

Greetings, Faith and Solidarity: An Analysis of the Use of Greetings and Responses in the International Central Gospel church (ICGC) of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have established that contrary to earlier scholarship, greetings are not semantically empty expressions, and that they are used for more functions than initiating social interaction. Whilst this has encouraged a new look into the system of greetings, most of such studies in Ghana and West Africa have concentrated on greetings in the traditional society, and sometimes how greetings of western languages have been adopted in the informal setting. Little is known about the use of greetings as a social expression in emergent social contexts such as schools, workplaces and churches.

This paper is an investigation into the organisation and use of greetings among the congregation of the International Central Gospel Church, a famous charismatic church in Ghana. In addition to throwing light on the content and context of greetings, it seeks to establish that these greetings are used to express and encourage the faith of the congregation in God and the solidarity among the membership of the church, and also to regulate and direct their social and linguistic behaviour.

That greetings perform functions other than the phatic has been acknowledged by ethnographers, sociolinguistics and pragmatists. Malinowski (1926) was, for instance, of the idea that greetings are part of the forms of exchange in which words are used merely to maintain ties of union or human relationships. Greetings to him, are semantically empty and they perform only social functions. On the other hand, later scholars have assigned to greetings a more pervasive function which is based, however, not on the general idea of the functions of greetings, but on the intents and the effects for which greetings are used in particular contexts of human interaction. Goody (1972), Othman (1995), and Lim (1988) for instance, argue that greetings perform a wide range of sociolinguistic functions including initiating, promoting and directing speech interaction, and for showing politeness. The present study is an analysis of the greetings and responses as used in the International Central Gospel Church in Ghana. It looks at the

propositional content as well as the locutionary and perlocutionary functions of greetings as used in the interactions in the church. The research seeks to portray that greetings and responses are not just used as a channel for further communication, but most importantly as way of depicting and asserting faith in God and also of maintaining solidarity among the congregation.

The function of greetings is considered in the light of the *functions of language* as identified by Searle (1969) and Halliday (1973) According to Searle (1969), at least three kinds of acts or functions are performed when we speak. A speech form constitutes an utterance act, and as an utterance, it could also be a propositional act or an illocutionary act. Propositional acts are those that have to do with referring and prediction. Illocutionary acts, on the other hand, are in reference to the intents of speakers as in stating, questioning, promising, or commanding. Whereas an utterance act may have no propositional content, an illocutionary act must have both a propositional as well as utterance act. Greetings could be seen in our analysis as having propositional content, and also for being an illocutionary act, which communicates the intents of speakers. With Halliday's idea of the functions of language, one might be tempted to group greetings under the interactional function of language, in which language is used to maintain social relationships. A more careful and analytical look at the variety and dynamism of the functions of communication would reveal, however, that greetings can be *regulatory* – regulating the behaviour of people, *personal* – expressing personality, *imaginative* - for playing and creating, and *representational* - for expressing propositions. This is very necessary especially if we consider the fact that these functions of language cannot be strictly demarcated. An utterance could be regulatory - regulating human behaviour - and

at the same time be interactional – maintaining social relationships and, perhaps, others more.

It might be necessary, at this juncture, to establish a framework of what we see as 'greetings'. Greetings are adjacency pairs, exchanges of *greetings* and *responses*. Greetings have primarily a social function of promoting cohesion, and can therefore be distinguished from other adjacency pairs like question-and-answers which primarily seek and give real information, and other exchanges which are deemed to be integral indispensable parts of ritual ceremonies such as priesthood ordination and swearing-in ceremonies. Unlike these, which are directly associated with the ends of a particular communication, greetings are primarily interactional lubricants and they help to create the necessary social cohesion which initiates and directs the achievements of the ends of such communicative events. Hudson (1980) distinguishes between propositional and non-propositional greetings. The propositional forms express a complete thought and they can be analysed in terms of the message they carry, outside of the functions they perform in the actual context of interaction. The non-propositional ones he sees as those that have no real sense outside their social functions. He goes on to say that whereas the propositional ones are creative and can be long, the non-propositional ones tend to be fairly short, neutral and fixed. To Hudson, however, greetings – whether they be propositional or non-propositional can be seen basically as 'entries', and they function just to show that an interaction has begun, after which people get on to particular transactions. Hudson states also that greetings between acquaintances may imply that 'the relationship which existed at the end of the last encounter is still unchanged, in spite of separation'. It would be seen in our analysis of the greetings and responses of the ICGC that greetings have more functions than as entries, and may not necessarily lead to further interaction as Hudson

asserts, and again, greetings may continue to the full length of an interaction performing communicative functions, which certainly move beyond showing the onset of interaction.

In spite of these new insights into greetings, most of the studies have concentrated on the traditional society with little attention to emergent social context such as the churches. For instance, Dzameshie (2002), and Eglewogbe (1990) have studied the use of greetings in the traditional Ewe society, with some attention on the adoption of English greetings into traditional expression. Agyeman-Prempeh (2002), Boahene (2001), and Christaller (1875/1964) have examined the greetings of the Akan people of Ghana as part of their studies into the Akan language and culture. Similar studies have been conducted by Dakubu (1981) into the use of greetings as part of her study into the linguistic life of the Gas of Ghana. Again, Yahya-Othman (1995) studied the role of greeting and failing to greet or respond in social relationship and politeness in Swahili. Whereas these studies are very useful, it is also necessary that attention be turned also on the use of greetings in emergent social interaction. Dovlo and Agozie (1995) and Mankattah (2002) - a research with which this was jointly held - however, in different ways respond to the issue of greetings in the new social context, and it is in furtherance of this that this study has been conducted into the use of greetings in a Christian community.

Before we undertake an analysis of the greetings and responses of the ICGC, it would be necessary to give an overview of the International Central Gospel Church, the population within which the research is set. The ICGC was established in 1984 as a charismatic church with emphasis on holiness, evangelism and fellowship. E. Kingsley Larbi in *Pentecostalism – The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (2001) sets the ICGC in the context of the evangelical and charismatic renewal which flourished in the 1960's and 1970's in the establishment of such fellowships as the Hour of Visitation Choir and

Evangelistic Association (HOVCEA), Youth Ambassador for Christ Association (YAFCA), and the Scripture Union (SU) and the University Christian Fellowships (UCF) which intensified at the time. Added to these local associations were the international interdenominational fellowships such as the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMI) and the Women Aglow International (WAI).

Associated with the charismatic churches of Ghana are the worship and interactive practices of American churches as typified in the local Baptist churches. One characteristic of the charismatic churches is the use of the interactive preaching style. In this style, the preachers are not confined to the pulpit, and they use frequent interactive exchanges some of which form part of the greetings we would consider in the analysis. This congregation is generally made up of the youth and people in early adulthood, who are generally educated. Preaching and other interactions are therefore generally held in English. Also, the churches organise lots of interactive programmes for the youth which make up the majority of the membership. Further, coming as a reaction to the traditionalism of orthodox churches, the charismatic churches are committed to a greater use of modern popular musical instruments and electronic sound management. Again, coming at the time of economic depression, the messages of the churches have a general inclination, in addition to normal gospel preaching, towards the need and methods for material, physical and intellectual prosperity. Finally, the ICGC in particular has a manifesto and commitment to bring leadership and vision to the present generation and influence the Ghanaian society with the principles of the Kingdom of God.

The organisation of the ICGC church is also worth considering. The church has a number of ministries which have different targeted memberships and focus all within the overall focus of the church. Some of these include the Children's Ministry, the Youth and

Students Ministry, the Family Enrichment Ministry, the Prison Ministry and the Women and Men Ministries. The church uses 'convocation' to refer to all occasions where religious experience in worship or fellowship is celebrated. These include the Sunday Service, Tuesday Teaching Service, Thursday Prayer Meeting (the Solution Centre), Greater Works Conference, the Believers' Summit, Annual Camp Meetings and Pastors' Conference. The church's liturgies for the convocations revolve usually around intercession (Praise and Worship), Bible reading, welcoming of visitors, announcements, singing performances or drama, offering and benediction.

The above account of the ICGC is to give us a picture of the social and organisational set-up within which the greetings and responses are exchanged. The analysis of the use of greetings and responses should recognise this set-up as providing the context within which the greetings arise and should therefore be appraised.

The research for this paper concentrated on the Winneba and Sakumono congregations of the church called the Faith Temple and Calvary Temple respectively. For the collection of data, interviews, direct interviews and discussions were used. Recordings were made of several church services or convocations. Most of the recordings were done stealthily in order to avoid the artificialness and the exaggeration that sometimes result when respondents are aware that they are being studied or recorded. The interviews involved pastors and deacons from the two congregations and a few other members from the congregation. They centred on the choice of greetings and the impressions about which greetings and responses are used and their effects. The interviews and the discussions gave new data and impressions, which could not be obtained in the recording and observation. Additionally, they helped to clarify some of the data obtained through the recordings and observation. Finally, the interview and discussion methods were used

in accordance with the general guidelines in anthropological research on the avoidance of being cocksure and consequently making of conclusions outside the faith and convictions of the members of a religion. Though this research is generally discursal, the input of these guiding principles cannot be discounted.

TYPES OF GREETINGS

Greetings in the ICGC Church can be differentiated according to the occasion and the speech community. The following types of greetings are accordingly identified:

- General greetings
- Greetings for ministries
- Greetings for Special Events
- Promissory Prayer Greetings

General Greetings

Such greetings are so designated because they are restricted neither to specific occasions nor to any particular group of people in the church. They form by far the greatest of the types of greetings and also the most frequently used. Again, they are quite open-ended, and they revolve thematically around the praise of God as shown below:

Greeting	Response
- Praise the Lord	Hallelujah
- Praise God	Hallelujah
- Praise Him	Hallelujah
- Praise God forever	Hallelujah
- Hallelujah	Amen
- Hallelu....	ya
- Amen	Amen
- Glory	Hallelujah
- Glory to God	Amen
- God is Good	All the time
- All the time	God is good
- Hello	Hi!

The idea of the general is evident also in the fact that the themes of the greetings are general everyday themes which can fit into every occasion.

Of the general greetings, 'Praise the Lord/Praise God (forever) : Hallelujah', 'Hallelujah: Amen' and "Amen : Amen" in the train seem to be the most frequently used. This is perhaps due to the fact they have a popularity which dates before the establishment of the church and also far outside the ICGC church, indeed in the whole Christian community in Ghana. Their popularity lies also in their being syntactically simple. Added to this is the general popularity of Hebrew words, 'Hallelujah' and 'Amen' in Christian communication and celebration for the different tongues in the Christian world. The greetings involving the use of 'glory' are seen to be less natural and are believed to be used in an attempt to create substitutes for those involving "Praise the lord", "Hallelujah" and "Amen" as discussed above. "God is good: All the time" and its vice-versa arrangement are most frequently used during testimonies and thanksgiving accounts where they are used to emphasise the hand of God in the miraculous accounts being recounted. Finally, the "Hello: Hi!" greetings are non-doctrinal forms. They are adopted from informal interaction among Americans and occur generally as regulators – to regulate the behaviour of the congregation.

The greetings are rendered to reflect remarkable degrees of excitement and this is reflected in the phonetic qualities of their rendition. Notable among these phonetic characteristics are the adoption of Americanised pronunciation, the variability of stress and intonation and the use of the phonetic features of length or dilation. For example, 'God' is rendered sometimes as /gad/ and there is an attempt by speakers sometimes to pronounce 'Lord' with the American rhotacisation – giving an /r/ colouring to the /ɔ/ vowel. Similarly, 'Amen' is rendered differently with variation in stress and vowel

quality. Generally, the lexical stress is moved from the first syllable where it normally is to the second. Again, the short vowel /ε/ is generally replaced with the longer form /ε:/ which is often dilated in order to reflect the excitement which the greeting is being used to punctuate or regulate. This means that the length of the vowel and certainly the volume reflects the mood of the speaker and the congregation. Sometimes, the vowel is replaced with /a:/ or /ɔ:/ giving /e'ma:n/ or /e'mɔ:n/.

Greetings for Ministries

Unlike the general greetings, these are restricted to particular ministries. They normally are picked from the motto of the ministries or from any statement which characterises their membership and aims. Generally, the motto of a ministry is divided into two, so that half is used for the greetings whilst the other becomes the response. It could also be made up of the name of the ministry used as greetings and the motto of the ministry or a description of its membership as the response. The table below illustrates the greetings for ministries:

MINISTRY	GREETING	RESPONSE
Children's Ministry	Good news!	Christ died for you and me!
	Jesus, the best!	Abonsam, Shame!
Youth Ministry (Omega Generation)	Omega Generation!	A greater generation after great ones!
PVV (Women's Ministry)	PVV!	Virtuous Women!
MMV (Men's Ministry)	MMV!	Service to God! Service to Men! Service to our community!

These greetings are used in three main circumstances:

- during the meetings of the ministries

- in general convocation services as a call to the ministry
- between members of ministries in their daily interpersonal interaction

Greetings for Special Events

Special events can be categorised into the general, which are special events for the community as a whole, even outside the church, and those for the church. General special events are Christmas, New Year and, Easter. The greetings are common to the general Christian community. They are constituted of the following:

EASTER

Greeting

Happy Easter!
Christ is risen!

Response

Same to you!
Hallelujah/He's risen indeed!

CHRISTMAS

Greeting

Happy/Merry Christmas!
Afenhyia pa!
(Happy Year round)

Response

Same to you/Many happy returns!
Afe nkɔ mbɔto hɛn bio!
(May another year come to find us alive.)

NEW YEAR

Greeting

Happy New Year

Response

Same to you/Many happy returns!

The church special events are annual convocations such as Camp Meetings, Works Conference and Believers' Summit. The greetings for these events are derived from the themes for the convocations and they are used as re-enforcements of the themes. The greeting at a camp meeting observed whose theme was "Taking new territories" was the following:

Greeting: Take new territories

Response: I am taking new territories.

Promissory Prayer Greetings

These greetings were brought up by members as a way to encouraging members to strengthen their faith. The statements are therefore based on the Christian idea of hope

and divine promise. Others include 'Cast your burden unto Jesus: For He cares for you', Monna Nyame ase, Oye na Nadɔye wɔhɔ daa: Amen (Thank God for He is good and his mercies endure forever: Amen), 'Fa woho bɔ Awurade: Ma woho ntɔ wo (Associate yourself with Christ: that he may have prosperity) and 'God is good: All the time' which has been mentioned under general greetings .

THE PROPOSITIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GREETINGS

In accordance with Hudson (1980) greetings in the ICGC church can be categorised into the propositional and the non-propositional. The issue of propositional significance can be considered by looking at the relationship between the propositional content inherent in the greetings and the function it is used to perform. In this connection, whereas some propositional forms maintain their propositional significance, others lose them and become just formulaic, and symbolic, so that the function they perform has nothing to do with their propositional content. This would become much evident when we discuss the discorsal and thematic significance of greetings below. To illustrate now, we use the greeting 'Praise the Lord: Hallelujah.' This is used in convocations for the following discorsal functions:

- to emphasise the greatness or mercy of God as perhaps appear in some testimony
- as a filler when the speaker is stuck in his address
- when the speaker wants to regulate the behaviour of the congregation and perhaps attract their attention.

These functions would be discussed in detail later on. For our present purposes, however, it is evident that the greeting maintains its propositional content as in (1) above, but loses it in (2) and (3). 'Praising God' as an idea is not relevant in filling one's speech gaps or in regulating congregational behaviour. One could, thus, use any different form of greetings

such as 'God is good: All the time' or 'Hello: Hi!' to achieve this discursal end. In this context, 'Praise the Lord: Hallelujah' though propositional, has been used symbolically and non-propositionally, and here the contextual or illocutionary meaning has nothing to do with its propositional or locutionary significance.

FAITH AND SOLIDARITY

A consideration of the propositional and discursal significance of the use of greetings and responses in the ICGC depicts that they are basically or ultimately used to establish the faith of the congregation in the Christian religion and the Supreme Beings in the fulfilment of their lives and hopes, and also to emphasising their unity and solidarity as people in a common fellowship. The following extensive quotation from Wilhelm (1990) on the modern presentation of the Catholic faith clearly represents the ideas of faith and solidarity in the ICGC Church also, and therefore also provides the framework within which greetings are used, and which greetings endorse and promote:

...worship is an expression of what God is worth to us – our deepest feelings of reverence, need and gratitude – and our confidence that we are unique loved, worth very much to him. Worship is our trusting 'yes' – however difficult, even painfully given at times – to ...the wonderful mystery of our own life, its joys and sorrows, its peaks and pits, its loves and its times of crushing rejection....**worship means joining others** to express and share together our feelings of reverence and need toward God, and our feelings of care and need for one another. As human beings, as people needing people, it is natural to worship together....We need others' experiences, insights, encouragement, and honest proddings – just as they need ours. (Wilhelm, 1990)

The expression of faith as suggested in Wilhelm's above means that the congregation of the ICGC churches use greetings to establish their faith in God (the Trinity) as the source of their blessing and general prosperity for the time past and for the future. Again, as established above, Christianity thrives on fellowship as people worship – pray and pray together – and again supports one another in the enhancement of their faith through 'its joys and sorrows, its peaks and pits, its loves and its times of crushing rejection' (ibid).

Solidarity in the context of our discussions has, thus, been used to refer to a situation in which the people get together and prod one another for their individual lives as well as for the success of their common fellowship with God. It is worthwhile to recognise as indicated above that the solidarity and faith aspects of Christianity, and by extension their functions in greetings in the ICGC Church are inextricable woven and cannot always be neatly differentiated. Secondly, the functions of greetings are more related to the context or ethnography within which the greetings are used - taking into consideration the place, event, participants and the norms of interpretation (Hymes, 1964, 1971; Wardaugh, 1992; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2002) than on the propositional content of the greetings.

The solidarity function of the greetings is symbolically evident in the booming nature of the response involving all or almost all the congregation. It becomes a symbol of oneness, such that where it is not choral or booming enough, it is seen to mean that not all the people understand or agree with the presence of the speaker or the greeter, the message to which it is appended, or are not attentive enough. At the instances where this happened in the research, the speakers/greeters boomed the greetings again, which were normally followed by more reverberating responses involving as many people as possible.

Another solidarity function of greetings in the ICGC Church is in the fact that it depicts and reinforces identity. This is particularly evident with the greetings for particular ministries, and most especially during general convocations where they are with other members of the congregation. The excitement with which members of particular groups respond to their greetings, looking into each other's face underscores this sense of identity. There is also the tendency for members of ministries which have not

been mentioned where the addressee greets one ministry after the other, to feel slightly peeved, and to insist that their greetings also be said.

Greetings are also used to direct and regulate behaviour so as to keep the entire congregation focussed on the ongoing activity. For instance, speakers initiate greetings when they notice that listeners are not attentive enough. A similar use is also evident when speakers feel that the congregation has prolonged its reactions as in laughter. The greeting interaction reinforces the cohesion between the speaker and addressee and redirects their common attention to the topic or activity being undertaken. General greetings, notably 'Praise the Lord: Hallelujah' and 'Hallelujah: Amen' are notably used. Ministries, however, preferably use their own greetings preferably during their meetings. In a meeting of the Men's Ministry, 'MMV: Service to God' was used on several occasions to direct social behaviour and to bring cohesion.

One other way in which greetings are used is to direct the interpretation and reaction of listeners. In testimonies, the use of 'Christ is good: All the time' and other general greetings created anxiety as they indicated that the event being recounted must have been a very trying one for the speaker. It also reinforces the faith of the people as it indicates that in such situations, it is only in the almighty hand of God which could have extricated one. As the congregation joins to respond to the greeting, they are not only showing solidarity for the one among them whose trials are being recounted. They are also affirming their faith in the God whom they know as the one who has been and would continue to be their armour and shield and who gives them prosperity. Often, such greetings which punctuate testimonies create suspense as members become anxious about the difficult times which such greetings honorific of God indicate.

Greetings as in the ICGC church perform further metalinguistic functions as mitigants, excusing for profane speech or ideas, and directing people to interpret otherwise ordinary speech deeply. In an exhortation to couples as part of a sermon, a pastor advised the couple thus: *'So all couples here, after your supper today, which must be very early, sit down and chat for some time in the living room with the children and then leave them and enter your bedroom and... PRAISE THE LORD!'* By this use of "Praise the Lord", the pastor succeeded in directing the congregations' mind to the fact of sexual interaction between couples. In another instance when a pastor used an expression which is generally regarded as profane, he succeeded in mitigating the effect of the profanity with 'Praise the Lord: Hallelujah' indicating that he is aware of the general unacceptability of the expression, only that it is only necessary that the expression be used.

Themes of special events such as Camp Meetings, Works Conference and Believers' Conference are also employed as greetings to establish cohesion, emphasise the theme of the convocation and to establish the faith of the congregation. Mention has already been made of the use of the theme 'Taking new territories' as greetings for a camp meeting. On the other hand, the greetings for general annual convocations – Easter, Christmas and New Year - are generally used to only establish solidarity with the exception of the Easter greeting, 'Christ is risen: Hallelujah/Risen indeed'. This is certainly because of the greetings, it is the only one which is directly related to the Christian belief. At Easter then, 'Christ is risen: Hallelujah/Risen indeed' is used to reinforce the message of the death and resurrection of Christ and its implications on the salvation of mankind.

Other sets of greetings which depict the faith of the congregation are those of the Children's Ministry:

Good news! : Christ died for you and me

Jesus, the best : Abonsam (Satan), Shame.

These two sets of greetings are founded on and seek to establish the two cardinal pillars of the Christian faith i.e. the resurrection of Christ which according to the Apostle Paul is the very basis of Christianity, and the idea of the triumph of Christ over the devil (Abonsam) which is part of the larger idea of spiritual and ethical dualism in Christianity in which the antitheses as between good and evil, life and death and glory and shame among others are expressed. The selection of these central themes of Christianity is very essential in emphasising to the children the basis of the Christian faith, and in encouraging as much militant love and identification with Christ and a corresponding hatred for Satan at the very onset of their Christian faith. In addition, the children know these greetings as a symbol of their identity from among other groupings of the church, and herein lie also their solidarity functions.

The promissory prayers also depict the faith of the ICGC church. The examples listed above reinforce the dependability of the salvation of God both spiritually and physically. They also depict the faith that prosperity depends on one's association with God. It is a way of affirming faith by encouraging others with the gains of serving and walking with the Lord.

Conclusion

We have sought to establish that greetings are an indispensable way in which the ICGC church articulates two very important pillars of the Christian faith –faith in God, and fellowship. As we have seen, the use of the greetings in establishing these functions is found more in the totality of the context in which the greetings are exchanged

than in the propositional content of the greeting and its response, and that far from being an empty phatic exchange, greetings are used in the ICGC church, as in many social interactions, not only to initiate communication but also to regulate and show the psychological, emotional and social preoccupation of the members of the Christian interaction. In addition to these, greetings are a way of establishing the charismatic nature of the ICGC church. They draw attention to the interactional nature of the denomination. Finally, greetings, looking at the fact that most of them are in English, draw attention to another characteristic of the charismatic tradition in Ghana, which is the predominant use of the English language.

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