

REVIEWS

A Review of Ivie Uwa-Igbinoba's *Aspects of Edo Greetings: Uniqueness and Significance* (Ivie Cultural organization, Benin City, 2014, Pages- 103)

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One of the striking indicators of the cultural status of a given people is their folkloric content and texture. An aspect of this traditional marker is the politeness art, as reflected in greetings or salutation dynamics. It is this concept, in relation to the Edo people, that Uwa-Igbinoba addresses in her book.

This instructive text begins with the classification of Edo, the origin of Benin, the Edo people, the Edo speakers and geography of Benin, and the Edo sound system. This introductory chapter is critical, not only because it creates the context for the entire discourse, but also because it addresses some of the contentious historical and anthropological details about, for instance, the classification of Edo language and the origin of Benin. Consideration of the intellectual contestations about the origin of Benin, the Edo language and the Edo people makes this discussion particularly revealing and engaging.

The second chapter takes a striking leap into the theoretical basis of the entire submission. The conceptual, historical and cultural framework given to Edo greetings is both fundamental and commendable. Bloomfield (1993) identified greetings as common formulas of social intercourse, they comprise certain expressions that have slurred and shortened by-forms in which the phonetic pattern is lost. Hudson (1980) noted that what decides the form of a greeting varies from society to society and from language to language, but certain general patterns have emerged over time.

The Benin people use family morning salutation as a kind of identification and link to their ancestry, and for showing loyalty and disloyalty. Most of the other greetings, as articulated in the work, can be traced to the origin of the Edo people before the monarchy was founded by their ruler, Igodomigodo.

The writer explains, and convincingly too, how greetings relating to family lineage grew out of the factious situation during the Ogiso era. This period was characterised by numerous divisions in the Benin kingdom, which were occasioned by a change to the hereditary succession system that the kings had maintained out of convenience. All other greetings in Edo were formed with consideration given to time, season, vocation, class or status, condition, situation, occasion; with each greeting serving its own purpose in the life of an individual in a social context.

According to traditional sources, that the author amplifies, Ogiso Irrebo and Ogbomo introduced *okhu ne a tue* or *ukhu egbee* which implies that family greetings or family morning salutations were part of the *Ewae* system. The former introduced *Ukhu* (which is a family indicator) and the latter modified it. The main motivation for instituting this family politeness code was to know the strength of the people who were loyal to the Ogiso at that time, particularly the *Edion n'isen*, or the five Kingmakers.

The core linguistic parts of this publication are in chapters in which *Uwalgbinoba* does not only explore the language and meanings of Edo greetings, but also graphically presents the varieties of communication methods in Edo. Language is a system of arbitrary local symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. Language is not merely a means of interpersonal communication; it is content in itself, a referent for loyalties and animosities, an indicator of social status and personal relationships, and a marker of circumstances as well as of societal goals and aspirations.

Every Edo family-- it is critical to highlight at this point--has its own morning identification or greetings peculiar to the lineage. There are various family greetings and the number reflects the number of Edo families including those that migrated or settled outside Benin Kingdom.

Perhaps the critical issue in this book, as the title indicates, is the clinical examination of the uniqueness and significance of Edo greetings. The author explains that the concept of uniqueness is borne out by her exploration of the structural design of the Edo greeting system and observes that the only culture similar to the Edo in terms of the family greeting system is the Yoruba, but that the similarity is limited to the aspect of family appellation and not of the identification greeting. The writer then hinges the index of significance of Edo greetings on symbolic identity, humility, respect, honour, inter marriage taboos and oneness.

Whether the above amplified factors or indices are strong enough to establish the uniqueness and significance of Edo greetings remains a matter of scholarly excursion. However-- and this points to the strength of this book--It is not out of place to observe that most linguistic research has hitherto concentrated on salutations. But in most cases, as scholars like Duranti (1999) have noted, such politeness indicators have little semantic content. Greetings serve as a way of easing tension or as a means of initiating or continuing relationship. Accordingly, researchers speak of the 'illocutionary' function, which indicates that their research is concentrating less on what greetings say and more on what they do. Duranti believes that in a comparative context, this approach to greeting system is flawed and that it is important to realise that not all greetings are bare of meaning. In some places, greetings say much about the social status of both the speaker and the interlocutor.

The author takes an approach that is similar to Duranti's. She begins with the assumption that many greetings are full of social meaning. Uwa-Igbinoba's working definition of greetings goes beyond passing salutation and includes greetings given at rites of passage such as birth and death, greetings given when addressing someone of higher status, including the Oba, and above all else, more than fifty one-word greetings. Part of a classificatory system of attribution and taboos; each of these one-word greetings is associated with one of the leading patrisibs (primarily patrilineal family groupings) in Benin.

Traditionally, these greetings were given when a junior member of the family encountered a senior (excluding the father) for the first time in the day. Although, some kind of historical relationship exists between this system and the Yoruba institution of oriki or praise names, the Edo greetings are uttered in different social contexts. There is also an elastic analogy between Edo tokens of respect and Javanese politeness codes. However, it is possible that the family greeting system is unique to Edo culture.

An applaudable achievement of this work is the writer's documentation for posterity of fifty-nine Benin families and their greetings. Further, she reflects on the Edo/English implications of after-meal greetings, occupational greetings, congratulatory greetings, consolatory greetings, farewell greetings, bedtime greetings, classic greetings, cult greetings, royal court greetings, and general greetings among others.

The author raises a fundamental issue about traditional Edo greetings. Will they survive the process of globalisation that is not only bringing both a national and a global culture to Benin but it is also spreading its people abroad in a world-wide diaspora? The response to this poser is not quite clear, but we must understand that in addition to documenting tradition, folkloric and linguistic scholarship may truly further its preservation.

I hope that this work will advance and preserve a significant part of the cultural tradition of Benin City and the Edo people in general.

In the process of revising this book, the author may do well to more completely problematize or conceptualize the Edo people and the Benin society. Such an effort would go a long way in boosting the work's intellectual tempo and thereby giving the publication the unequivocal status of a standard text. Similarly, the few pages given to discussing the uniqueness and significance of Edo greetings can be said to be inadequate, considering that they constitute the sub title of the entire work. A few typographical errors and syntactic issues should also be addressed.

References

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