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Greeting in American and British Conversations

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Abstract:

The current research looks at American and British conversations through the act of greeting. It aims at finding out the strategies used to realize the act of greeting in conversations of these communities, Showing how social distance influences greeting performance used by American and British English people in conversations. Moreover, it aims at identifying the content of greeting in the conversations of both communities and pinpointing the most common differences in greeting performance between American and British people. Five American and five British texts were chosen by the researcher using a qualitative method to gain a deeper knowledge and investigation of the data of this research. The results of this research have revealed that in discussion, Americans and British English people greet each other in distinct ways, in American and British talks, social distance plays a crucial part in determining the sort of greeting. People utilize distinct greeting content in American and British discussions. The findings of this study have also revealed that Americans like to meet each other with a time-free greeting. Furthermore, they prefer informal greetings than formal greetings. In addition, the content of their greeting is personal in nature. When it comes to British English folks, they prefer to employ time bind greetings over time free greetings. Furthermore, they use formal greetings in their interactions more than informal greetings, and the content of their greetings is also personal.
Key words: Greeting, contextual factors and types of greeting.

Introduction

Language is the best way of communication among participants in social interaction. So, in order to understand any language, it is necessary to give sufficient attention to the basic rules of conversation like greetings, politeness, persuasion and the like.

According to Goffman (1971), greeting plays important role in conversations as it is utilized to strengthen relationships between people and to acknowledge different social status.

The current study investigates the act of greeting in American and British conversations as an attempt to give sufficient insight to this act from the social perspective.

1.1 Problem

Greeting is an expressive act in which the speaker expresses attitude and feeling towards listener, and is influenced by a certain social situation.

Here are some examples of the act of greeting in British and American conversations:

1. Example (1)

Robert: Good afternoon, teacher, how are you today?

Teacher: Good afternoon, Robert, I am doing well. And you?

(British conversation)

2. Example (2)

James: Good morning, Professor Austin, how are you doing?

Professor Austin: Good morning, James, I am doing well. And you?

James: I 'm great, thank you.

(American conversation)

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, greeting is a subject which has not been deal with from a sociolinguistic angle; hence the present study highlights the analysis of greeting socially as it is used in American and British conversations.

Consequently, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do American and British English people perform greeting in conversations?
2. How does social distance influence greeting performance by American and British English people in conversations?
3. What is the content of greetings in conversations of both communities?
4. What are the differences in greeting performance between American and British English people?

1.2 Aims

In view of the above problem, the present study aim to:

1. Finding out the strategies used to realize the act of greeting in American and British English people in conversations.
2. Showing how social distance influences greeting performance used by American and British English people in conversations.
3. Identifying the content of greeting in the conversations of both communities.
4. Pinpointing the most common differences in greeting performance between American and British people.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. There are different ways by which American and British English people perform greeting in conversations.
2. Social distance plays important role in determine the type of greeting in American and British conversations.
3. In American and British conversations, people tend to use different content of greeting.
4. There are some differences between American and British English people when they perform the act of greeting.

1.4 Procedures

To achieve the aims of the study and to test its hypotheses, the following steps have been adopted:

1. Conducting survey of the relevant written literature about greeting in American and British conversations.
2. Clarifying the formal and informal greeting types in American and British conversation.
3. Analysing certain texts in American and British conversations by using qualitative method.

1.5 limits

This study investigates the act of greeting from one perspective: the social perspective. This investigation will be carried out on some texts taken from daily life from American and British conversations. These texts are chosen because they constitute different types of greeting in the conversations of these communities.

1.6 Value

It is hoped that the present study would add some value to both theoretically and practically research, as it tries to present a general framework of the speech act of greeting from social perspective in both American and British. It is also hoped to add value for those who are interested in social and contrastive studies as it contrast the use of greeting in American and British conversations.

2.1 Introduction

This research introduces the concept of greeting in American and British communities . First, it surveys the varying definitions of the term "greeting" from different point of view. Then, it demonstrates the most common types of greeting in American and British conversations. The study deals with the concept from the social angle. It tries also to clarify the basic components of greeting. Moreover, an attempts are made to find out the strategies of this speech act.

2.2 Greeting: The Concept

Unfortunately, researchers had not given a significant effort to this speech act. Hence, some spaces need to be devoted to reveal the definitions of greeting from different point of view.

To start with, greeting is considered as one important aspect of conversation. Researchers like Goffman (1971); (Kendon (1990); Chaer (2011); Wu (2014) and Felecan (2015) tried to give a precise definition to it.

Socially, Goffman (1971) defined greeting as a conversational acts that is utilized by the speaker to establish relations and to acknowledge different social status.

For Kendon (1990) greeting was a social exchange which included verbal and nonverbal features. In this way, greeting was not limited to verbal features but also it might be carried out by nonverbal features, whereas Chaer (2011) saw greeting as words employed by the speaker to greet or call the addressee.

Another definition was made by Wu (2014) who declared that greeting was one of the most important strategies that was utilized by the speaker to strengthen social relationship with the partner in conversation. Moreover, Felecan (2015) pointed out that greeting was a communicative behaviour used by the speaker to express feeling and attitude towards the addressee.

In sum, all the previous definitions show that greeting is one of the most important roles and aspects of conversation by which social relations are built up.

2.3 Greeting Strategies

American and British people tended to use various strategies to perform the act of greeting according to the situations. In this field, Kakiuchi (2005) pointed out that people utilized greeting – greeting strategies or greeting –question strategies as the following examples that are taken from www.learnenglishteam.com:

Example 1:

A: Good morning.

B: Good morning.

(Greeting –greeting strategies)

Example 2:

A: Hi, Helen! How's it going?

B: Fine, thanks- and you?

(Greeting –question strategies)

Kakiuchi also added that there was another strategy in which people mention the partner's name at the end of the sentences like the following example:

Example 3:

A: Hi, Alice.

B: Hi, John.

(Greeting- partner's name)

In addition to what had mentioned above, Attwood (2015) pointed out that greeting's strategies were different from one culture to another and from one country to another due to the fact that all people in American and British communities like to avoid repetition.   Moreover, different circumstances required the use of different greeting strategies. In this way, one cannot greet a manger as an example in the same way like a friend or a relative. Attwood also added that greeting strategies were different according to formal, informal and casual situations, the following are formal strategies:

1. Good morning /evening/ afternoon.

2. Pleased to meet you.

3. Glad to meet you.

The informal strategies are as the following:

1. Hello.
2. Hey or hi.
3. What's up?
4. How are you?

The various types of greeting strategies motivate the researchers to study the purposes behind it which is going to be in the following section.

2.4 The purposes behind using greeting

People tended to utilize greeting in conversations for different purposes. In this field, Goffman (1967) declared that there were three purposes for greeting.

1. A person starts a greeting to show that a relationship is not changed.
2. To state the roles the participants will have in conversation.
3. Sometimes people use greeting to explain circumstances affect their meeting.

As for Grimshow (1980), greeting had many functions. It could be used to present respect to other person, to gain presence, to draw attention to something, to minimize threat and it is sometimes used to identify a person to others.

In line with Grimshow, Emery (2000) denoted that greeting was also utilized to establish identity and corroborate solidarity.

According to Kridalaksana (2001) greeting was actualized to maintain relationship between the addresser and the addressee in conversations.

For Galaczi (2005) greeting was always associated with politeness because the speaker used greeting to show politeness and desire to interact with the addressee in conversation.

Moreover, Riegel (2009) stated that greeting was utilized by people for two purposes. First, it was used for conative purpose by which the speaker wanted to govern, invite or influence . Second, it was utilized for phatic purpose by which the speaker tried to strengthen relationship between participants.

Furthermore, Felacan (2015) declared that greeting was also used to show the availability of the addresser towards the addressee.

In short, there are different reasons behind using greeting, but the most important one is that greeting is utilized to strengthen relationship between participants.

2.5 Greeting's Components

Researchers revealed that greetings consist from different parts. According to Shleykina (2016), greetings contained three major parts as the following:

1. Greeting phrases.
2. Address terms.
3. Element of phatic communication.

Concerning greeting phrases people tended to use special greeting phrases like " Hello", "Good morning", Good afternoon",… etc.

In the field of address term, there are other components of greeting in which people used the name or the term of person such as "Good morning Mr. Brown".

Moreover, phatic expressions such as "How are you?" which can be used in informal situation.

Furthermore, Greere (2005) added that there was another element of phatic expressions which was called neutral phrase such as "Nice party" and " Lovely day". These types of phrases were used in certain occasions.

2.6 Categorization of greeting

Researchers classified greetings into three categories according to the following:

1. The presence or lack of time indicator.
2. Contextual factors.
3. Lexica-semantic content.

Holliday (1975) stated that according to the presence or lack of time indicator greetings could be categorized into:

1. Time- free. There are many words and expressions that can be used in this field such as "How are you?" and "Hello".

2. Time-bond. In this case, the speaker restricts greeting to the time such as "Good morning" which is used only in the morning, and "Good afternoon" which is utilized in afternoon.

3. Seasonal greetings. This refers to some phrases that are used in special occasions such as "Happy new year" and " Happy birth day".

Greere (2005) explained that contextual factors such as age, education and status play important role in determining the type of greeting whether it is formal or informal.

Regarding formal greeting, this type is utilized in formal context such as in business situations with people of high status and age. It can also be used with people who meet each other for the first time. This means that formal greeting is more restricted in use whereas informal greeting is more flexible because it can be utilized among family, friend and pairs in informal situations.

Moreover, greeting can be categorized according to content. In this field, Qian (1996) revealed that greeting can be classified into personal and non- personal greeting. Personal greetings refer to the expressions which show an interest in the greeted person such as inquiring about the health, feeling and the family of the greeter . Qian added that non-personal greeting refers to the phrases relate to non-personal objects such as "What a nice day today!" and "What a lovely day!"

2.7 Greeting and Politeness

Goffman (1971) considered greeting as a polite behaviour. This is due to the fact that greeting is aiming at strengthen the relationships between the people. Leech (2014) declared that failing to greet person is regarded as face threatening act. This means that greeting is considered as one aspect of politeness. Based on the pervious views, Karlstrom (2019) stated that greeting was one of the natural parts of politeness, but at the same time it depends on many factors such as social distance (age and social status) and culture. These factors affect people's verbal greeting choices whether it is formal or informal.

2.8 Greeting in British and American Communities

In daily life, greeting is different from society to society and from culture to culture. Actually, this is due to the fact that greeting is determined by many factors such as the social relationship, age, status, etc. In this regard, Greese (1991) declared that British society tend to be more polite in their conversations. Thus, they tended to use formal greeting phrases such as: "How are you?" more than "Hi" or "Hello".

In addition, Biber et al, (1999) stated that British people tend to use the last name or the title in greeting such as "Good morning Mr. Smith".

Moreover, Islam (2018) points out that British English people is well known for using formal greeting in their conversations ,but they also use informal greeting in normal situations such as among friends and family. So, they use phrases such as "Are you Ok?" and "How is it going?"

Generally, British people tend to be more polite when they meet people for the first time and also in formal situations such as business so they utilize formal greeting. They may use phrase like "Pleased to meet you".

Moreover, Minzeshiemer (2008) confirmed that it is common for British people to say "Happy Christmas" in certain occasion, in contrast to American people who say "Merry Christmas".

Concerning American community, Halliday (1979) pointed out that American people is famous for using the informal type of greeting. This is because Americans ignore social status; they almost use the world "Hello" as a way of greeting people, but this does not mean that there are no roles of good manners. In fact there are some roles that should be used in certain situations such as when talking to superiors they use formal language.

Likewise, Evason (2016) confirmed that American people utilize informal greeting in social setting. In addition to that, Biber et al (1999) revealed that Americans use the first name in their conversations such as "Hello John".

In short, one can say that the act of greeting is influenced by culture and communities due to the fact that each community has its own norms and habits which make some differences between people in performance the act of greeting.

3. Data Collection and Description

The researcher used a qualitative method in finding out the strategies used to realize the act of greeting in conversations of British and American communities. This can be attributive to the fact that qualitative method is utilized when the data is in the form of words, sentences and pictures (Subroto, 1992).

3.1 The Source of Data

The sources of the data of the current study are script conversations taken from two websites on the internet. The link of the British conversations is:

https://www.easypacelearning.com

The link of the American conversations is: www.learningenglishteam.com

3.2 The Model of Analysis

The analysis of the chosen text had carried out according to eclectic model that is adapted from Halliday, 1975; Qian, 1996 and Greere, 2005. This model comprises three models: First, Halliday's (1975) model of greeting which classified greeting according to the presence or lack of time. Second, Qian's (1996) model of greeting in which greeting was classified into personal and non- personal greeting. Third, Greere's (2005) model of greeting, which classified greetings according to the contextual factors into formal and informal greeting.

4. Text Analysis

This part of the research is devoted to the analysis of certain American and British conversations that carry the act of greeting specifically five American texts and five British texts have been chosen for the analysis of the current study.

4.1 American Texts

Text (1)

James: Good morning, Professor Austin, how are
you doing?

Professor Austin: Good morning, James. I am doing well. And
you?

James: I'm great, thank you. This is my friend
Emma. She is thinking about applying to

this college. She has a few questions. Would

you mind telling us about the process,

please?

Professor Austin: Hello, Emma! It's a pleasure to meet you.

I'm more than happy to speak with you.

Please stop by my office next week.

Emma: It's a pleasure to meet you, professor. Thank

you so much for helping us.

Professor Austin: Don't mention it. Hopefully, I will be able to answer your questions!

This conversation was between a student and a professor. The student starts the conversation by greeting the professor using the phrase (Good morning) which was used at specific time. Thus, the type of greeting according to the presence of time was time bond.

Concerning contextual factors, there was differences in social distance, more precisely, education and social status which made the speaker use formal greeting.

From personal or non-personal point of view, the persons asked about personal affairs of each other so they utilized personal greeting.

Text (2)

Jane: Hi, Helen! How's it going?

Helen: Fine, thanks-and you?

Jane: Just fine. Where are you off to?

Helen: To the library. I've got a history exam next week

and need to start studying. Ugh

Jane: Oh, no. Well, I'll see you later then. Good luck!

Helen: Thanks. See you later.

The conversation was between two friends. The conversation showed that Jane was very pleased to see her friend. He used the word "Hi" which was related to category of time free because it could be used at any time among friends.

Concerning contextual factors, there was no differences in social distance because the conversation was between two friends so the participants used informal greeting.

From personal or non-personal point of view, the participants utilized personal greeting because they asked about personal affairs.

Text (3)

Meg: Well, hello there, Julia! Long time no see!

Julia: Meg! Hi! What a coincidence! I have not seen you in

ages! What are you doing here?

Meg: I just got a new job in the city, so I 'm shopping for

some clothes. Hey, what do you think of this shirt?

Julia: Hummm…well, you know how much I love blue.See?

I've got the same shirt!

Meg: You always did have good taste! What a small world.

In this text, the speaker used the word (hello) followed by the expression (long time no seen) which was used among friend who had not seen each other for a long time. Generally speaking, there was no restricted in greeting time. Thus, according to the presence of time, greeting here was classified according to time free.

Concerning contextual factors, since the conversation was between friends so there was no social distance which made the speaker utilized informal speaking.

From personal or non-personal point of view, the two friends used personal greeting because they asked about personal affairs.

Text (4)

Linda: Hey! How did your physics exam go?

Frank: Not bad, thanks. I'm just glad it's over! How about

you…how'd your presentation go?

Linda: Oh, it went really well. Thanks for helping me with it!

Frank: No problem. So… do you feel like studying tomorrow

for our math exam?

Linda: Yeah, sure! Come over around 10:00, after breakfast.

Frank: All right. I'll bring my notes.

In this text the speaker used the word (Hey!) which was a friendly expression meaning "hello". Since this word (Hey) could be used at any time, so greeting was classified with time free.

As for contextual factors, the conversation was between two friends. This means that there was no social distance between the friends . Consequently, the type of greeting was informal greeting.

Concerning the content, the friends exchanged information about their life so one could say that it was personal greeting.

Text (5)

Hotel Receptionist: Hi, there. How can I help you?

Claire: Well I'm in a town visiting for a few

days and I need to get some things

done while I'm here.

Hotel Receptionist: Sure. What do you need?

Claire: I need to get my hair cut. I also need to

have my new pants hemmed.

Hotel Receptionist: OK. Here's a map of the city. There is a

good hair salon here, which is just a

block away. And there is

a tailor right here. Is there anything

else?

Claire: Yes. I'll need to have my car serviced

before my long drive home!

Hotel Receptionist: No problem. There's a good mechanic

a few blocks away.

This conversation was at the hotel. It was between hotel receptionist and a woman. The receptionist started the conversation with the word (Hi) which belonged to greeting of time free because it could be used at any time.

Concerning the contextual factors, though the participants were not friends, they tended to use informal type of greeting as a way to minimize the social distances between them and to make a kind of friendship by using a friendly expression of greeting.

From content point of view, the speaker asked about a personal affair which classified greeting to the personal greeting category.

4.1 British Texts

Text (1)

Sarah: Hello Jason, how are you, it's a long time since
we last met?

Jason: Oh, hi Sarah I've got a new job now and is going
great. How about you?

Sarah: Not too bad.

Jason: How often do you eat at this café?

Sarah: This is my first time my friend kept telling me the
food was great, so tonight I decided to try it. What
have you been up to?

Jason : I have been so busy with my new job that I have
not had the time to do much else, but otherwise,
me and the family are all fine.

Sarah: Well, I hope you and your family have a lovely
meal.

Jason: Yes you too.

This conversation was between two friends who had not seen each other for a long time. The speaker started his speech using the word (Hello) which could be used at any time. Thus, according to the presence of time, greeting here was classified according to time free.

Concerning contextual factors, the context was between two old friends, so there was no social distance between them. Consequently, the speaker used informal speaking.

From personal or non-personal point of view, the two friends used personal greeting because they exchanged information about their lives.

Text (2)

David: Hello, my name is David It's nice to meet you.

Jenny: Hi, I 'm Jenny. It's my please to meet you.

David: Am sorry. What was your name again?

Jenny: Jenny

David: So Jenny, What do you do for living?

Jenny: I work at the local school teaching English. What
do you do for a living?

David : I 'm also an English teacher, but I'm currently out
of work.

Jenny: Sorry to hear that. It has been really nice talking to you.

David: Yes. It was a great pleasure meeting you.

This conversation was between two people who met for the first time. The speaker started the conversation using the word (Hello) which restricted greeting to time free.

Concerning the contextual factors, the two people were not friends, so there was a social distance between them. Thus, they used formal greeting.

From the personal and non – personal point of view, the participants tried to exchange information about their daily life, so greeting here was classified to personal greeting.

Text (3)

Robert: Good afternoon, teacher, how are you today?

Teacher: Good afternoon, Robert. I am doing well. And you?

Robert: I'm great, thank you. This is my best friend Jane. She wants to apply to come to the university. She would like to ask you a few questions. Would you mind taking the time and telling her what process she has to do, please?

Teacher: Hello, Jane! It's a nice to meet you. I'm very busy today, as I am going to class now for the next 3 hours. Can you come to my office for 9 am tomorrow morning.

Jane: Yes, that will be no problem. Thank you for making time for me and speaking to me today.

Teacher: Hopefully we will be seeing you at this university soon. See you tomorrow at 9.

This conversation was between a student and his teacher. The student started the conversation by greeting the professor using the phrase (Good afternoon) which was used at specific time. Thus, the type of greeting according to the presence of time the type of greeting was time bond.

Concerning contextual factors, there were differences in social distance, more precisely, education and social statue due to the fact that the conversation was between a student and his teacher, so the speaker used formal greeting.

From a personal or a non-personal standpoint, the two participants asked about the health of each other so they used personal greeting.

Text (4)

Mike: Good morning, John.

John :   Good morning, Mike.

Mike: Let me take you to your cubicle and then I will give you a tour of our facility.

Mike: Here is your cubicle, your "home away from home" from 8: 00 to 5:00 every day, John.

John: Oh, very nice!

Mike: Drop your belongings here, and let's go!

John: OK, I am ready Mike.

This conversation was about first day at work. It was between two workers. The first person started the conversation with the phrase (Good morning) which classified greeting to time bond because it could be used at morning only.

Concerning the contextual factors, the participants were not friends, so the speaker tended to use formal type of greeting though he used the name of the partner as a way to make a kind of friendship.

From content point of view, the speaker did not ask about personal or non –personal affairs. He only used the phrase of greeting.

Text (5)

Post office clerk: Good morning, what can I do for you today?

Karen: Good morning. I have to send this parcel to Thailand, please.

Post office clerk: OK, pass me the parcel through the opened

window and let's see how much it weighs. It

weighs 3 kilos. You need to send it by

airmail, it will get there in about 7 days.

Post office clerk: You also have the option of using

international signed for.

This conversation was at the post office. The speaker started the conversation with the phrase (Good morning) which restricted greeting to time bond because the phrase was used only in the morning time.

Concerning the contextual factors, there was a kind of social distance between the participants, so greeting here was formal greeting.

According to the content of greeting, the speaker did not ask about personal affairs. He immediately asked about non – personal things. Thus, the content here was non –personal content.

5. Conclusions

This study has come up with the following conclusions:

1. According to the first hypothesis of the study, there are different ways by which American and British English people perform greeting in conversations. The researcher has found out that American and British English people perform the act of greeting by relating greeting to the presence or non-presence of time.

2. According to the second hypothesis, social distance plays important role in determine the type of greeting in American and British conversations; the researcher has noticed that social distance affect the type of greeting. The more social distance is, the formal greeting is used, whereas the less social distance is, the informal greeting is utilized.

3. According to the third hypothesis, in American and British conversations, people use different content of greeting. The researcher has observed that there are personal and non-personal content of greeting.

4. The fourth hypothesis which states that there are some differences between American and British English people when they perform the act of greeting. The researcher has found out that American people tend to use greeting of time free. Moreover, they use informal greeting more than formal greeting. Furthermore, the content of their greeting is related to personal affairs. Concerning British people, they tend to use greeting of time bond more than time free. Moreover, they utilize formal greeting more than informal greeting in their conversations and the content of their greeting is also personal content.

المستخلص

التحية في المحادثات الامريكية والبريطانية

عبير ناصر عباس

تناولت الدراسة الحالية التحيات في المحادثات الامريكية والبريطانية. وتهدف الرسالة الى معرفة الاستراتيجيات المستعملة في التحيات لكلا المجتمعين البريطاني والامريكي و اكتشاف مدى تاثير الفارق الاجتماعي على نوع التحيات المستعملة من قبل المجتمعين وما يترتب عليه من استعمال تحيات رسمية او غير رسمية. كما و تهدف الدراسة الحالية ايضا الى معرفة ما تتضمنه التحيات من محتوى شخصي او غير شخصي عند ادائها. واخيرا تضمنت الدراسة اكتشاف الاختلاف في اداء التحيات بين المجتمعين الامريكي و البريطاني. تم اختيار خمسة نصوص أمريكية وخمسة بريطانية من قبل الباحث باستخدام أسلوب نوعي لاكتساب معرفة أعمق والتحقيق في بيانات هذا البحث. كشفت نتائج هذا البحث أنه في المحادثات، يرحب الأمريكيون والإنجليز البريطانيون ببعضهم البعض بطرق متميزة ، وتلعب المسافة الاجتماعية دورًا مهمًا في تحديد نوع التحية ، حيث يستخدم الناس محتوى تحية مميزًا باللغة الأمريكية والبريطانية. كما وكشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة أيضًا أن الأمريكيين يحبون مقابلة بعضهم البعض بتحية خالية من الوقت. علاوة على ذلك ، يفضلون التحيات غير الرسمية على التحيات الرسمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، فإن محتوى تحياتهم شخصي بطبيعته. عندما يتعلق الأمر بالأشخاص الإنجليز البريطانيين ، فإنهم يفضلون توظيف التحيات التي تربط الوقت بمرور الوقت مع التحيات المجانية. علاوة على ذلك ، يستخدمون التحيات الرسمية في تفاعلاتهم أكثر من التحيات غير الرسمية ، ومحتوى تحياتهم شخصي أيضًا.

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