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A Sociolinguistic Study of Cultural Value Orientations in Luguru and Sukuma Greeting Systems

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Abstract

This study investigates how greetings manifest cultural value orientations in Luguru and Sukuma. Informed by Schwartz's (2006) theory of cultural value orientations, the study comparatively analyses the linguistic forms and interactional patterns to reveal the values encoded within the two Bantu communities and their alignment with the theory. The study collected data through unstructured observation of six informants aged 40 and above from each language group, using interviews and simulated participant observation in the districts of Maswa and Mvomero. The findings reveal that Sukuma greetings predominantly manifest the orientations of Hierarchy and Embeddedness, whereas Luguru greetings reflect Hierarchy, Embeddedness, Egalitarianism, and Harmony. The study demonstrates that greetings serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and symbolic markers of what a community considers morally appropriate and respectful. Linguistically, the study shows that greeting forms and their interactional sequencing function as structured linguistic systems through which cultural value orientations are expressed and reproduced. Therefore, the study offers empirical sociolinguistic evidence of how greeting practices constitute a key domain for expressing culturally grounded values.

Keywords: Greeting systems, cultural value orientations, Luguru, Sukuma, sociolinguistics

Introduction

Greetings are socio-cultural rituals that may encapsulate values and relational dynamics (Wójtowicz, 2021). This paper seeks to uncover how these routinised access rituals manifest cultural value orientations of two Bantu-speaking communities in Tanzania, namely the Luguru and the Sukuma. The two communities have distinct kinship systems, social hierarchies, and communicative norms. Therefore, this paper adopts a comparative approach to examine how the Luguru, a matrilineal community, and the Sukuma, a patrilineal community, express similar or contrasting cultural values using their greeting systems. As an element of culture, values have been studied in anthropology, organisational behaviour, psychology, marketing, and education (Yau, 1988). Moreover, the interface between language and culture has long been established, as evidenced by Aminin et al. (2018), Joseph (2004), and Wierzbicka (1997). Thus, greeting practices are a valuable linguistic resource for cultural analysis (Wierzbicka, 1997). This paper is based on the understanding that greetings are not merely a tool for communication or an expression of deference, but rather a repository of cultural meanings conveyed through verbal and non-verbal expressions. As such, they serve as a lens for understanding communal value systems as they reflect underlying social structures, deferential expectations, and relational strategies.

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This study is grounded in Schwartz's (2006) theory of cultural value orientations. Although originally developed within cross-cultural psychology and anthropology, the theory provides a suitable tool for identifying cultural values embedded in greeting practices. Schwartz's structured set of value domains, such as respect for traditions, humility, and power, provides clear criteria for categorising the values observed in linguistic components and greeting patterns. Mapping these values onto higher-order cultural values helps identify orientations, such as Embeddedness (emphasising social cohesion and shared identity), Hierarchy (emphasising respect for authority and social order), and Harmony (emphasising balance and fitting into society and the natural world). In so doing, the framework facilitates a systematic interpretation of how greetings manifest and reinforce a community's cultural priorities. This alignment allows for a rigorous cross-cultural comparison and reveals the specific ways in which greeting systems function as vehicles for expressing and perpetuating cultural value orientations in matrilineal and patrilineal communities. However, a sociolinguistic comparison of cultural value orientations involving Luguru and Sukuma greeting practices in light of Schwartz's (2006) theory has not been conducted. Against this backdrop, the paper analyses the cultural values encoded in the greeting expressions of each community, contributing to sociolinguistic scholarship on the similarities and differences in encoding and perpetuating cultural value orientations within the matrilineal–patrilineal continuum.

Literature Review

Greetings serve similar functional roles across different dimensions, despite differences in linguistic components, patterns, and theoretical perspectives (Duranti, 1997; Egblewogbe, 1990; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2013; Kezilahabi, 2001; Morton, 1988; Youssouf et al., 1976). This similarity could be attributed to the fact that greetings are treated by scholars as a human habit that employs linguistic and non-linguistic features to meet politeness standards. For instance, greetings serve to acknowledge the presence of others and express politeness. These functional roles are unlikely to differ significantly across cultures since greeting one another holds similar importance in human social interaction. However, the degree to which acknowledgement, recognition, and politeness are considered appropriate or correct varies from one community to another. Each linguistic community is, therefore, characterised by unique greeting forms and rules governing appropriate greeting behaviour.

Wei (2010) found that greeting rules are not universal due to cultural differences. The differences show that greetings encode cultural identities. The cultural identities are reflected in the forms and patterns used by individual language communities. Therefore, when greetings are viewed as a means of expressing cultural significance, they can reveal important information about language communities, including their cultural values and priorities, rather than simply being a routinised human behaviour that serves similar functional roles across language communities. Such information can be examined through both the linguistic components of greetings and the rules governing their socially appropriate use to meet politeness expectations (Yahya-Othman, 1995). Analysing how greeting forms and their culturally appropriate use relate to politeness expectations and how these are determined by community-specific cultural values, offers a new perspective within the long-standing relationship between language and culture. It also shows the potential of greetings as a linguistic resource for aligning communities along the cultural value orientations proposed by Schwartz (2006).

The Luguru language is spoken by people living in Mvomero District, Morogoro Rural District and Morogoro Municipality in Morogoro Region. These areas have a great number of Luguru speakers (LoT, 2009). The language is called Kiluguru by Swahili speakers, and Ichilughulu or Ishilughulu by its own speakers. By 2009, the language was estimated to be spoken by about 321,920 people living in Morogoro (LoT, 2009, p 67). The Luguru live on the slopes of the Uluguru Mountains along the edges of the Eastern Arc Forest in the region in the east of Tanzania (Moses, 2019). The Luguru social structure is fundamentally matrilineal, with descent, inheritance, and lineage membership traced through women (Beidelman, 1967).

By contrast, Sukuma (Kisukuma/Shisukuma) is a Bantu language spoken in north-western Tanzania, primarily in the regions surrounding Lake Victoria, including Mwanza, Shinyanga, Simiyu, Geita, and parts of Mara and Tabora (Batibo, 2015; Broems, 2025; LoT, 2009). It is associated with the Sukuma, the largest ethnic group in the country. In 2009, the language was estimated to have around 5.2 million speakers according to the Languages of Tanzania (LoT, 2009, p 2) project, making it the most widely

spoken indigenous language in Tanzania. Classified as a Northeast Bantu language (Guthrie, 1967), Sukuma is closely related to Nyamwezi. In contrast to the Luguru, the Sukuma follow the patrilineal system, which fundamentally shapes their greeting conventions.

By and large, greetings fulfil similar social functions in various communities. However, the two communities might culturally encode identity and prioritize social norms in unique ways, making them a valuable entry point for uncovering the relationship between language, culture, and politeness in matrilineal and patrilineal communities.

Behaviour of Greeting Forms and Patterns

Studies on forms and patterns of greetings reveal more interesting behaviours than a mere description of greetings can capture (Agyekum, 2008; Ekenjume-Ilongo, 2013; Yahya-Othman, 1995). Greetings encode layers of meaning that extend well beyond the functional roles identified in earlier research. For instance, Gewta’s (2016) analysis of Sidama greetings shows how varying expressions of welcome are constructed through metaphorical references to different layers of soil. The extract below, taken from Gewta (2016: 30), illustrates expressions used when welcoming someone.

- (4a) *suk’k’udaa-ʔe*
Top soil come-3S
'Let top soil come onto me'
'welcome' (weak)
- b) *sururudaa-ʔe*
deepsoil come-3S
'Let deep soil come onto me'
'welcome' (stronger)
- c) *suk’k’usururudaa-ʔe*
top soil deep deep soil come-3S
'Let top soil and deep soil come onto me'
'welcome' (strongest)

According to Gewta (2016: 30), “let topsoil come onto me” is a weak welcome; “let deep soil come onto me” is a stronger welcome, and “let topsoil and deep soil come onto me” is the strongest welcome. Although Gewta was not concerned with what such imagery would reveal about the Sidama community, these expressions may raise a question as to why soil is used to show varying levels of intimacy and love in welcoming others. Another follow-up question would inquire about what the layering of soil might suggest about Sidama’s conceptualisations of closeness, belonging, or love. Although these inquiries are valid, overlooking cultural dimensions and generalising greetings as mere functional routines risks missing the profound cultural value insights embedded within them.

A similar case arises in Mmadike and Okoye’s (2015: 10) study of Etulo commenting greetings. They record congratulatory expressions as shown in the following table.

Table 1: Etulo Commenting Greetings

S/N	Greeting	Gloss	Context	Purpose
1 2	Abùkiòsan Abùfia	You have done well You have tried	Successful event	To exult someone for his/her achievement

3 4	Abulɔɔndʒùlɔ Abulɔɔndʒùlɔdʒaa	You are a man You are a man-woman	Achievement of a task or feat	
5	Kɛɛyayii	Keep it up/keep it moving	A successful event	To encourage or motivate someone
6	Kunewɔ̄(nâ)	Be strengthened	At work	
7	Tamgbâ	Thanks	In the event of any act of benevolence or kindness	To express joy and appreciation for a favour

On the surface, the expressions under S/N 9 *Abulɔɔndʒùlɔ* ('you are a man') for congratulating men and 10 *Abulɔɔndʒùlɔdʒaa* ('you are a man-woman') for congratulating women may be regarded as formulaic ways of exalting someone's achievement. Yet they provoke significant questions with regard to Etulo's worldview on gender because, based on the Etulo data, success is framed linguistically as manhood. It also raises the question of whether achievement is culturally viewed as a male attribute, and that women must be positioned as 'man-like' to be recognised as successful. These unexamined assumptions highlight how greetings might reveal cultural values of communities that determine their inclinations of priorities in terms of gender and success that remain hidden if one focuses solely on the functional roles of greetings.

The cultural significance of greetings is also evident in Ngoni. Mapunda and Sommer (2017), for example, illustrate that language shift can be observed in many aspects of language, including greetings. In the Ngoni language community, youth are increasingly shifting from using indigenous Ngoni greetings such as *tukuwoni mayu/dadi* to the use of Swahili *shikamoo mama/baba*. When the social functions of greetings are considered alongside this shift, a key question arises: Does the abandonment of Ngoni greetings also affect the perceived significance of greeting practices within the community? Based on Mapunda and Sommer's (2017) findings, it can be argued that although members of the Ngoni community are shifting from Ngoni greetings to Swahili greetings, the functional role of greetings in the community has remained intact. The Swahili greeting continues to serve the core social functions such as recognition, acknowledgement and the affirmation of interpersonal relations, much like the now-diminishing Ngoni forms. Therefore, what has changed is the cultural identity embedded in the Ngoni greeting expressions themselves, but not the function of greetings. In other words, the Ngoni community has lost the cultural significance carried in the greetings, but the importance of greeting one another is not lost. This scenario illustrates a crucial observation: the functional roles of greetings may persist, but the cultural identities encoded in specific linguistic forms and patterns can shift or even disappear.

The present study, therefore, shifts the focus from asking what greetings do to asking what greetings reveal about the users of such greetings. By analysing the greeting expressions and the rules governing their appropriate use in Luguru and Sukuma groups with distinct cultural heritages and sociolinguistic histories, this study identifies the cultural values encoded within these systems and demonstrates how they align with broader cultural value orientations.

Values and Cultural Value Orientations

The concept of values has been defined in various ways across disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, marketing, sociology, and cultural studies (Hofstede, 1981; Kluckhohn, 1951; Schwartz, 1992, 2006; Yau, 1988). Despite disciplinary differences, they all seem to agree on a unifying theme that values are guiding principles or standards that govern individual or collective behaviour. In this study, values are understood as culturally shared and socially embedded conceptions of the desirable that guide interaction, perception, and social relations. Drawing on insights from Hofstede (1981), Kluckhohn (1951), Rokeach (1973), and Schwartz (1992), values are treated as enduring beliefs and motivational goals that operate across social situations and shape what a society regards as proper, respectful, or admirable.

Cultural value orientations, on the other hand, refer to cultural inclinations that reflect the broader organising principles of a society's value system. Cultural value orientations tend to allow certain values while barring others, at least at some point, if they violate the core principles governing what is considered right or wrong. For example, in a hierarchically oriented society, values such as respect for authority will be emphasised. According to Yau (1988), as a hierarchically oriented community, the Chinese teach children at an early age that they are 'worthless' to prepare them to endure humility in front of leaders or parents. Thus, cultural value orientations represent the patterned ways in which values are clustered, prioritised, and institutionalised within a cultural group.

Schwartz (2006) identifies six cultural value orientations, organised around three bipolar dimensions: Embeddedness vs. Autonomy, Hierarchy vs. Egalitarianism, and Mastery vs. Harmony. These orientations provide a typology through which different societies can be compared based on their dominant value systems. For example, a community that emphasises respect for traditions and extended family is inclined towards *Embeddedness*, while a community that promotes independence and self-expression may reflect *Autonomy*. A community that emphasises order, respect for authority, and social roles is said to be inclined towards *Hierarchy*, while a community that emphasises values such as equality and respect for both men and women belongs to *Egalitarianism*. A community that promotes independence and self-expression reflects Autonomy, while one that promotes the status quo and unity with the environment belongs to the *Harmony* category. Thus, cultural value orientations offer a macro-level lens through which group-level values are integrated into broader cultural logic.

Greetings are especially susceptible to being value-laden forms and practices because scholars such as Egblewogbe (1990), Mmadike and Okoye (2015), and Wei (2010) emphasise that greetings are culture-specific. The cultural specificity of greetings suggests that they contain cultural elements and are enacted with respect to communities' cultural orientations. This explains why greetings are highly regulated social performances that may be used to judge people's behaviour or manner in interaction as desirable or undesirable. Kimambo's (2024) examination of Makhuwa greeting patterns reveals that neglecting the elements that determine appropriate greeting behaviour is regarded as a serious social offence. Thus, greetings often determine personal or social judgments about an individual's behaviour, especially regarding their moral conduct, upbringing, or respect for norms. The appropriateness or inappropriateness of how one greets can trigger social approval or disapproval. In this way, greetings function as a moral gauge within society.

Research on greetings in Tanzania has demonstrated that greetings revolve around the expression of social Hierarchy, relational expectations, and broader moral orders. Much of this work highlights how these factors interact with Kiswahili influence in multilingual settings. For example, Lupogo et al. (2021) show how Kiswahili *shikamoo* is increasingly used across ethnic communities as markers of respect and social distance, particularly among younger speakers navigating modernity. Similarly, Rwakakindo (2021) documents a shift among Kisubi speakers in Kagera, where the frequency and the formality of traditional greetings are declining due to sociolinguistic pressures from Kiswahili and changes in social organisation. These studies collectively show that greeting practices are transforming in response to what could be viewed as social change, language contact, and shifting value systems.

More recent work by Kimambo (2024) offers a detailed socio-pragmatic analysis of how *shikamoo* is appropriated within the Makhuwa greeting system in Mtwara. His study demonstrates that greeting behaviour reflects not only age-based Hierarchy as it could be anticipated, but also initiation status, gendered expectations, marital roles, and embodied signs of respect such as kneeling or standing still. This theme is extended further in Kimambo (2025), who compares Makhuwa and Kurya greetings and identifies points of tension arising from different cultural norms in multilingual encounters. Likewise, Lupogo et al. (2021) and Rwakakindo (2021) offer rich socio-pragmatic descriptive accounts showing that Tanzanian greeting practices are socially patterned, influenced by social relations, and, importantly, sensitive to cultural contact. However, their analyses remain largely on the socio-pragmatic surface, focusing on how greetings operate and what social factors shape them. Nonetheless, the 'why' inquiry is equally important, as it delves into cultural dimensions that trigger inconsistent ways of performing appropriate greetings in different communities. It could be argued that many of the patterns they document such as the weight of initiation status in Makhuwa (Kimambo, 2024), the shifting roles of

greetings in Kisubi (Rwakakindo, 2021), or the age expectations embedded in Kiswahili greetings (Lupogo, 2021; Yahya-Othman, 1995) clearly indicate the cultural value systems that shape greeting appropriateness. The present study, therefore, takes this important next step by employing Schwartz's cultural value orientations to systematically interpret the why question of greeting practices in two Tanzanian Bantu language communities, thereby comparatively revealing their cultural values and cultural value orientations.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a set of theoretical viewpoints that operate at different but complementary levels. At the general sociolinguistic level, it subscribes to the viewpoint that language and culture are mutually constitutive. This standpoint is informed by a constructivist orientation, which views language as a socially constructed and culturally situated phenomenon (Bybee, 2010; Tomasello, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Within constructivism, the principle of linguistic relativity (Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis) offers additional insight by stressing that linguistic structures and uses can influence how speakers perceive and interpret their social world (Kay & Kempton, 1984). In relation to the current study, these assumptions support the idea that greetings function as culturally meaningful practices through which social relations and worldviews are enacted.

At the analytical level, however, this study is principally grounded in Schwartz's (2006) Theory of Cultural Value Orientations. The theory specifies three bipolar dimensions: Embeddedness versus Autonomy, Hierarchy versus Egalitarianism, and Mastery versus Harmony. These dimensions provide a systematic prism for identifying and comparing the values encoded in Luguru and Sukuma greeting practices. This paper, therefore, uses this theory as the primary tool for mapping how the greeting systems of the two language communities express and reproduce value orientations embedded in their respective cultural contexts. Accordingly, the philosophical views about the relationship between language and culture set a broad foundation, while Schwartz's (2006) theory provides the specific conceptual dimensions for analysing the cultural orientations embedded in the two communities' greeting systems.

Methodology

The study involved two Bantu languages of Sukuma and Luguru, and was conducted in Maswa and Mvomero districts in Tanzania, involving 12 participants aged 40 and above. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and simulated participant observation to capture both spontaneous and elicited greeting practices in the Luguru and Sukuma communities. Observation focused on naturally occurring greetings in everyday contexts. It enabled documenting authentic linguistic and cultural practices and revealing social dynamics that might not surface in interviews. Group and individual semi-structured interviews allowed participants to explain the meanings, rules, and cultural rationales underlying greetings. This method offered insights into how greetings reflect values in both communities. Simulated participant observation provided culturally grounded re-enactments of greeting scenarios. It was particularly useful for eliciting context-specific forms that may not arise during natural observation. This triangulation of methods enhanced the validity, richness, and contextual depth of data. Analysis was descriptive and qualitative, and it combined interpretive and deductive approaches. Interpretive analysis examined greetings in relation to age, status, kinship, and social position while focusing on their performance and perception within each community. Deductive analysis applied Schwartz's cultural value orientations, categorising greeting expressions and patterns according to predefined value domains and linking linguistic forms and usage patterns to cultural values.

Sukuma Greeting System

The Sukuma greeting system uses three primary expressions: *ng'wangeluka*, *ng'wadila*, and *mhola*. The expression *ng'wangeluka* is typically used to greet someone in the morning, while *ng'wadila* is used in the afternoon and evening. The third expression, *mhola*, is an informal greeting used at any time of day, depending on the speakers' level of familiarity. According to the informants, *ng'wangeluka* and *ng'wadila* are employed in formal encounters, particularly when people meet for the first time in a given day. In contrast, *mhola* is used in casual interactions or repeat encounters later in the day. Its use implies a level of closeness that permits a more relaxed form of address.

In the Sukuma community, the act of greeting is semantically linked to the notion of “visiting.” This conceptualisation is illustrated through the expression *gugisha*, meaning ‘to greet’, which derives from the root *gish-* meaning ‘to visit.’ A common example recorded during fieldwork is the phrase *ngishage isengiyo*, which translates to ‘greet your aunt’ but literally means ‘visit your aunt’. This linguistic structure underscores how the act of greeting is framed as a form of visitation, echoing historical lifestyle patterns in which physical visits were essential for sustaining relationships and exchanging information.

The appropriate use of greetings in Sukuma is influenced by various social variables. Time of day is an important determinant, with specific expressions aligned to particular temporal segments. The frequency of encounter also plays a role: full greetings are typically exchanged during the first meeting of the day, whereas subsequent meetings may warrant shortened or informal variants. Social relationships significantly shape greeting practices. The use of clan names during interactions is a cultural norm, especially when speakers are not closely related. For instance, a younger person may greet an older male with *Ng’wadila bhabha* ‘Good afternoon, father’, to which the older man might reply *Ng’wadila nyanda* ‘Good afternoon, boy’. This would then be followed by a request for clan identification: *Bhabha, nagugishe ginehe?* ‘Father, how do I greet you?’, prompting the response *Tuli Masalu* ‘We belong to the Masalu clan’, followed by *Ng’wa Masalu* ‘I recognise you through the Masalu clan’. Such exchanges demonstrate the community’s emphasis on social placement and recognition through lineage, particularly when greeting strangers or distant acquaintances.

The greeting system is further shaped by variables such as age, gender, and social relationships. Younger individuals are expected to initiate greetings when interacting with elders. Similarly, women are generally expected to greet men first. In interactions between age-mates, the term *bageshi* ‘peer’ or ‘fellow’ is often used in place of familial terms such as *bhabha* ‘father’ or *mayu* ‘mother’. Even in such cases, clan identity remains important and is explicitly acknowledged through the naming of one’s clan during greeting.

Kinship relations play a central role in determining the language and structure of greeting exchanges. Specific expressions are employed to reference the source of family connection between speakers. These include *ng’waguku* ‘through our grandfather’, *ng’wanene* ‘through myself’, *ng’wang’wanone* ‘through my son’, *ng’wabhabha* ‘through my father’, and *ng’wamama* ‘through my grandmother’. Each of these terms signals a distinct type of genealogical relationship and is used by the senior party in the exchange to affirm their position within the family hierarchy. For example, in a greeting between a grandson and his grandfather, the latter may say *ng’wanene* ‘through myself’ to recognise the grandson through himself as the source of the family line. Similarly, a father may use *ng’wabhabha* ‘through my father’ to his child to refer to their connection through his own father. Thus, this pattern of Sukuma greeting preserves the patrilineal emphasis of family identity in Sukuma society.

Sukuma greetings are shaped by the interplay between lexical content and cultural interpretation. Although the community employs a limited set of formal greeting expressions such as *ng’wangaluka*, *ng’wadila*, and *mhola*, their pragmatic use reveals a sophisticated framework of appropriateness, status signalling, and social relationships. For example, *ng’wangaluka* is specifically tied to the morning. It marks the opening of a new social cycle. *Mhola* is used in informal interactions, particularly among close relations or when time constraints require brevity.

The analysis also reveals that the act of greeting serves as a mechanism for reinforcing and reproducing social hierarchies. Three principal variables determine the structure and appropriateness of greetings: age, gender, and kinship. Age is an overriding determinant of status. In interactions between non-kin, the younger party is expected to initiate the greeting and acknowledge the elder’s clan identity by mentioning their clan name. The reciprocal structure often requires the elder to respond with a corresponding acknowledgement of the younger person’s clan. Where a younger person greets an elder with *Ng’wadila bhabha*, the conversation typically proceeds with inquiries about clan affiliation, affirming both the elder’s precedence and the community’s emphasis on lineage.

Gender further shapes the direction and tone of greeting exchanges. Men are typically accorded higher social status in Sukuma society, and women are culturally obliged to greet men first. This expectation persists regardless of age unless overridden by direct kinship roles, such as that of a mother greeting her

son. In interactions involving unrelated men and women, the woman initiates the greeting and performs the act of clan recognition first, after which the man reciprocates. Such patterns reflect a patriarchal social structure in which greeting functions as a linguistic confirmation of gender-based Hierarchy.

Kinship relationships form a particularly rich dimension of the greeting system. The use of expressions such as *ng'waguku*, *ng'wanene*, *ng'wabhabha*, and *ng'wamama* indicates the highly nuanced ways in which family relations are encoded in everyday interactions. These expressions identify not only the existence of a kin tie but also the direction of that relationship and the associated status. For instance, *ng'waguku* 'through our grandfather' is reserved for elder siblings or senior cousins recognising their juniors within the same patrilineal. Similarly, *ng'wanene* is used by grandparents to grandchildren to affirm their role as the origin of the family line, literally meaning 'through myself.' In contrast, *ng'wamama* 'through my grandmother' is used to acknowledge kinship rooted in the maternal line and is typically used among cousins connected through a common grandmother. Each of these expressions carries both relational and hierarchical meaning and is activated only under specific social conditions.

The Sukuma greeting system also includes mechanisms for identity solicitation and negotiation. In initial encounters, where social familiarity is absent, interlocutors may use strategies such as the expression *n'ibaga* 'I have forgotten' to prompt the other party to disclose their clan's name. This initiates a formal exchange that involves reciprocal clan recognition and affirms social distance or potential kinship. The practice reveals a broader cultural preoccupation with social mapping and determines not only who someone is but also how they fit within a complex network of lineage and affiliation.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that greetings among the Sukuma are not merely dyadic exchanges but carry performative weight in sustaining social cohesion. By initiating greetings especially in the presence of elders or strangers speakers affirm respect, acknowledge shared history, and uphold the moral fabric of the community. Failure to greet appropriately, or to greet at all, is interpreted as a breach of social etiquette and may have implications for interpersonal relationships.

Overall, the Sukuma greeting system reveals a rich interplay between language, social identity, and cultural configurations. Greetings function as socially calibrated acts that reflect and reproduce age-based authority, gender roles, kinship hierarchies, and communal norms. It can be argued that the structure and variability of greeting practices suggest that language in the Sukuma community is both a tool for communication and a cultural practice woven into their everyday performance of respect, identity, and relational ethics.

Manifestation of Cultural Value Orientations in the Sukuma Greeting System

The Sukuma greeting system provides a profound reflection of the cultural value orientations manifested in everyday interaction. Far from being mere linguistic routines, Sukuma greetings manifest two cultural value orientations, namely Hierarchy and Embeddedness, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 2: Manifestation of Cultural Value Orientations in Sukuma

Cultural Value Orientations	Greeting Forms and Patterns	Cultural Values
Embeddedness	The use of seniority expressions based on social relations, e.g. <i>ng'wabhabha</i> , <i>ng'waguku</i> and identity solicitation in the greeting exchange	Social order, respect for elders, and conformity
Hierarchy	A socially lower person (based on gender or social relations) initiates a greeting exchange	Social power and humility

As the table indicates, the orientations are characterised by the community's fundamental values, including respect for elders, humility, gendered social classes, kinship relations, and identity. The greeting forms, their contextual variations and the norms governing their usage together articulate a system of values that define what it means to be a respectful and socially competent member of Sukuma society.

Hierarchy

One of the most salient cultural orientations manifested in the Sukuma greeting system is respect for social Hierarchy, especially based on age and seniority. The younger individuals are expected to initiate greetings towards their elders. This expectation embodies a community-wide value of humility and deference to seniority. All greeting interactions, whether between kin or strangers, must observe this norm. Elders are not only to be acknowledged but are also addressed using specific honorifics or kinship terms such as *bhabha* 'father' or *mayu* 'mother', even in the absence of a blood relationship. Such linguistic practices show how ingrained the value of Hierarchy is within the Sukuma worldview.

Similarly, gender differentiation and patriarchal order confirm the existence of Hierarchy in this community, shaped by both age and gender. Greetings are regulated by a gendered expectation whereby women initiate greetings towards men, regardless of relative age, unless kinship reverses this expectation (as in mother–son relationships). This reflects broader societal roles in which men occupy a structurally higher status, with language functioning to reproduce these roles. Historical accounts from informants also indicate that women traditionally knelt when greeting men, a physical enactment of submission and respect. Although such practices have declined, their linguistic traces persist, reinforcing a cultural script in which greetings affirm male authority and female deference.

Embeddedness

Another prominent cultural value orientation evident in the Sukuma greeting system is Embeddedness. This orientation is reflected in the use of seniority terms, which serve to perpetuate and promote family cohesion. The seniority term *ng'waguku* proclaims that the source of the relationship between grandchildren is the grandfather. However, *ng'waguku* may not directly mark the source of the relationship among grandchildren, but rather who is senior based on the social relationship rules in an encounter. This emphasis on kinship awareness and genealogical identity exemplifies the Embeddedness orientation. The consistent use of clan names and kinship-based seniority expressions shows that greeting exchanges function as vehicles for affirming social belonging and intergenerational continuity. For instance, when a speaker responds *ng'waguku* ('through our grandfather'), interactants acknowledge the other party and reaffirm their mutual connection through a shared ancestor. Such greetings function as verbal rituals that symbolically restore and reinforce genealogical bonds, making kinship salient in daily interaction. Beyond the prioritisation of family lines in greetings, the practice of soliciting an interlocutor's clan name further shows the community's Embeddedness orientation.

Luguru Greeting System

In Luguru, the frequency of encounters allows interlocutors to choose between full, formal greetings or simply uttering something to break the silence. The types of greeting used depend on the time of day and the interlocutors' social positions, which are determined by age and the rituals they have undergone.

Luguru has two kinds of greetings, which, for this study, are categorised as neutral greetings and ranked greetings. Neutral greetings include time-of-day greetings and calques. They are categorised as such because they can be initiated and responded to by anyone. These greetings are explicitly tied to the time of day and are lexically differentiated: *aulamke* 'how is the place you woke up?' and *auwasire* 'how is the place you slept?' are used in the morning; *ausindire* 'how is the place you spent the day?' and *auswere* 'how is the place you spent the day?' in the afternoon and evening, and *aukalagha* 'how is the place you have been?' in situations where individuals have not seen each other for a long period.

Time-specific greetings reflect a shared cultural rhythm and daily routine that is reinforced linguistically. Morning, afternoon, and evening are understood as distinct social and symbolic phases, each requiring its own linguistic reference. Calques are alternatives to the time-of-day greetings from Swahili, where *abari dza imitondo* 'how is the morning', contracted to *dzemitondo*, is equivalent to *auwasire* and *aulamke*, while *abari dza imisi/imihe* 'how is the afternoon/evening?', contracted to *dzemisi* and *dzemihe*, are equivalent to *ausindire* and *auswere*. These greetings are literal translations of Swahili greetings, which are also acceptable in the Luguru community.

One of the defining characteristics of the Luguru greeting system is social differentiation based on age and ritual category that determines one's status. While general greetings such as *aulamke* can be used across social boundaries, more nuanced expressions are reserved for specific interactions. The ritual

status of certain members of society, such as those with *kikombe*² or *mlunga*³, influences the choice of greeting and often requires a greater degree of formality or symbolic respect. Informants reported that greeting practices towards such individuals are deliberate and reflect an understanding of spiritual Hierarchy and traditional protocol.

During greeting exchanges, reciprocity and conversational symmetry are common among the Luguru. Interlocutors often mimic each other's expressions, turning an initial greeting into a dialogue of mutual acknowledgement. After one person greets with *aulamke* 'how is the place you woke up the other responds with *anogha* 'it is good' and may repeat the same question in return. This back-and-forth is a culturally expected feature, reflecting the Luguru community's belief in maintaining social balance through verbal exchange.

Additionally, extended inquiries about others such as children, family members, and the household are equally common within the greeting structure and serve a dual purpose. First, they reflect collectivism among the Luguru community, where an individual's well-being is inherently connected to that of their family. Second, they function as a form of relational reaffirmation, reminding both parties of their shared social obligations and mutual concern. This practice aligns with findings in other African languages, such as Akan (Agyekum, 2008) and Swahili (Yahya-Othman, 1995). The greeting expression *aukalagha* 'how is the place you have been?' serves as a temporal bridge, used when speakers have been apart for a significant period. Unlike time-of-day greetings, *aukalagha* marks social and emotional distance. It not only acknowledges the gap but also restores continuity in the relationship. This observation supports the argument that greetings in Luguru may be employed to reaffirm bonds, rebuild familiarity, and re-establish relational presence.

Turning to ranked greetings, they are divided into two groups: those determined by age and those determined by ritual. *Mwinyi* 'I greet you in the name of Mwinyi', replied with *mungwana* 'he is a gentleman' is used among adult peers. *Arigani* is used for people with *kikombe*, while *mbukwa*, *kucha*, *kova* and *fungo* are reserved for the highest-ranking people who have undergone the *mlunga* ritual. Although greetings for *mlunga* individuals are socially categorised similarly, their exchanges still follow a specific structure and are time-sensitive. *Kucha* is for morning; *mbukwa* and *kova* are appropriate for any time of day, while *fungo* is strictly for evening.

Each greeting culminates in the pronouncement of a culturally loaded affirmation. *Kucha* ends in *kulangala*⁴, meaning 'dawn' or 'darkness is gone'; *mbukwa* ends in *dzighwasa*⁵, meaning 'they are asleep, at rest, or at ease' (*Mbukwa* are metal rings worn around the wrist, representing inherited names and functioning as symbols of one's ancestors). The expression *dzighwasa* affirms the purpose of the *mlunga* ritual, which is to remove problems. *Kova* ends in *mnyerere*⁶, a type of banana plantain whose leaves are used in traditional prayers, whereas *fungo* ends in *maghona*⁷ 'prefers sleeping', symbolising the habit of the African civet with the purpose of the *mlunga* ritual.

Therefore, greetings in Luguru society are common social practices whenever individuals meet. The forms of greetings are shaped by both the nature of the encounter and the social identities of the interlocutors. The system comprises two broad categories: neutral greetings and ranked greetings. Each category reflects distinct cultural expectations. Neutral greetings, which are explicitly tied to the time of day, are appropriate for all speakers. They mark morning (*aulamke*, *auwasire*), afternoon and evening (*ausindire*, *auswere*), or extended absence (*aukalagha*). These expressions are specific linguistic means

² *Kikombe* is a social position a person acquires after undergoing a partial *mlunga* ritual and becomes eligible for *arigani* 'How is the situation' greeting

³ *Mlunga* is a social position a person acquires after undergoing a complete ritual for inheriting names and becomes eligible for *mbukwa* 'metal rings', *kova* 'slug', *fungo* 'African civet' and *kucha* 'dawn' greetings. A person with *mlunga* or *kikombe* usually wears metal rings called *mbukwa* around their wrist.

⁴ Can see the light

⁵ They are asleep (inherited names)

⁶ Banana leaves

⁷ Prefers sleeping

showing phases of daily life that the community uses to encode shared temporal rhythm. Luguru also employs calques of Swahili greetings, such as *dzemitondo*, *dzemisi*, and *dzemihe*. The Calques illustrate contact-induced variation while maintaining the semantic structure of time-specific salutations. At the heart of these neutral forms is the principle of reciprocity: greetings typically evolve into short dialogic exchanges in which interactants recognize and acknowledge each other's desire to show respect. Additional inquiries about children, spouses, or household well-being reinforce the collectivist principle that the community stands for, where personal welfare is understood relationally.

Ranked greetings constitute the more socially stratified dimension in the Luguru system. These expressions are governed by age and ritual status. This tendency of Luguru greetings reveals social classes in which linguistic choices and patterns of greetings signal one's place within the community. Among adults, *mwinyi* is answered with *mungwana* and used to show mutual respect among adult peers. Individuals with the *kikombe* ritual status receive a specialised form of greeting called *arigani*, while the highest-ranking figures, those who have undergone the *mlunga* ritual, are addressed with *mbukwa*, *kucha*, *kova*, or *fungo*. Each of these expressions is associated with specific times of day, and they culminate in culturally meaningful affirmations. These closing expressions including *kulangala*, *dzighwasa*, *mnyerere*, and *maghona* draw on Luguru cosmology and encode symbolic references to dawn, rest, ritual cleansing, ancestral mediation, and animal metaphors. Such metaphoric greetings illustrate how the Luguru greeting repertoire is intertwined with ritual knowledge, inherited names, and spiritual authority. The presence of terms like *mbukwa* 'metal rings', *kova* 'snail', or *fungo* 'African civet' further demonstrates that Luguru greetings operate as identity markers that mould speakers within moral, ancestral, and ritual lineages.

Manifestation of Cultural Value Orientations in the Luguru Greeting System

This section presents how cultural value orientations are manifested in the greeting system of the Luguru. According to Schwartz (2006), cultural value orientations emerge from the values a community prioritises in daily life. As routinised cultural practices, greetings provide insight into how these value orientations shape behaviour, attitudes, and social norms. This section demonstrates how Luguru greetings encode and express cultural values, thereby reflecting the community's broader value orientations. The Luguru greeting system manifests four cultural value orientations: Embeddedness, Hierarchy, Harmony, and Egalitarianism, as the following table summarises.

Table 3: Cultural Value Orientations in the Luguru Greeting System

Cultural Value Orientations	Greeting Forms and Patterns	Cultural values
Embeddedness	<i>Arigani</i> , <i>Mbukwa</i> , <i>Kova</i> , and <i>Kucha</i> , <i>Fungo</i> are connected to traditional rituals honouring ancestors	Respect for traditions and obedience
Hierarchy	Ranked greetings based on age or ritual status, e.g. <i>shikamoo</i> , <i>chewa</i> , <i>arigani</i> , <i>mbukwa</i>	Social power and humility
Egalitarianism	All men and women are greeted equally; no greeting forms or patterns differentiate gender	Equality between men and women in greeting exchanges
Harmony	Using animal and plant names as greetings, e.g., <i>kova</i> (snail), <i>fungo</i> (African civet), <i>mnyerere</i> (banana tree)	Unity with nature, safety, peace, and security

Embeddedness

According to Schwartz (2006), Embeddedness refers to the idea that individuals are not autonomous but are embedded within a collective community. Communities inclined towards Embeddedness emphasise group cohesion, continuity, and obedience to tradition. The Luguru greeting system contains five greetings (*mbukwa*, *kova*, *fungo*, *kucha*, and *arigani*) that are restricted to those who have undergone the *mlunga* or *kikombe* ritual. One informant explained that many people undertake *mlunga* not out of preference, but in response to misfortunes attributed to neglecting traditional obligations. In this context, greetings serve as symbolic affirmations of traditional beliefs. By participating in the ritual system and earning these greeting rights, individuals reinforce their Embeddedness within the social fabric.

Hierarchy

Schwartz (2006) defines Hierarchy as the legitimate ordering of people into different roles, classes, and statuses based on social norms. Hierarchical societies value obedience, respect for authority, and recognition of social ranks. In Luguru society, Hierarchy is enacted through ritual progression. A person moves from commoner to middle status through *kikombe*, and to upper status through *mlunga*, with each stage conferring specific greeting entitlements. For instance, a non-initiated person may greet a *mlunga* individual with *mbukwa* or *kucha*, but is forbidden from initiating *kova* or *fungo*. One participant explained, "I can greet a person with *mlunga* using *mbukwa*, but I cannot receive it because I haven't been initiated." Thus, greetings are not just respectful forms; they enforce a social Hierarchy governed by ritual status.

A closer comparison with Makhuwa greetings clarifies how initiation systems in matrilineal societies produce greeting hierarchies that are not based primarily on age. Among the Makhuwa, both women and men undergo initiation, but through different processes: girls pass through three successive stages of *unyago*, while boys complete *jando* (Kimambo, 2024). Each initiation stage creates ranked cohorts, such that earlier initiates outrank later initiates, and initiation status determines who must initiate deferential greetings such as *shikamoo*. In contrast, Luguru initiation does not follow gender-separated paths; both men and women may attain *kikombe* or the higher *mlunga* status, which grants access to specialised ritual greetings such as *mbukwa*, *kucha*, *kova*, and *fungo*. Yet, the underlying principle is the same in both communities: ritual progression determines greeting rights and obligations. Thus, Luguru patterns reinforce Kimambo's broader insight that in matrilineal societies, greeting behaviour may be structured around rituals rather than other factors such as age and gender differences.

Harmony

Harmony, as a value orientation, prioritises unity with nature, peaceful coexistence, and spiritual alignment with one's environment. This is evident in Luguru greetings, which express unity, blessings, and environmental consciousness through references to animals or natural symbols. For example, *kova* 'black slug', and *fungo* 'African civet' are more than mere labels. They are expressions associated with beliefs in good fortune, spiritual cleanliness, and environmental approval.

Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism is a prominent cultural value orientation in the Luguru greeting system, particularly regarding gender. Schwartz (2006) defines Egalitarianism as the belief that all individuals are moral equals who deserve equal rights and respect. In Luguru, the choice of greetings does not differ between men and women. Interlocutors may use *shikamoo* or *mbukwa* across gender lines based on social status, not sex. When asked whether greetings are gender-exclusive, one informant responded, "Actually, there are no greetings which are exclusively for men or women. If it is *mbukwa* or *shikamoo*, both receive the same." This statement reflects Egalitarianism in Luguru society, where status determined by ritual or age dictates how one is greeted, but not their sex.

Moreover, both men and women can initiate greetings. One participant explained that if a daughter has undergone *mlunga* but her father has not, the father would still greet her with *mbukwa*, regardless of gender. This contrasts with the Sukuma community, where gender determines greeting roles and responsibilities. In Luguru, greetings become an arena where gender equality is practised and reinforced.

Discussion

Although both Luguru and Sukuma are Bantu-speaking communities, their greeting systems show contrasting world views. Interestingly, the Luguru who are matrilineal society express a broader range of Schwartz's cultural value orientations, including Hierarchy, Embeddedness, Egalitarianism, and Harmony. These orientations are manifested through ritualised greeting expressions, reciprocal turn-taking, and metaphoric references to nature. In addition, the Luguru greeting system shows that the community accommodates both social Hierarchy and gender equality. By contrast, the patrilineal Sukuma greeting system manifests the orientations of Hierarchy and Embeddedness. Similar to what Kimambo (2025) observes for the Kurya, the Sukuma descent system emphasises seniority, gendered authority, and clan-based social order. Viewed comparatively, Luguru and Sukuma greeting systems provide a window into how kinship organization, ritual authority, and symbolic practices yield different configurations of cultural

values within two culturally distinct Bantu communities (Batibo, 2015; Eglewogbe, 1990; French, 2023; Wierzbicka, 1997).

The findings also show that languages within the same genealogical group can manifest varied pragmatic and cultural patterns. Although Luguru and Sukuma are both Bantu languages, their greeting systems differ significantly in form, interactional patterning, symbolism, and social function. The noted difference implies that shared linguistic structures, such as noun classes or verbal morphology, do not entail shared pragmatic norms or cultural values (Duranti, 1997; Takahashi, 2025). Instead, pragmatic behaviour in greetings seems to be highly determined by cultural histories, social institutions, and kinship hierarchies. Therefore, the current study advances our understanding of Bantu linguistics by showing that greeting practices are not genealogically inherited but culturally determined.

The significance of these findings lies in how greeting expressions illuminate the cultural work they perform. By linking greeting expressions to Schwartz's (2006) value orientations, the study shows that greetings function both as polite formulae and as culturally meaningful acts that naturalise core social values. In Luguru, ritual progression and ancestral identity determine linguistic rights and obligations. Conversely, seniority and patrilineal order determine greeting asymmetries in Sukuma. Drawing on these patterns, it is reasonable to argue that greeting behaviour reflects what is morally desirable, what counts as appropriate, who deserves respect, and how authority is recognized in a particular community (cf. Bybee, 2010; Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973; Tomasello, 2003). Hence, such practices are central to understanding the reproduction of cultural value systems through everyday interaction.

The study further demonstrates that African greeting systems, even within the same macro-cultural or linguistic region, embody cultural value orientations in different ways. Both communities emphasise Hierarchy, suggesting that deference to authority and recognition of social rank may be widespread interactional norms (Gewta, 2016; Yau, 1988). However, the presence of Egalitarianism and Harmony in Luguru but not in Sukuma implies that matrilineal societies may accommodate a wider moral repertoire in their greeting practices to balance respect with reciprocity (see also Kimambo, 2024). Conversely, the absence of these orientations in Sukuma greetings mirrors the stronger influence of patrilineal lineage and seniority, which foregrounds duty and compliance. Data from both communities show that greetings in African communities cannot be treated as uniform cultural phenomena. They should be treated as varied cultural expressions due to different local kinship structures, ecological symbolism, and ritual histories.

Finally, the study presents the unique value of linguistic approaches to cultural analysis, as also argued by Wierzbicka (1997). Studying actual greetings captures values as they are performed rather than merely stated. They show implicit cultural logics through lexical choice, formulaic patterns, turn-taking behaviour, metaphoric invocations, and ritualized constraints. This flexibility makes the linguistic approach more powerful than, say, survey-based methods, for analyzing cultural values since it reflects accurately habitualised and socially conditioned behaviour (French, 2023). By observing how speakers greet one another rather than what they say about their culture, the study has uncovered value orientations that could have otherwise remained unarticulated. Therefore, the linguistic material in the present study has provided a precise and culturally grounded means of understanding how Luguru and Sukuma communities encode and transmit respective cultural emphases.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how greeting systems in the Luguru and Sukuma language communities embody cultural value orientations through their linguistic forms and interactional patterns. Integrating linguistic analysis with Schwartz's (2006) theory of cultural value orientations showed that greetings are routine exchanges. In addition, they are culturally charged acts that embody a community's order, social organisation and worldview. The methodological combination of naturalistic observation, interviews, and simulated participant observation enabled the identification of greeting practices that reveal how values are performed rather than simply declared.

The comparative findings show that despite belonging to the same Bantu linguistic family, Luguru and Sukuma greetings manifest strikingly different cultural emphases. The Luguru system manifests Hierarchy, Embeddedness, Egalitarianism, and Harmony through ritualised greeting rights, reciprocal

exchanges, and symbolic metaphors connected to nature and ancestral identity. In contrast, the Sukuma system aligns predominantly with Hierarchy and Embeddedness. This alignment is consonant with its patrilineal structure that values seniority, gendered authority, and clan-based identity. These differences show that pragmatic norms in greetings are influenced more by kinship systems, ritual institutions, and cultural histories than by linguistic genealogy.

Therefore, the study illustrates that greeting practices function as key cultural sites where values are put into effect and transmitted from one generation to another. By applying a linguistic lens to cultural value orientations, the study shows the analytical strength of examining everyday verbal routines to uncover cultural logics. The findings contribute to broader discussions in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and cultural psychology by demonstrating that greeting systems offer a uniquely sensitive diagnostic for understanding how communities articulate and sustain their value orientations.

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