*ndó n’ulo* — “sorry to the household”) occur only in solemn mourning contexts.
- By documenting setting/scene, you show how greetings index time, place, and occasion.

#### (b) Participants (P):

- In Ngwà land, younger greets older first, and status affects language choice.
- Example: A child greets with *ndewò* (“greetings”), while the elder replies with blessings (*Chineke gozie wu* — “may God bless you”).
- Participants’ social roles (age, gender, kinship, title) shape both the form and the expected response.

#### (c) Ends (E):

- Greetings are not just “hellos” — they achieve social ends:
  - Respect (*Maazi/Mma mma nu* — shows recognition of the elder’s presence)
  - Solidarity (*Ndi ótù Inu?* — “are you well, my sibling?” affirms kinship)
  - Economic ties (*ì biàlà àhíá?* — “have you come to the market?” builds rapport for trade).

**(d) Act Sequence (A):**

- Ngwà greetings often follow structured sequences:
  - Younger one: *Útutu oma* (“Good morning!”)
  - Elder: *yá gazie!* (“May it go well!”)

This call-and-response sequence shows reciprocity and shared norms.

**(e) Key (K):**

- Greetings must be delivered with the appropriate tone and attitude.
- A cheerful tone at a funeral would be inappropriate; instead, solemn intonation with lowered voice shows respect.
- Ethnography of Communication helps capture this emotional/interactional “key.”

**(f) Instrumentalities (I):**

- While greetings are spoken, non-verbal signs play a huge role:
  - Kneeling slightly when greeting elders
  - Handshake in formal or market contexts
  - Silence + head bow in ritual greetings.
  - Ethnography of Communication acknowledges these multimodal features as part of communication.

**(g) Norms (N):**

- Cultural rules govern greetings:
  - Young ones must greet first.
  - Failure to greet an elder is considered disrespectful.

- Certain greetings are taboo at the wrong time (e.g., saying *Útutu ọma* “Good morning” at night).

**(h) Genre (G):**

- Ngwà greetings belong to a recognized speech genre with sub-genres:
  - Daily greetings (morning, afternoon, evening).
  - Market greetings.
  - Ceremonial greetings (marriages, funerals, festivals).
  - Work-related greetings (*jishie ike* — “be strong”).

**3.1.2 Application of Theory (Sample Data)**

**Utterance:**

- Junior: *Í vòṛlà chí?* (“Have you seen the day?”)
- Elder: *Yá gazie!* (“May it go well!”)

**SPEAKING Analysis:**

- **S:** Home, early morning
- **P:** Younger one (17-year-old boy) greets elder (65-year-old man)
- **E:** Show respect, mark start of daily interaction
- **A:** Greeting > blessing response
- **K:** Humble tone, junior bows slightly
- **I:** Spoken language + body bow
- **N:** Social norm = junior greets first, elder responds with blessing
- **G:** Daily morning greeting (ritualized)

Here, the greeting functions as a phatic communion (Malinowski 1923), reinforces power and solidarity, and exemplifies communicative competence as defined by Hymes (1972).

### **3.2 Relevance/Justification of the Theory**

This section explains why the Ethnography of Communication (EoC) (Hymes 1962, 1972) is especially appropriate for analyzing greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect, how it complements Politeness Theory, and how it will be operationalised in the research. It also points out practical outputs you can produce using Ethnography of Communication and notes its strengths and limits in this particular project.

Ethnography of Communication treats communicative behaviour as events embedded in culture. Greetings in Ngwà are ritualized events (morning routines, market calls, funeral condolences) whose meaning depends on where, when, who, and why — precisely the kinds of factors Ethnography of Communication foregrounds. Hymes' notion of communicative competence goes beyond grammar to include knowledge of how to speak appropriately. In Ngwà communities people must know not only the words for “good morning” but when to kneel, which title to use, and how to intone the greeting. Ethnography of Communication captures all these components.

The SPEAKING model (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, Genre) provides a ready checklist to describe every greeting event in full ethnographic detail ideal for systematic documentation and comparison across settings, ages, and domains.

Ethnography of Communication connects an individual greeting to wider cultural values (age hierarchy, kinship obligations, market ethics). Thus you can argue how a particular greeting both enacts and reproduces Ngwà social structure.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data collected on greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect of the Igbo language. The analysis is organized around the four objectives outlined in Chapter One, using the Ethnography of Communication framework as the analytical tool. Each subsection addresses one objective, and the chapter concludes with a general discussion of the findings.

#### 4.1 Identification and Documentation Greeting Patterns in Ngwà Dialect

This section identifies the various greeting forms recorded among Ngwà speakers and documents their linguistic structures (with tone markings) and cultural uses.

##### A. TIME OF THE DAY

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
Good morning	Ụtụtù ọmà
Good afternoon	Ịkètè ọmà
Good evening	Ànyasu ọmà

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Speaker:** Home, early morning.

**Participants:** Younger one (17-year-old boy) greets elder (65-year-old man).

**Ends:** Show respect, mark start of daily interaction.

**Act Sequence:** Greeting > Blessing response.

**Key:** Humble tone, junior bows slightly

**Instruments:** Spoken language + body bow.

**Norm:** Junior greets first, elder responds with blessing

**Genre:** Daily morning greeting

## B. WELLNESS/PHATIC GREETINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
How are you?	Ndi ótù Ị nù?
How are you doing?	Ndi ótù imere?
How is it going?	Ndi ótù ọ dị-iga?
How is your day going?	Ndi ótù ubochi wù nnù?
How is your family?	Ndi ótù ndị ụlọ wù nnù?
How is business?	Ndi ótù ọrụ nnù?

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** School classroom.

**Participants:** Friend 1 (Daniel) and friend 2 (Sarah).

**Ends:** Showing mutuality.

**Act Sequence:** Greeting by Daniel > Sarah responds.

**Key:** Cheerful and friendly tone.

**Instruments:** Spoken language + handshake.

**Norm:** Social norm of peer interaction.

**Genre:** Wellness/Phatic greeting.

### C. MARKET/OCCUPATIONAL GREETINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
Hello there	Ndi ótù
Good to see you	Ọ di mma ịhụ wù
Welcome my customer	Ibiala ònye ahịa m
How is market?	Ndi ótù ahịa nnù?

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Market place

**Participants:** Market woman and customer.

**Ends:** Purchasing of an commodity.

**Act Sequence:** Customer greets > market woman responds.

**Key:** Humble/polite tone.

**Instruments:** Spoken language.

**Genre:** Work-related greeting.

#### D. WELCOME/HOSPITALITY

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
Welcome	Ibiálá
Welcome back	Ibiáriálá
Nice to meet you	Ọ di mma ịmata wù
Welcome home	Ibiálá ụlọ
Please come in	Biko bátá

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Home town (Village).

**Participants:** Father and his family.

**Ends:** Welcoming home after being away.

**Act Sequence:** Family welcomes father > Father responds.

**Key:** Cheerful tone.

**Instruments:** Spoken language + Gestures (hug).

**Norm:** Family norm.

**Genre:** Welcome/Hospitality greeting.

## E. CONDOLENCES/RITUAL GREETINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
My condolences	Ndò
I am so sorry for your loss	Ọnwụ bátára wù wùtara m
I am here for you	A nọyera m gí
Thinking of you	A di m íchè echíche wù
May God bless you and your family during this time	Chineke gózie kwa wù na ezinụlọ wù

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Funeral.

**Participants:** Family of late person and guests at funeral.

**Ends:** Pay tribute and express condolence.

**Act Sequence:** Guests console family of late person > Family responds.

**Key:** Mild tone.

**Instruments:** Prayers + hugs.

**Genre:** Ceremonial greeting.

## F. KINSHIP/SOLIDARITY GREETINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
My siblings, how are you?	Umunne m, ndí ótù únù nnù?
My father/elder, how are you?	Nna m/dede ndí ótù inù?
My brother, it has been a longtime	Nwanne nwoko ndí ótù inù?
My in-law, how are you?	Ogọ m, ndí ótù inù?
My grandmother, good day ma	Nnenna m, mma mma

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Village setting.

**Participants:** Family and extended family.

**Ends:** Show respect, daily interaction.

**Act Sequence:** Greeting > Response.

**Key:** Cheerful tone.

**Instruments:** Spoken language + gestures.

**Norm:** Family norm.

**Genre:** Kinship/Solidarity greeting.

## G. BLESSING/PARTING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
Goodbye	Ngwanù
Farewell	Lá ke ọmà
Take care	Lekátá onwe wù
Later	Emechaa
Till tomorrow	Echi nù
Good night	Laba keọma
God bless you	Chineke gozịe wù
Best wishes	Nkè ọma dịrị wù

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Home

**Participants:** Parents and child.

**Ends:** Sending off to school.

**Act sequence:** Parents tells child “Take care” > child responds.

**Instruments:** Spoken language + hug.

**Norm:** Family norm.

**Genre:** Parting greeting.

## H. SEASONAL GREETINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
Merry Christmas	Erimeri ekeresimesi
Happy new year	Erimerie afọ ọhùrù
Happy new yam festival	Erimeri igba jì ọhù

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Community.

**Participants:** Members of community.

**Ends:** Celebration of the season.

**Act Sequence:** Greeting by member 1 > response by member 2.

**Key:** Cheerful tone.

**Instruments:** Spoken language + handshake/hugs.

**Genre:** Seasonal greeting.

## I. JOURNEY-RELATED GREETINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
You have come, welcome	Ibiálá, ndewò
Go well	Jé ke ọma
Return safely	Bìaria ke ọmà

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Home.

**Participants:** Father and family.

**Ends:** Wishing a safe trip.

**Act Sequence:** Family wishes the father a safe trip > father responds.

**Key:** Cheerful tone.

**Instrument:** Spoken language + hugs.

**Genre:** Journey-related greeting.

**J. WORK/LABOUR GREETINGS**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE	NGWÀ DIALECT
Good work	Ọrụ ọma
You are working hard	I di-irusi ọrù ike
Thank you for the work	Imela maka ọrù a
You are hardworking	I shìrì íke ọrù

**Using the SPEAKING MODEL analysis:**

**Setting:** Office.

**Participants:** Members of staff.

**Ends:** Showing mutuality.

**Acts Sequence:** Staff 1 greets > staff 2 responds.

**Key:** Polite tone.

**Instrument:** Spoken language + handshake.

**Genre:** Work/Labour greeting.

## 4.2 Sociolinguistic Functions of Greetings in Ngwà Society

Greetings in Ngwà society are not just phatic expressions but powerful sociolinguistic tools that maintain relationships, express respect, mark identity, and transmit cultural values. Their usage depends on age, gender, status, setting, and time, making them a rich source of sociolinguistic meaning.

### 1. Establishing and Maintaining Social Bonds

Greetings function as a social glue in Ngwà society.

- Saying *Ụtutu oma!* (“Good morning”) when meeting a neighbour reinforces daily interaction.
- Kinship greetings such as *Ụmunne m, ndi otu unu nnu?* (“My siblings, how are you?”) are acts of solidarity that keep family and community ties strong.
- Failure to greet is seen as antisocial behaviour, sometimes interpreted as arrogance or hostility.

Example: When two people pass each other on the road, the expected norm is at least a short greeting like *Imeela/Oru oma* (“Thank you/Well done”), or else it may cause suspicion: *O bu na o na-ewere onwe ya ka o di elu?* (“Does he think he is too proud?”).

### 2. Expressing Respect and Politeness

In Ngwà culture, greetings are a primary index of respect, especially in intergenerational communication.

- Younger people greet elders first: *Ndeewo, Nna m!* (“Greetings, father!”).
- Kneeling slightly or bending while greeting adds a non-verbal cue of deference.
- Elders return greetings with blessings: *Chineke gọzie wu!* (“God bless you”).

Example: When a youth meets an elder in the morning, the greeting is not just *Ụtutu oma*, but often extended to *Ụtutu oma, nna anyi!* (“Good morning, our father”), foregrounding respect and recognition of seniority.

### 3. Marking Identity and Group Solidarity

Greetings often index belonging to the Ngwà subgroup of the Igbo nation.

- Localized expressions (*Ị vọpla chi?* — “Have you seen the day?”) carry Ngwà phonological and lexical features distinct from Standard Igbo.
- Market greetings like *Ndi ótù ahịa nnu?* (“How is market?”) identify speakers as insiders of a trading culture.
- Collective greetings at festivals (*Eriimeri igba jì ọhu!* — “Happy New Yam festival!”) signal cultural solidarity.

A. Okorji (2005) observes that “greetings in Igbo sub-dialects often carry identity markers which distinguish one group from another, thereby serving as a linguistic badge of membership.”

### 4. Performing Social Roles and Ritual Obligations

Certain greetings are ritualized obligations in Ngwà society.

- At funerals, mourners must say *Ndo* (“Sorry/my condolences”) to the bereaved.

- At weddings, greetings such as *Ibiálá, nwanyị anyị!* (“Welcome, our wife!”) ritually incorporate the bride into her new family.
  - Title holders and chiefs are greeted with honorifics: *Onyeishi, imela!* (“Leader, thank you”).
- B. These ritual greetings are not optional; they legitimize social roles and reaffirm community values.

## 5. Regulating Social Distance and Familiarity

Different greetings help speakers navigate formality vs. informality.

- Formal greetings (*Ụtutu oma, ànyasu oma*. “Good morning”) are used in polite or distant interactions.
- Informal greetings (*Ụtutu!* “Morning!” or *ndi ótù ! nu?* “How are you?”) show intimacy.
- Youth slang: *Ndi ótù?* (“How far?”) indexes modernity and peer solidarity.

C. Thus, greetings signal levels of familiarity, reducing or reinforcing social distance.

## 6. Facilitating Transactions and Cooperation

In Ngwà markets and workplaces, greetings serve an economic function.

- A customer greets a seller: *Ọ di mma ihụ wu!* (“Good to see you”).
- Seller responds: *Ibiala onye ahia m!* (“Welcome my customer!”).
- These exchanges create a friendly atmosphere for bargaining and build trust.

D. Without such greetings, transactions may be strained. As Nwoye (1993) explains, in Igbo communicative culture, greetings “create the pragmatic ground for successful interaction.”

## 7. Expressing Empathy and Shared Humanity

Greetings are also tools for showing empathy, concern, and emotional connection.

- *Ndo!* (“Sorry”) is used not just for grief but for any inconvenience, e.g., illness or hardship.
- *Ndi ótù ndị ụlọ wu nnu?* (“How is your family?”) goes beyond the individual to show communal concern.

E. Such greetings embody the Igbo value of communalism and solidarity.

## 8. Conveying Blessings and Well-wishes

Many greetings in Ngwà society take the form of spoken blessings.

- *Bìaria ke oma!* — “Return safely.”
- *Chineke gozie kwa wu!* — “May God bless you.”
- *Jé ke oma!* — “Go well.”

F. These greetings function as speech acts of prayer, reflecting the deeply religious worldview of the Ngwà.

## 4.3 The influence of Social Variables on Greeting Choices and Strategies in the Ngwà Dialect

### 4.3.1 Age

#### Pattern

- Juniors to Elders: obligatory initiation by juniors, longer formula, overt deference (lexical honorifics + non-verbal gestures).

Example: Junior to Elder (formal morning): *Ị vòólà chì, Nnà anyi?* (“Have you seen the day, our father?”) — accompanied by slight kneel.

- Elders to Juniors: shorter replies, often blessings or permissive responses.

Example: Elder to Junior (reply): *Ee, yá gazie. Chineke gọzie wu.* (“Yes, may it go well. God bless you.”)

- Peers (same age): casual, reduced forms; sometimes slang or English/Standard Igbo insertions among youths.

Example: Peer to Peer (youth): *Ndi ótù Ị nu?* (“How far/How are you?”) — casual handshake.

G. Age marks power/status asymmetry: greeting functions to index respect and social order. The longer, honorific formula plus obligatory non-verbal submission (kneel/prostration) are negative-politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson) to avoid face-threat toward elders. Elder replies serve to restore face and offer social blessing.

### 4.3.2 Gender

#### Pattern

- Women tend to use more elaborate, affiliative greetings in intimate/domestic domains (longer phrasal forms, kinship terms).
- Men use shorter, instrumental greetings in work/market settings; they may emphasize action words (e.g., *Oru oma!* “Good work!”).
- Gendered differences are domain-sensitive (public vs private) and interact with age and status.

#### Examples

- Woman to Woman (domestic): *Ibiala, nwánnè m nwanyị, ndi ótù Ì nu?* (“Welcome, my sister, how are you?”) — hug/handshake.
- Man to Man (work): *Oru oma!* (“Good work!”) — brief, encouraging.

H. Women’s greeting strategies emphasize solidarity and affect, reflecting gendered social roles as caregivers and kinship maintainers. Men’s shorter forms prioritize instrumental action (task orientation), suited to public, transactional domains. Gender differences are performative and culturally encoded.

### 4.3.3 Kinship (Relationship type: close kin, distant kin, non-kin)

#### Pattern

- Close kin: use kinship terms (*nwánnè nwoko, nne m, nna m*) and extended greeting sequences; tactile affection (hugs, cheek-touch).

Example:

*Nwánnè nwoko, ndi ótù I nu?* (“My brother, it’s been a longtime”) — extended check on family welfare.

- Distant kin / in-laws: more formal, may include honorifics and deliberative address.

Example:

*Imeela, nkè oma òmà òmà!* (“Thank you, best wishes”) — respectful but less intimate.

- Non-kin / strangers: default to neutral salutations (*Ndeewo, Ùtùtù oma*), often with distance markers.
- I. Kinship greetings perform identity work — affirming membership and mutual obligations. They also serve informational functions (enquire about family, livelihood) that sustain social support networks. The choice of kin term itself signals closeness.

#### **4.3.4 Occupation and Domain (market, farm, church, school, office)**

##### **Pattern**

- Greetings vary by occupational domain: traders use market-specific salutations; farmers use work praise; clergy/hymn leaders combine greetings with religious formulae. Formal workplaces more often prefer Standard Igbo/English; markets preserve Ngwà lexical forms.

## Examples

- Trader to Customer: *Ị biálá ahíá? / Ibiálá onye ahia m!* (“Have you come to the market? / Welcome, customer!”) — loud call.
  - Farmer greeting returning labourer: *Ọrụ oma!* (“Well done / keep at it!”)
  - Church: *Chíneke gozie unu!* (“God bless all of you”) — collective blessing.
- J. Domain shapes lexical choice, pitch, volume, and strategic intent (economic vs. affective). Market greetings are partly instrumental (to attract buyers) but still anchored in phatic politeness.

### 4.3.5 Context (formal vs informal; ritual vs everyday; urban vs rural)

#### Pattern

- Formal contexts (ceremony, council meetings) elicit full, ritualized greetings with honorifics, protocol gestures (prostration, presentation of kola).
- Informal contexts (street passing, peers) yield reduced or contracted greetings.
- Urban contexts show more code-mixing (English/Standard Igbo insertions) and some erosion of traditional forms among youths; rural contexts preserve fuller traditional routines.

#### Examples

- Formal (chieftaincy): *Ùtutu oma dede m, Ndeewo nu!* + prostration.
- Informal (street): *Ndi ótù Ị nu?* (quick nod).
- Urban youth: *Morning!* or *How far?* (Pidgin/English hybrid).

K. Context determines register and indexicality: formal settings index tradition and hierarchy; informal settings index solidarity and efficiency. Urbanization drives code choice reflecting mobility and broader social networks.

#### 4.3.6 Practical Presentation

##### 1. Table: Greeting form by social variable

Social variable	Typical greeting (Ngwà)	Gesture	Typical response
Junior to Elder	Ùtùtù óma nna m ("My father, good morning")	slight kneel	Yá gazie ("May it go well")
Peer to Peer	Ndi ótù Ì nù? ("How are you?")	handshake/nod	Adì m mma ("I am fine")
Trader to Customer	Ibiálá ònye áhìà m ("Welcome, my customer")	Handwave	Ndi ótù ahìà nnù? ("How is market?") + purchase of item.
Formal/chief	Dede m, inọọla	Prostration	Chíneke gozie wù ("God bless you") - formal blessing

#### 4.4 Impact of modernisation and language contact

##### Impact on the Ngwa dialect

- **Borrowing:** Increased contact with English has led to the adoption of many loanwords into the Ngwa dialect to describe modern concepts for which no indigenous term exists.
- **Dialect leveling:** Greater mobility, urbanization, and constant interaction with speakers of other dialects can cause Ngwa speakers to drop or alter some of their unique dialectal features, such as distinct vowel sounds, to sound more like the mainstream.

- **Risk of endangerment:** Some research indicates that younger generations of Ngwa speakers may have a weaker grasp of their dialect's intricacies, including complex word formation rules, due to insufficient intergenerational transmission.
- **Code-switching:** In formal and professional settings, Ngwa speakers often switch to English or use a code-mixed version of Igbo that is heavily influenced by English vocabulary and structure.
- **Cultural adaptation:** Despite external pressures, the Ngwa dialect is described as highly adaptable, creating new words and expressions from existing ones to accommodate modern needs and sustain its vitality.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary of the entire study, the major findings that emerged from the research, and the general conclusion drawn from the analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the key insights obtained from the investigation into the sociolinguistic functions and patterns of greetings in Ngwà society. The concluding section of the chapter draws together the main points of the study and suggests possible implications for language preservation, cultural identity, and further research.

#### **5.1 Summary**

This research examined how greetings function as a vital aspect of communication, social interaction, and cultural identity among the Ngwà people of Abia State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the recognition that greetings, beyond being simple linguistic expressions, embody the values, beliefs, and worldview of a people. It sought to describe the structure, meaning, and sociolinguistic functions of greetings in Ngwà. The Ethnography of Communication framework proposed by Dell Hymes (1972) was adopted to analyse how greeting behaviour is patterned within the Ngwà speech community.

The study has provided both a linguistic and sociocultural documentation of Ngwà greetings, thereby contributing to the preservation of dialectal identity within the broader Igbo linguistic heritage.

## **5.2 Findings**

This section presents the key findings that emerged from the study. The study revealed that the Ngwà dialect possesses a highly developed and context-sensitive system of greetings, which reflects the social and cultural life of the people. Greetings vary depending on time, situation, occupation, and relationship between interlocutors. Examples include: *Ụtùtù óma* (“Good morning”), *Chikete óma* (“Good afternoon”), etc. These expressions are not arbitrary; they follow cultural conventions that mark respect, familiarity, or empathy depending on the setting. Furthermore, greetings in Ngwà serve as social instruments that reinforce communal values such as respect, solidarity, cooperation, and peace. They are used not only to initiate conversations but to maintain relationships, express empathy, and ensure social cohesion. For instance, when a younger person greets an elder with *Ìdèwò nná m* (“Greetings, my father”), it symbolizes reverence. Similarly, *Jìshìjike n’órù* (“Keep up the good work”) expresses encouragement and solidarity. Thus, greetings are performative acts that both reflect and construct social relationships — aligning with the ethnography of communication’s focus on speech as a form of social action (Hymes, 1972).

The study found that social variables such as age, gender, kinship, occupation, and context significantly influence the choice and structure of greetings; age (younger

people initiate greetings to elders as a mark of respect), gender (men and women may use slightly different greeting registers, with women tending to use more affectionate or elaborate greetings), etc.

Lastly, modernization, urbanization, and education have led to the gradual hybridization of traditional greeting forms. Younger speakers increasingly mix Ngwà with Standard Igbo or English, producing hybrid forms such as: “Good morning, òdèwò sir!”, “Mummy, útùtù óma!”. While such contact enriches expression, it also threatens dialectal purity and the transmission of traditional forms to younger generations. The research established that greetings in Ngwà dialect function as strong markers of identity and belonging. Through their unique tone, structure, and rhythm, Ngwà greetings signal group membership and help distinguish Ngwà speakers from other Igbo subgroups. They thus serve as a linguistic symbol of cultural heritage and pride.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study has examined “greeting patterns in the Ngwà dialect of the Igbo language” from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on their forms, functions, and the social meanings they encode within Ngwà society. The investigation revealed that greetings in Ngwà are not merely routine expressions of politeness but are deeply embedded in the cultural, social, and communicative fabric of the people. They serve as instruments of solidarity, respect, identity maintenance, and social regulation.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader understanding of Igbo sociolinguistics and highlights the need for documentation and revitalization of dialectal variations such as Ngwà, which embody both linguistic richness and cultural identity.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, several recommendations are made to ensure the preservation, promotion, and further academic investigation of Ngwà and other Igbo dialect:

### **1. Preservation and Documentation of the Ngwà Dialect**

Given that modernization and language contact (especially with English and Nigerian Pidgin) are gradually eroding traditional greeting patterns, it is recommended that linguists, cultural organizations, and local authorities work together to document Ngwà greetings and other dialectal features. This could include compiling dictionaries, recording oral traditions, and developing multimedia resources (audio, video, and written materials) showcasing the use of greetings in natural contexts. Such documentation will preserve the dialect for future generations and promote linguistic diversity within the Igbo language family.

### **2. Inclusion in Educational Curricula**

Traditional greeting norms and their sociolinguistic functions should be integrated into Igbo language curricula at both primary and secondary school levels. This will not only promote cultural awareness and moral education but will also help younger generations appreciate the communicative and ethical values embedded in their mother

tongue. Educational materials should include examples of greetings from major Igbo dialects (including Ngwà), to reflect linguistic inclusivity.

### **3. Promotion of Cultural Festivals and Community Events**

Cultural organizations and traditional institutions should organize Ngwà cultural festivals, language workshops, and community events where traditional greetings, songs, and folktales are emphasized. Greeting competitions or performances could be used to engage young people and help them practice culturally appropriate communication. This fosters solidarity, respect for elders, and a sense of identity within the Ngwà community.

### **4. Further Sociolinguistic Research**

Future studies should expand on this work by exploring:

- The impact of digital communication (e.g., texting, social media) on the use of traditional greetings.
- The gendered dimensions of greeting patterns — for example, whether male and female speakers differ in the frequency, politeness strategies, or forms of address they use.

Such research would deepen understanding of how social variables and cultural change continue to shape communicative norms in Igbo-speaking communities.

### **5. Revitalization through Media and Technology**

Media outlets, especially local radio and television stations should incorporate Ngwà greetings and expressions in their broadcasts. Similarly, mobile applications, social media pages, and podcasts could be created to teach traditional greetings, complete with

audio pronunciation and cultural explanations. This would make learning both accessible and engaging, especially for younger, tech-savvy audiences.

## **6. Policy and Community Engagement**

Local governments and linguistic bodies such as the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) should develop language preservation policies that recognize dialectal variations like Ngwà as integral parts of the Igbo linguistic identity. Collaboration between community elders, linguists, and government agencies can ensure that dialects are protected, standardized, and transmitted in both formal and informal settings.

## **7. Encouragement of Intergenerational Communication**

Finally, parents and elders in Ngwà communities should be encouraged to use traditional greetings in daily interaction with children and youths. Greeting is not only a linguistic practice but also a moral one, teaching values of humility, respect, and social harmony. By maintaining these practices at home, the continuity of Ngwà identity is ensured.

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