



Expression of Greetings by Indonesian EFL Learner

Bukhori

State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau

bukhori.elmeskumy.@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategies of Indonesia EFL learners employed for expressing greeting in different status and gender. 25 students from English Education Department of State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau asked to fulfill Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The result indicated that there are variation of strategies in performing greeting in relation to contextual variable which include gender (male and female) and status (high and equal) of interlocutor. The findings suggested that gender did not influence EFL learners' initiating act of greeting expression. Meanwhile, status of interlocutor influenced EFL learners' greeting expression. Finally, expression "assalamu'alaikum" used by almost all EFL learners to both higher status interlocutors (male and female) who have good understanding of Islamic doctrines. And female EFL learners tend to use non verbal form of greeting rather than male EFL learners.

Key words: *greeting, verbal, non verbal, gender, status*

1. Introduction

One of the principles of teaching and learning a second/ foreign language is communicative competence. According to Brown (2001) communicative competence has come to capture a multiplicity of meanings depending who you ask. Communicative competence involves not only rules of the language but also social and functional rules of language (Hymes, 1972 cited in Istifci, 2009). In this case, the learner does not only acquire the language but also acquire rule and speech acts. Unfortunately, most of EFL learner face problems in performing speech acts, such as greeting.

Studies into greetings as a sociolinguistic element or as a speech act have been conducted. For instance, Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi &

Tohidian (2011) investigated politeness strategies in greeting of native speakers of Persian; English and EFL learners; Yan (2010) studied on concept of gender that influence politeness strategies in adjacency pair as found in greetings, complaints and directives; Alharbi & Al-Ajmi (2008) concerned with the way in which the Gulf-Arabic formulaic expressions of greetings and politeness are treated in a contemporary bilingual dictionary on the dialect; Seyki-Baidoo & Koranteng (2008) examined the way in which English general greetings have diffused into the Ghanaian sociolinguistic context; Akindele (2007) studies Sesotho greetings; William (2001) evaluated greetings exchanges in textbooks and real life setting; Duranti (1997) analyzed universal and culture-specific properties of greetings in Western Samoa; Sattarov (1996) analyzed greeting forms, both

verbal and non-verbal among Uzbek and American people; Egblewogbe (1990) have researched into Ewe greetings.

However, it seems that study on how English as foreign language learners perform greeting in relation to social status, age, and gender for Indonesian context has not been conducted yet. As such, the present study was designed to investigate the kinds of greeting forms are performed by Indonesian EFL learners. The study specifically focused on the role of interlocutor and learners' sex, age, informal situation and social status in relating to their greeting forms. Therefore, the study covers the research questions below.

1. What kinds of verbal forms are used by Indonesian EFL learners ?
2. What kinds of non-verbal forms are used by Indonesia EFL learners ?
3. Does interlocutors' status, and gender influence learners' greeting forms ?

2. Review of Literature

Greeting is an act of communication in which human beings intentionally make their presence known to each other, to show attention to, and to suggest a type of relationship or social status between individuals or groups of people coming in contact with each other (Wikipedia, 2011). Greetings are generally regarded as a means of establishing social contact and acknowledging the social presence of others. Greeting is also as rituals that have been found in nearly all culture (Levinson, 1983).

Basically, greetings can be expressed both audibly and physically, and often involve a combination of the two (Wikipedia, 2012). According to Firth (1973) as cited in William (2001), greeting phenomena as ritual consists of

verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal forms may be one of three linguistic units: question (*How do you do?*), interjection (*Hello*) or affirmation (*Good morning*) and non-verbal forms are composed of body language. Moreover, Laver (1981) as cited in William (2001) views greeting as having three components: formulaic phrases, address forms, and phatic communion or small talk (*Nice day for this time of year*).

Furthermore, according to Sattorov, T. (1996) nonverbal greeting includes: (1) Gesture consists of eye contact, motion of the eyelashes, motion of the eyebrows, hand lift, appointed finger, head gesture, hand wave, air kiss, steps in the direction of the addressee, hand on chest, bend over, military like salute, raised fist, raised thumb, peace sign, wink/ eyelid, (2) physical contact consists of handshake, hand slap, hit on the back, hit on the shoulder, embrace, kiss on the cheeks, kiss on the forehead, kiss on the lips, (3) specific form consists of smile, motion of mouth, distance between speakers, tears in the eyes, time spent for greeting, grooming behavior.

Then, Hudson (1980) underlines that the verbal expression which constitutes greetings are prescribed by culture and are determined by social relation between addressor and addressee, i.e. social distance between people, experience they have shared, and social characteristics such as sex, age, religion, race, and occupation. In addition, greeting customs may change within a culture depending on social status and relationship; they exist in all known human cultures (Wikipedia, 2012).

Studies into greetings as a sociolinguistic element or as a speech act have been conducted. Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi & Tohidian (2011) investigated politeness strategies in

greeting of native speakers of Persian; English and EFL learners. As a cross-cultural study investigating expressions of greeting in Iran, this study investigates politeness strategies that native Persian, English and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners employ for greetings in opposite gender contexts. Considering gender as a variable, Persian EFL learners' politeness and formality vary according to the situational context. How formality increases in different gender greetings in Persian is a cultural specific phenomenon. This study presents that EFL learners transfer Persian style of greeting in different situations to their EFL performance. The results of the Chi-square test also suggest that EFL learners use inappropriate politeness expressions in their English responses.

In different concern, Yan (2010) studied on concept of gender that influence politeness strategies in adjacency pair as found in greetings, complaints and directives. The evidence suggests that it is personal relationship rather than gender that may influence the way people greet each other. Through degrees of formality vary, females and males use almost the same positive politeness to show concern to friends. The only slight difference is that men sometimes likely use a more casual and humorous way to initiate greeting.

Meanwhile, Alharbi & Al-Ajmi (2008) concerned with the way in which the Gulf-Arabic formulaic expressions of greetings and politeness are treated in a contemporary bilingual dictionary on the dialect. The examination focuses on five categories of greeting rituals: initiation of social encounter, concern about wellbeing, health and state of affairs of others; temporal greetings; polite requests and thanking; and closings and farewells. The findings suggest that greeting ritual have to be independently

treated, and their dictionary listing must be supplemented with (1) explanatory definition, (2) actual articulation, (3) adjacency pairs, (4) authentic context, (5) etymology, and (6) cross-reference to the related entries.

Then, Seyki-Baidoo & Koranteng (2008) examined the way in which English general greetings have diffused into the Ghanaian sociolinguistic context. It examines the various levels of change that the greetings have undergone in the Ghanaian context. Such changes are seen to include the verbal and structural content of the greetings, the phonological realization, sociolinguistic distribution as well as their pragmatic implications. It found that changes to English general greetings such as the loss or replacement of phonological elements and the introduction of new greeting formulae are widespread among both educated and uneducated Ghanaians, though some of the phonological changes especially may have started from non-educated users of English greetings.

With another perspective, Akindele (2007) studies aspect of day-to-day interactional discourse of the Basotho sociolinguistic community of Southern Africa: the phenomenon of greeting. The study examines the types and structural organization of Sesotho greeting sequence and the sociolinguistic factors that account for this structuring. It also considers the functions of greetings in the overall life of the people. The analysis has shown that greeting is a normal sociolinguistic routine meant for the establishment of interpersonal relationship and also a serious business of topic introduction and development in Sesotho, since it involves knowing about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends. It also suggests that deference to age, context of situation and time are

powerful factors in the organization of Sesotho greetings. Finally, the data has shown in some respects that there is a similarity between the types and structuring of Sesotho greetings and those of the Yoruba, Setswana, Shona and Arabic.

Focus on gender, Turjoman (2007) investigated the difference between how men and women greet and take leave of someone of the same sex in Saudi Arabia, a gender segregated society. Age, social status, relationship between participants, and setting were tested to see if they have any effect on how Saudis greet and take leave of each other. Results indicated that women consistently took longer to greet and take leave of someone of their own sex regardless of age, social status, relationship between participants, or setting. Women also used more metaphors and superlatives while greeting or taking leave of someone of their own sex. Women were found to repeat their greetings and leave-takings more than men.

Next, William (2001) evaluated greetings exchanges in textbooks and real life setting. This study found that there is a substantial difference between greetings taught in ESL texts and those used in real life. The authenticity of greetings in textbooks is questionable on several grounds: lack of variety, inappropriate representation of status, etc. Textbook writers have frequently been using 'safe' polite forms of greetings in their books. It can only be hoped that more people will look into this issue in the future. It is also important that teachers be flexible in their approach and not rely only on textbooks.

In terms of culture, Duranti (1997) analyzed universal and culture-specific properties of greetings in Western Samoa. There were six criteria

for identifying greetings across languages and speech communities. Based on these criteria, four types of greeting exchanges were found. These exchanges showed contra claims in the greetings literature, that not all greetings are devoid of propositional content and they need not be expressive acts of the type proposed by speech acts theory. In greeting, Samoans accomplish various social acts, including searching for new information and sanctioning social behavior.

Then, Sattarov (1996) analyzed greeting forms, both verbal and non verbal among Uzbek and American people. Aspects discussed include: the general usage pattern of greeting forms: their frequency and distribution in particular social situations in relation to the speakers' profession, age, gender, and social position; social factors that influence choice of greeting form; social patterns of greeting forms among undergraduate students and teachers in both Uzbekistan and the United States. The finding showed that in both cultures, greetings are expressed both verbally and nonverbally. Uzbek verbal forms are characterized by their relative simplicity. Nonverbal greetings are more complex than verbal ones in both cultures, but have differing pattern whereas American pattern are relatively more formal and restrained.

Finally, Egblewogbe (1990) researched on greeting among the Ewes that is regarded as a responsibility and a right. It served to identify the individual with his group and acts as an avenue for expressing solidarity and love as well as showing respect and deference to superiors. Greetings could easily betray ill-feeling and hatred as much as absence of greetings. Refusal to greet a person or respond to his greetings can be hurtful apart from showing that something is amiss.

3. Methods

a. Participants

Participants of this study consisted of twenty five EFL graduate students of English Education Department of State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. The twenty-five students consisted of 20 female students and 5 male students. The respondents are relatively homogenous in terms of their cultural background, academic/ linguistic experiences and age. They are between 20 to 22 years old, from Riau province and at the sixth semester of Faculty of Education and Teacher Training.

b. Procedures

The data for present study were collected through a controlled elicitation method called Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The DCT was written in English since the respondent of this study is the sixth semester students of English Education Department. It was assumed that they have had enough English linguistic experiences to express their responses.

Adapting from Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi & Tohidian (2011), then, the DCT scenarios were written in such a way in order to get real expression or speech acts of the respondents. There were six prompts composed. They involved six kinds of interlocutors and two status relationship of the speakers. Each prompt consisted of two different genders (male and female) of interlocutors. The six prompts are stated below:

1. Greeting to the senior lecturer with important position (greeting to higher status)
2. Greeting to the lecturer with good understanding of Islamic doctrines (greeting to higher status)
3. Greeting to the junior lecturer (greeting to higher status)
4. Greeting to close friend (greeting to equal status)
5. Greeting to classmate (greeting to equal status)
6. Greeting to strange students (greeting to equal status)

Then, the participants were asked to put themselves in each situation and to assume that in each situation they would say something what they would say (Alfatah & Ravidranath, 2009).

c. Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, participants' responses to the DCT were tabulated and analyzed based on the analytic framework taken from Firth (1973), Sattorov (1996) and Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi & Tohidian (2011). In this analysis, the researcher focused on two kinds of greeting forms, namely verbal and non-verbal greetings. Verbal form consisted of affirmation, interjection and question. Non-verbal form included handshake, smile and hug. The number of participants' responses was counted for each situation and listed them in the table. Then, each response was categorized into power-politeness and solidarity-politeness. Meanwhile, the grammatical accuracy of responses was not examined.

4. Findings And Discussion

The kinds of greeting forms can be seen in the following data employed by Indonesian EFL learners description.

Table 1
Greeting to the senior lecturer with important position (greeting to higher status)

Group	Greeting form					
	Affirmation	Verbal Interjection	Question	Handshake	Non verbal Smile	Hug
Male – male	2	5	3			
Female – male	4	15	11		2	
Male – female		4	3			
Female – female	5	13	9		2	

Table 1 shows that for male with higher status, most the participants (male and female) used two forms of greeting. For instance:

- 1.1 *Assalamu'alaikum Sir. How are you ?* (interjection + question)
- 1.2 *Assalamu'alaikum, afternoon Sir.* (interjection + affirmation)
- 1.3 *Hi, Sir (smile)* (interjection + non-verbal)

Some others used affirmation (*good afternoon*), and interjection (*hi*). It also shows that some participant used three forms of greeting such as *assalamu'alaikum, afternoon, Sir. How are you today ?* and *assalamu'alaikum, how are you, Sir (smile)*). Meanwhile, greeting forms for female interlocutor with higher status constructed by the participants (male-female) seems similar forms, such as *Assalamu'alaikum. How are you, Mis*

?or Good afternoon, Miss. How are you ?. However, surprisingly, some of female respondents used non-verbal form of greeting (smile).

Based on these findings, most of participants tended to use lengthy greeting by combining two and three types of greeting. The lengthy greeting indicates solidarity-politeness of speaker (Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi, & Tohidian, 2011). It means that the participants tried to show their desire for setting up of intimacy to the interlocutor. Li (2009) stated that solidarity is sociolinguistic term not only to the equal and informal relationship, but also the desire for the setting up of equality, intimacy, common interest, sharing, etc. In other words, the participants tried to decrease the power of addressee.

Table 2
Greeting to the lecturer with good Islamic understanding (Greeting to higher status)

Group	Greeting form					
	Affirmation	Verbal Interjection	Question	Handshake	Non verbal Smile	Hug
Male – male		5	4			
Female – male		20	7	1	1	
Male – female		5	3			
Female – female	1	10	9	2	1	

In table 2 for male who have good understanding of Islamic doctrine

on higher status, more than a half of participants (56%) (male and female)

used two forms of greeting. For instance:

2.1 *Assalamu'alaikum Sir. How are you ?* (interjection + question)

2.2 *Assalamu'alaikum Sir. (handshake)* (interjection + non-verbal)

Other students used interjection (*Assalamu'alaikum Sir*). Greeting forms for female interlocutor who had good understanding of Islamic doctrines with higher status constructed by the students seems similar forms. Such as *Assalamu'alaikum Miss. How are you today ?* or *Assalamu'alaikum Miss. (handshake)*. It also indicates that some

of female respondents used non-verbal form of greeting (smile and handshake).

The findings delineate almost all participants preferred to use one form of verbal greeting that is *assalamu'alaikum*. Besides, most of participant also used the lengthy greeting as solidarity-politeness of speaker to show their desire for setting up of intimacy and common interest to the interlocutor (Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi, & Tohidian, 2011; & Li, 2009). Therefore, although the participants made effort to incline the power of interlocutor, they still keep distance to the addressee.

Table 3
Greeting to the junior lecturer (greeting to higher status)

Group	Greeting form					
	Affirmation	Verbal Interjection	Question	Handshake	Smile	Hug
Male – male		4	5			
Female – male	3	10	16	2	1	
Male – female	1	5	2			
Female – female	2	13	15	1	1	1

As shown in table 3, the participants (male and female) used various verbal forms of greeting for greeting when the interlocutor was junior male lecturer on the higher status. Most the participants used two forms of greeting. For example:

3.1 *Afternoon, Sir. Where are you going, Sir ?* (interjection + question)

3.2 *(shake hand) How are you, Sir? How was your holiday ?* (non verbal + question)

3.3 *Afternoon, Sir. How do you do ?* (affirmative + question)

Other students used question (e.g. *how are you?*), affirmation (e.g. *good afternoon*) and interjection (e.g. *assalamu'alaikum, Pak*). It also shows that one participant used three forms of greeting (e.g. *hello, afternoon, Sir.*

Where are you going ?. Meanwhile, Greeting forms for female interlocutor who was junior lecturer with higher status constructed by the students seems similar forms. For instance, *Afternoon, Miss. How are you ? Where are you going, Miss ?* or *(handshake) How are you, Miss ? How was your holiday ?* As usual, some female respondents used non-verbal form of greeting (handshake, smile), but the use of hug was only for female to female interaction.

From the findings, most of participants tended to use lengthy greeting and contextualized greeting. It is indicated by adding question with speaker-hearer context. These kinds of greeting indicate solidarity-politeness of speaker (Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi, & Tohidian, 2011) that they want to set up the equality, intimacy, and common interest (Li, 2009). Meaning that

participants felt the powerless of interlocutor, but they still keep distance to show their politeness to the higher

status. For this reason, they used fix greeting and formal and complete forms of words.

Table 4
Greeting to close friend (greeting to equal status)

Group	Greeting form					
	Affirmation	Verbal Interjection	Question	Handshake	Non verbal Smile	Hug
Male – male		4	5			
Female – male		18	16	2		
Male – female		4	5			
Female – female		20	15	1		1

Table 4 describes that the participants (male and female) verbal and non verbal forms of greeting when the interlocutor was close male friend with the equal status. Most the participants used combination of interjection and questions, e.g. *Hi, Bro. What's up?*. Meanwhile, some others joined question and nonverbal e.g. (*handshake*) *how are you?*. Only a few of participant used non verbal forms of greeting. In this section most of students used specific question related to hearer's holiday as stated in scenario such as *hi, how are you. How was your holiday?*. For female close friend as equal status to the speaker, the participants also used mostly two types of verbal forms. For example, *hi, what's up ? you look more*

beautiful than before...(interjection + question) and hi (hug), how are you ? (interjection + non verbal + question)

The findings inform that participants tend to use solidarity-politeness of speaker (Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi, & Tohidian, 2011) to set up the equality, intimacy, and common interest (Li, 2009). It is pointed out by their greeting construction. They used lengthy greeting, personalized greeting and contextualized greeting. It is indicated by using informal forms of greeting expression and personal greeting questions. In contrast to the previous scenarios, here, only three participants used *assalamu'alaikum* for their greeting.

Table 5
Greeting to classmate (greeting to equal status)

Group	Greeting form					
	Affirmation	Verbal Interjection	Question	Handshake	Non verbal Smile	Hug
Male – male		5	3			
Female – male	1	20	13		1	
Male – female		5	2			
Female – female	1	20	15			2

In table 5, the participants (male and female) used verbal and non verbal forms of greeting when the interlocutor (whether male or female) was their classmate. Most the participants used combination of interjection and

questions, such as *Hi, how are you ? , hi, what was your holiday?*. Meanwhile, some others just used simple interjection *hi* or *hey*. Only a few of participant used non verbal forms of greeting.

The data indicate that participants tend to use solidarity-politeness of speaker (Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi, & Tohidian, 2011) to set up the equality, intimacy, and

common interest (Li, 2009). It is showed by their greeting construction. It is characterized by using informal forms of greeting expression and personal greeting questions.

Table 6
Greeting to strange students (greeting to equal status)

Group	Greeting form				
	Affirmation	Verbal Interjection	Question	Handshake	Non verbal Smile Hug
Male – male	1	4			
Female – male	1	18			9
Male – female	1	4			
Female – female	1	18			9

From table 5, it can be seen that the participants (male and female) used verbal and non verbal forms of greeting when the interlocutor (whether male or female) was strange student. Most the participants used one form of greeting, such as *Hi*, (interjection), *afternoon* (affirmation) and (*smile*) (non verbal). Only a few of participant used combination form of greeting in terms of verbal and non verbal form (e.g. *hi...(smile)*). It shows that participants tend to use power-politeness of speaker (Gharaghani, Rasekh, Dabaghi, & Tohidian, 2011). Although the participants placed at equal status they tried to show their power to the interlocutor.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the study, it can be concluded that Indonesian EFL learner tend to use verbal form of greeting rather than non verbal in terms of gender and social status as contextual variable. However, they used different greeting expression and words formation according to social status of interlocutor. Secondly, the students tend to use solidarity politeness to show their desire to set up of equality, intimacy and common interest but still keep distance. Surprisingly,

“*assalamualaikum*” became trend for both interlocutors, male and female, who have good understanding of Islamic doctrines. Moreover, female tend to use non verbal form of greeting for certain status. Finally, the result of this study cannot be generalized for all Indonesian EFL learners because this study was limited by small number of participants, single data collection technique and simple data analysis. Further research need to be conducted to get deep explanation and description on greeting expression of Indonesian EFL learners by employing larger participants, various data collection techniques and deep data analysis.

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