

'PARTIR, C'EST MOURIR UN PEU'  
UNIVERSAL AND CULTURE SPECIFIC FEATURES OF  
LEAVE-TAKING

by  
Felix K. Ameka

*1.0 Setting the scene*

Perhaps because of the French saying in the title, quoted from Firth (1972: 7), which says that parting is a little dying, leave-taking is very rarely discussed in the linguistics and pragmatics literature in its own right. There is evidence, however, in the acquisition literature that '[W]hen we learn languages, greetings and goodbyes are among the first things we learn.' (Youssof et al. 1976: 799). For instance, Greif and Gleason (1980: 160) observe that 'bye-bye is one of the earliest conventionalised communicative acts insisted upon by adults and produced by infants'. Furthermore, in opposition to *thank you* 'hi and bye-bye appear in most children's lexicons early in the one-word stage' (p. 165). Clark and French (1981: 116) express similar views but accord more primacy to *bye-bye*. They state that it tends to be the first conventionalised speech formula learned in English (and this may be the case in other languages as well).

While farewell formulae such as *bye-bye* are acquired fairly quickly, like other routines, their inappropriate use in specific situations in cross-cultural encounters can lead to misunderstanding. Such pragmatic failure is usually triggered by the mismatch between the literal meanings of the routinised expressions and their illocutionary meanings. A celebrated example of this is the difficulty *See you later* causes for migrants in Australia learning English. My personal experience while learning Dutch a few years back is relevant here. Two of the first expressions I acquired in Dutch are: *Tot ziens!* literally, 'till seeing' and *Tot straks!* literally 'till later'. I assumed that these were interchangeable and that the literal meaning was not significant. At the end of one working day, wanting to impress some of my Dutch colleagues, I said *tot straks* to them. They were startled because we did not have any appointment to meet later in the same day. I learned the rule of usage there and then: *tot ziens* is like *see you* but *tot straks* is used only when there is an understanding that there will be a definite contact between the interlocutors during the course of the same day.

These anecdotes and the early acquisition of farewell expressions point to their importance in social interaction. Yet there is a dearth of studies of leave-taking phenomena in their own right. The only study devoted to leave-taking on its own that I am aware of is inspired by the work and teaching of Anna Wierzbicka. It is the study of the semantics and pragmatics of saying good-bye at the end of social encounters in Australian English (Hill 1985). I do not wish to claim that the subject has not received any attention in the literature. The specialised linguistic expressions used in the enactment of leave-taking, for example, are sometimes described in the context of everyday interactional routines either from a language developmental viewpoint as in Greif and Gleason (1980) or more generally with respect to the communicative significance of routines (e.g. Aijmer 1996; Ameka 1991; Ferguson 1976). The closest we get to the independent treatment of leave-taking is in the termination of telephone communication as in the seminal work of Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and Clark and French (1981). Albert and Kessler (1976, 1978) have also discussed the strategies of ending social encounters especially with respect to minimising the pain associated with social separation from a socio-psychological point of view. Otherwise, investigators usually follow the intuitive relation between greeting and parting, and describe leave-taking as a counterpart of greetings. For instance, Goffman (1971: 79) classifies both greetings and leave-taking as 'access rituals' because '[G]reetings mark the transition to a condition of increased access and farewells to a state of decreased access'. The influential work of Firth (1972) shows that there are parallels between verbal and non-verbal rituals associated with greeting and parting in many languages and cultures. The same expressions that are used for greeting can also be used for farewelling. This is true of English time of day greeting expressions such as *Good morning*, *Good afternoon* and *Good evening*. *Good night*, however, is only used as a parting expression. Similarly, non-verbal behaviour associated with greeting and parting tends to be identical. For instance, the 'greeting kiss' and the 'parting kiss' in many cultures has the same form (and perhaps a common meaning, see Wierzbicka 1995). In the same way, a handshake may accompany a greeting and a parting (cf. Laver 1981; Eble 1982). This cannot justify the lack of independent treatment of parting phenomena because there are countless ethnographic accounts of greetings by themselves without necessarily making reference to leave-taking (see

e.g. Goody 1972 and Irvine 1974 just to mention two classics on groups in West Africa).

In this paper I want to discuss leave-taking in its own right. I aim to show the near-universal features of leave-taking in terms of the structure of the events that occur in terminating social encounters and in terms of the form of the language and the semantic fields to which the expressions belong. It will be shown that there are gradations in the importance or salience accorded to leave-taking in different cultures. This ranges from cultures in which there is apparently no recognisable or distinct closing phase of social encounters to less elaborate and more elaborate patterned routines of leave-taking. My second purpose is to describe the structure of the closing phase of encounters with specific reference to the southern Ghana cultural area (cf. Ameka 1994). Two salient routine strategies that occur in closings in this area will be highlighted. These are the permission seeking phase which could be characterised as the pre-closing phase and the co-enactment of departure through a 'seeing-off' phase. Furthermore, I will describe the meanings encoded in some of the linguistic routines employed for leave-taking at night in Ewe, a specific ethnolinguistic group in this area.

In doing this I am returning to the theme of speech acts and illocutionary semantics that was prominent in the work of Anna Wierzbicka when I first came in contact with her more than a decade ago. In the week that I arrived in Canberra in March 1984, Anna Wierzbicka gave the first seminar of the semester entitled: 'Different cultures, different languages, different speech acts: English vs. Polish'. This was later published as Wierzbicka (1985, and in a revised form has appeared as Chapter 2 of Wierzbicka (1991). The influence of that era is evident in my work and it is for this reason that I dedicate these thoughts on leave-taking to Anna Wierzbicka on her 60th birthday. Besides, I also wish to express the fact that saying good-bye to Anna Wierzbicka and to Australia at the beginning of 1991, the year in which her book on Cross-Cultural Pragmatics appeared, was 'a little dying' for me.

## 2.0 *Are farewells universal?*

The ways in which people end social encounters like many other interactional strategies, vary from culture to culture and are constrained

by different norms in different societies. It appears that there are cultures in the world where the situation of breaking social contact is not recognised and is not signalled by boundary markers. Youssouf et al. (1976: 817 fn 7) report personal communication from Dell Hymes who explicitly challenges the universality of farewells based on the fact that 'among the Wasco, members can both "meld into on-going situations" and "simply leave" without "the disruption of formally signalling entry/departure"'.

While such societies may not be entirely rare, it seems that there are many more societies that have a means of indicating the termination of contact. However, there is variation in how elaborate the leave-taking rituals are. Firth (1972: 9) quotes from the account of Diamond Jenness (1964 pp 61, 245) about the Eskimo who do not have an elaborate leave-taking ceremony: 'The Eskimo had no word for farewell in their language, but came and went without ceremony... "I am going" I said again, using their only greeting of farewell; and they answered together "You are going"'. The Eskimo situation seems to be different from that of the Wasco who do not signal departure. The Eskimo seem to acknowledge the parting but they do not have an intricate system of leave-taking expressions.

In other societies, leave-taking, that is, the breaking of contact, seems to be less complex than greeting, that is, making contact. Naden (1985:195) writing about the Mamprusi of northern Ghana, comments that in comparison with 'the elaborateness of Mamprusi greetings, the farewells are something of an anti-climax. Often at the end of business, interactants drift apart without any formal closure. Such farewells as do exist depend on comparatively modest amounts of social and situational information'. The Mamprusi situation is in sharp contrast to the situation in Ewe and other groups in southern Ghana as we shall see below. In these societies there is a formal closure phase with an intricate structure. Naden (ibid.) however concedes that the Mamprusi closing tends to be a bit more elaborate when 'a visitor from outside the village is going home or a villager is going on a journey. The person leaving may say "Remain well"... and the one staying behind will utter one or more farewells in the form of commands to greet the people of the place of destination, ...'. It will be shown below that similar phrases are common in the language of leave-taking cross-linguistically.

Be that as it may, the Mamprusi situation provides some support for the explanation offered by Clark and French (1981: 4), following Goffman (1971), with respect to how elaborate farewells may be and

especially their complicated nature in urban American interaction. They surmise that '[I]n small close-knit societies in which continuing relations among individuals are taken for granted people may not need an elaborate form of leave-taking. In urban America, however, people generally need to reassure each other that the break in social contact is only temporary – that they are still acquainted and will resume contact at some time in the future.' Indeed the social function of leave-taking rituals seems to be the reaffirmation of good feelings between the interlocutors. As such the possibility of future contact may be desired or one can simply proffer good wishes to the other participant.

However, there is no certainty that this segment of social interaction is significant or marked in every culture. Even in those cultures where it is conventional to signal departure, the ways of doing so vary tremendously from culture to culture. In spite of this variation, I will show in Section 5 that the resources used across languages belong to a small set of speech acts, semantic domains and syntactic forms. As Firth (1972: 2) put it: 'There is great variety of custom in greeting and parting behaviour across the world. But this variety occurs through a range of relatively few, simple sets of words and non-verbal acts.'

### 3.0 *The structure of closings*

In most studies of the closing phase of social contact, a three-stage development is recognised: (i) A pre-closing phase in which one of the interactants signals his/her intention to terminate the encounter. This may be done by inviting the other party to bring the topic to a close. (ii) A leave-taking phase, which may involve the enactment of different social rituals such as thanking and phatic talk, as well as the exchange of farewells. (iii) The final departure where the interlocutors part physically. (See e.g. Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 317; Aijmer (1996: 59 ff.); Eble (1982: 440) and Clark and French (1981: 16).

This tripartite structure appears to be a universal – an etic grid – for ending social encounters. Naturally, we would expect that there will be differences in the cultural elaboration and the salience accorded each of the three phases in particular cultures. Furthermore, we would expect that in specific cultures the type of social encounter that is being ended would affect the realisation of the three phases of the closing. For instance Clark and French (1981: 16), who also propose three stages for goodbyes in urban American telephone conversations, observe that the

leave-taking section in which farewells are accomplished is optional. They explain that:

If the two parties need no such reaffirmation, the section will be omitted entirely.... if the break is to last long the section will consist of more elaborate preparations before ending with a goodbye exchange. The goodbye exchange (...) is ... the only obligatory part of leave-taking

I will show in the next section that in the southern Ghana cultural area, the type of encounter rather than the needs of the participants is what controls which phases of the closing are attained. The perceived duration of the break plays a role in the choice of the linguistic forms for the exchange of goodbyes. However, this is also tied to the destination and/or activity of the participants after the parting.

#### 4.0 *Negotiating closings in southern Ghana*

The closing of social encounters in the southern Ghana cultural area can be divided into three phases. The first, the pre-closing, is the phase in which an interactant asks permission from the other party to leave. The second, a leave-taking phase, may comprise a gesture of formal closure and/or a seeing off activity, and the exchange of farewells. The third, the departure phase, is when parting finally takes place. Each of the three segments of the closing will be discussed in turn and illustrated mainly from Ewe. For descriptive purposes, it is useful to make some distinctions in the types of encounters and in the roles of the participants (see Ameka 1991: 380 ff. for further justification).

Interactions between people who do not otherwise live in the same place or household may occur as chance meetings or as planned encounters. By chance meetings, I mean those encounters which occur just because the interlocutors happen to be in the same location at the same time. Encounters of this kind occur between people who meet in the street, in the neighbourhood, at the river side, on the way to the market, to the farm, to school etc. Such meetings are usually brief and involve the exchange of greeting routines and a minimal closing – the exchange of farewells and departure. By planned meetings, I mean encounters which have a defined social or transactional purpose. Such encounters may vary in their level of formality, in their length and

content and, above all, in their purpose. In this case the nature of the openings and closings is more intricate.

For both types of encounter, one can identify two participants or groups of participants: a host who is construed to be at home either in reality or at least functionally (cf. Naden 1980, 1985) and a visitor – one who is not at his/her home or does not function as such. Thus a trader in the market, a teacher at school, a farmer on the farm etc. can all be said to be functionally at home. A customer in the market, a visitor to a school or farm etc. is not at home. It is the visitor who should set the closing phase in motion.

#### 4.1 Permission to leave: how to open up closings in Ewe

As noted above, the pre-closing segment consists of the visitor signalling that they want to end the transaction by seeking permission from the host to depart. Typically, the visitor prefaces the request for permission to leave with a conditional clause like 'If there is nothing more to do, ...' then we will beg leave. It is only when the host agrees that the next phase of the closing can take place. Consider the following excerpt from an Ewe play portraying the closing phase of an interaction between Tsiami 'Spokesperson', the visitor, and Bokó 'Diviner', the host.

- 1 Tsiami: ... *fifíá* *mía-bíá* *mó*  
 ... now 1PL-ask way  
 lit: now we will ask the way  
 '...Now, we will ask permission to leave.'
- Bokó: *mó* *li* *faa*  
 way be:PRES:3SG freely  
*mía-de* *aféme* *nyúie*  
 2PL-reach home well  
 lit: There is way. Reach home well  
 'You may go. Have a safe journey home.'
- Tsiami: *yoo*  
 OK. (Nyaku 1980MS:9).

The closing segment in this example is fairly simple partly because it is a service encounter. The service of divination for which the Tsiami and his party came had been fulfilled and there is no need for an elaborate

closing. The response turn of Bokɔ contains two moves: the first is the response granting permission and the second is a farewell wish which effectively starts the leave-taking phase.

The request for permission to leave is a genuine one and can be answered positively or negatively. A positive response may be accompanied by other supportive acts like thanking the visitor for coming, and expressing displeasure to let them go. In the latter case, a justification is usually added that if one takes too much time from a visitor, s/he would only come to visit the next time if s/he can find a large stretch of time, which may be hard to come by. So in order to encourage the visitor to come again, permission is granted. If the response is negative the host signals that s/he would like the visitor to participate in other activities. In some cases this may involve invitation to have a meal or a drink with the host or to perform some other social ritual. The visitor can accede to the request to delay departure or may decline and repeat the request adding a justification for not being able to stay longer. If the visitor agrees to stay, at the end of the other activities that were introduced into the agenda, so to speak, s/he would have to re-enact the permission seeking.

The salience of this phase as a distinct one in the closing segment not only in Ewe, or in southern Ghana but in fact in West Africa is reflected in the folk linguistic action labels that are used to talk about the phase in different languages. It is also reflected in the transfer of this communicative practice to the varieties of English and French as used in that part of the world. The story is told of a Malian studying in Paris who was invited to dinner by a French lady. At the end of the evening the Malian wanted to signal his desire to close the interaction. He said to his hostess: 'On va demander la route.' Literally: 'One will ask for the road/route'. His hostess understood this to mean that he was asking for a route description of how to get back home. So she replied: 'On descend et on tourne à gauche ...' 'You go down and then you turn left ...'. Obviously the misunderstanding is due to the fact that the Malian was using the West African pre-closing strategy of requesting permission to leave in France where it is inappropriate. In Ghana, it is not uncommon to hear friends who are about to end an interaction jocularly say in English 'permission to fall out' and the host replies: permission granted.

The verbal expressions used to describe this activity in many of the languages of southern Ghana have a regular polysemic structure. The primary sense is 'to beg the way, to ask for the way' which is

metaphorically extended to 'to ask permission'. For instance, the Akan expression is *sɛ kwan* 'beg way'. The Ewe folk label for this act is *mɔ́bábíá* 'way asking/permission seeking.', a nominal which is derived from the verbal construction *bíá mɔ́* 'ask way, ask permission'. Furthermore, the speech formulae used to enact the phase make use of these expressions as illustrated in (1) above. Significantly, the formulae for enacting the request in all the languages is in the declarative mode with a progressive or the so called factative or aorist aspect marking. Thus in Sekpele, the language of the Likpe people in south-eastern Ghana the request can be phrased in one of two ways:

- 2 a N-lə kusú bɔ́-tɔ  
1SG-be way CM-ask  
'I am asking permission to leave'
- b N-tɔ kusú ló  
1SG-ask way UFP  
'I have asked permission to leave'

The response move like the Ewe one is simply

- 3 Kusu kpé  
way be  
'You have permission to leave'

This phase opens up the closing, to borrow a phrase from Schegloff and Sacks, and is optional. It is omitted if the meeting is a chance one. It is minimally realised if the encounter is an informal but purposeful one. It is obligatory and fairly elaborate if the situation is a formal one, such as traditional ceremonies of 'outdooing' of a baby and name giving, certain types of funerals, marriages, arbitrations at the chief's court etc.

The presence of such a phase is consistent with the general norm of interaction in these communities which enjoins interactants to give notice or forewarn their interlocutors before they perform any activities. There are illocutionary particles and routines which have just such forewarning function (see Ameka 1986, 1994 for some examples). There is even a speech act verb *klá* in Ewe whose core meaning can be paraphrased roughly as: 'I want you to know that this is what I am going to do'. One of the things children are drilled in is to give notice

before they leave the house, even if they were just going to play in the neighbourhood.

The rule of speaking associated with this phase of the closing can be represented in Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)-style 'cultural scripts' as follows (see e.g. Wierzbicka 1994, 1996).

- 4 When I am in the same place as someone  
 When I do not want to be in the same place any more  
 It is good if I say something like this to this person  
 I want you to say something that will cause me to know  
 if I can leave a short time after now

#### 4.2 The praxis of farewelling

After permission to leave has been granted, the interactants proceed to negotiate leave-taking. This second phase of closing, the leave-taking phase, can be subdivided into three parts: (i) a physical gesture marking the closure of formal and ceremonial encounters; (ii) the 'seeing-off' activity; and (iii) the exchange of farewells.

At the end of formal and ceremonial occasions such as marriages, name-giving and exchange of news visits, a physical gesture accompanied by a linguistic gesture is performed by all present to signal the formal end of the encounter. Typically a spokesperson is asked by the host to lead all present in this. The ritual has two stages: a preparatory stage and the performance. The core of the ritual is that all present get up from their seats a little and sit down again. This process is accompanied by a linguistic gesture said by all simultaneously as they return to their seats. The linguistic noise made is: [hěě] depicting the noise associated with sitting down. This action is described in Ewe folk terms with the expression in (5a) or (5b):

- 5 a así-ḍé-ḍé      zi(kpui)      tó  
 hand-RED-put      seat      edge  
 'putting hands on the edge of seat'
- b zi(kpui)-lé-lé  
 seat-RED-catch  
 'seat holding'

This closing act is performed like this: first, the spokesperson warns all the people present that the elder is going to pick up his chair with a phrase like the following:

- 6 Tógbui      bé      ye      le      zikpui      lé      gé  
 grandfather say LOG be:PRES seat catch INGR  
 Lit.: Grandfather says he is going to hold his seat  
 'The elder (or chief) says he is about to get up'

He then states that the elder has got up and on hearing this all the people get up a little and sit down again. A sample expression for this second part is:

- 7 Tógbui      bé      ye      lé      zikpui  
 grandfather say LOG catch seat  
 'The elder (or chief) says he has got up!'

This part could occur at the end of any 'sitting' encounter. However, the prototypical situation for its enactment is at the end of happy ceremonial rituals like marriages and name-giving. Because of this, one of the felicity conditions for its enactment is that it should be attributed to an elder. Notice that the instruction for it to be performed is attributed to Tógbui 'grandfather, elder, ancestor' and is performed on his behalf by an intermediary – a manifestation of the triadic mode of communication that is prevalent in West African societies (see e.g. Yankah 1995). It follows that this sub-part of the leave-taking phase is omitted in informal and chance encounters.

The other two subparts of the leave-taking phase can occur with varying degrees of elaborateness at the end of any social encounter. When the permission to leave phase has been accomplished and, for formal encounters, the formal closure ritual performed, the host can offer to see the visitor off. It is a social convention in Ghana (and elsewhere) that the participant 'at home' or their representative should accompany the visitor as they leave to a place beyond the bounds of the home. They should not just accompany them to the door or the gate of the home but they should go for some distance along the way. This may entail accompanying the visitor to the bus stop or station, if the visitor was going to travel. The literal meanings of the Ewe expressions, given below, used to describe this event might help to throw some light on the way the convention is conceptualised.

- 8 a dé afɔ mɔ me ná ame  
 put foot way containing region of for person  
 'to walk the way with someone'
- b dʒó ame dʒá  
 send person in the distance  
 'to see someone off'

It is impolite if a host does not offer to do this. If the host himself cannot do this, they should appoint a representative to deputise for them.

If the host goes to see the visitor off then the exchange of farewells part can happen on the way while the seeing off is taking place, or at the point where the host wishes to stop. However, if a representative of the host is the one who sees the visitor off then the exchange of farewells between the host and the visitor happens before the seeing off. The representative and the visitor can of course exchange farewells at the end of the seeing off. The exchange of farewells consists of the enactment of different speech acts which are discussed in Section 5.

The departure phase of the closing may be signalled by different forms of behaviour. The parties may shake hands. As they drift apart they could wave to one another sometimes accompanied by a repetition of the English loan *bye-bye*

5.0 *The language of leave-taking*

Crosslinguistically, speech formulae used in the farewell part of leave-taking belong to a small set of specific speech acts. One common feature of these terminal expressions is that they obey the 'Pollyanna' Principle, that is, they stress the positive and favourable aspects of the break in contact that is about to occur. There are four broad semantic types of these expressions. Each of the semantic types correlates with some formal property. Examples of the different types presented from Ewe exhaust the range of such farewell formulae in the language. Illustrations from English and other languages are adduced to clarify the claims being made.

The first semantic type is blessings. Formulae are used to invoke the blessings of supernatural beings on the one leaving. *God bless you*, which can still be heard at the end of social interactions in English is an

example. Such forms occur even more frequently in Ewe. Consider the following blessing of a father to a son who is about to leave for another town to look for work.

- 9 Sodza ná-dʒi ná wò,  
 God SBJV-shine to 2SG  
 tɔgbui zikpui-wó ná-kplɔ wò  
 grandfather stool-PL SBJV-lead 2SG  
 de tefé si yi-mí nè-le lá  
 reach place REL go-PROG 2SG-be:PRES TP  
 'May God be gracious to you, and may the stools of our  
 ancestors lead you to where you are going' (Akpati 1980:43)

The second semantic type of expressions are those which the interactants use to wish each other well. English farewells such as *God be with you till we meet again*, *Goodbye*, and the time of day expressions *Good morning*, *Good afternoon* and *Good evening* used as farewells are one set of examples. Other forms that belong here are *Enjoy yourself*, *Have a nice day* and *Have fun*. One feature of these expressions is that they involve positive predicates such as 'good' and 'nice'. Curiously, in spite of the fact that bare imperatives in Anglo-American interpersonal communication are not preferred (cf. Wierzbicka 1991 Ch. 2 and references there) a subclass of the expressions have a bare imperative structure. In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987: 99) comment on this: 'Greetings and farewells and in general rituals of beginning and terminating encounters often contain bald-on record commands.' They argue that these are consistent with the general tendency where actions that are in the direct interest of the addressee are usually phrased as bare imperatives (cf. Laver 1981: 295).

In Ewe where imperative structures are not tabooed in social interaction, several farewell wishes are in the imperative mode. Significantly, such forms contain the positive value predicate *nyó* 'be good' or its derivative similar to the English situation. One group of these Ewe expressions are used to address someone departing on a trip.

- 10 a Hé-de nyúie b Zɔ nyuie c Tsɔ afɔ nyúí  
 CON-reach well walk well take foot good  
 'Get there well' 'Travel well' 'Safe journey'

All these expressions make use of a verb of motion. Expressions similar to the Ewe *zɔ nyúie* in (10b) above are found in other Ghanaian languages. For example, its equivalent in Akan is *nanti yie* 'walk well'. It appears that the prevalence of this semantic formula (cf. Pawley 1992) in indigenous Ghanaian languages is responsible for the ubiquitous use of 'Safe journey' in Ghanaian English. Another pan-Ghanaian formula is the one used by the one departing to wish the people staying behind well. This may be paraphrased as 'Remain well' as we have seen earlier with respect to the Mamprusi. The Ewes say:

- |    |                         |        |       |
|----|-------------------------|--------|-------|
| 11 | Nɔ                      | anyí   | nyúie |
|    | be:NPRES                | ground | well  |
|    | 'Stay well/Remain well' |        |       |

Yet another common well-wishing expression which makes use of a verb of motion and the adverb well is one that is used when the destination of the person departing is assumed to be his/her home. In Dutch one says *welthuis* 'get home well'. In Ewe, one uses the form in (12) below.

- |    |                                    |                            |       |
|----|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| 12 | de                                 | afé-me                     | nyúie |
|    | reach                              | house-containing region of | well  |
|    | 'Get home well/ Reach home safely' |                            |       |

Some 'good night' expressions in Ewe also fall together with these well-wishing expressions. What they share with the formulae noted so far is the positive value terms. Thus if people who are parting are about to go to bed they may say the forms in (13) to each other.

- |    |   |                        |             |   |     |              |       |
|----|---|------------------------|-------------|---|-----|--------------|-------|
| 13 | a | Dɔ-dɔ                  | né-nyó      | b | Mlɔ | anyí         | nyúie |
|    |   | RED-pass nights        | IMP-be good |   |     | lie down     | well  |
|    |   | 'Let sleeping be good' |             |   |     | 'Sleep well' |       |

A final set of Ewe expressions used for well wishing make use of the subjunctive or the optative imperative, a feature consistent with their well-wishing function. In addition they have positive value predicates. They are used to wish good luck to people departing either for the journey or in general.

- |    |   |                                 |                      |              |
|----|---|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 14 | a | Mɔ                              | me                   | né-fá        |
|    |   | way                             | containing region of | IMP-cool     |
|    |   | 'May the road be cool/peaceful' |                      |              |
|    | b | Mɔ                              | dzi                  | ná-ko        |
|    |   | way                             | upper surface        | SBJV-clear   |
|    |   | 'May the way be clear'          |                      |              |
|    | c | É-me                            |                      | ná-nyó       |
|    |   | 3SG-containing region of        |                      | SBJV-be good |
|    |   | 'May it (its contents) be good' |                      |              |

The third semantic type of well-wishing terminal expressions are those the interactants use to indicate their hope of future contact. English forms like *See you later/soon/tomorrow/next year* etc., *Catch you later* and the Strine (Australian) vulgar *Cop you later* belong to this type. In Ewe, there are three sorts of forms that are used for this function. One set of formulae are those that generally affirm that the interactants will make contact again. There are two variants for this. Interestingly, one makes use of the repetitive marker *ga* 'again' and the verbal expression which translates as 'meet' (see (15a)). The other makes use of the prospective aspect which is used to express imminent future and the verbal expression which translates as 'make contact' (see (15b)).

- |    |   |                                       |                     |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 15 | a | Mía-ga-dó                             | go                  |
|    |   | 1PL:IRR-REP-put on                    | 'contact'           |
|    |   | 'We will meet again'                  |                     |
|    | b | Míé-le                                | go wɔ gé            |
|    |   | 1PL-be:PRES                           | 'contact' make INGR |
|    |   | 'We will be making contact presently' |                     |

A second set of the Ewe forms are used to request the one departing to come back quickly and safely. The expressions are:

- |    |   |                     |      |                            |         |      |
|----|---|---------------------|------|----------------------------|---------|------|
| 16 | a | Va                  | kábá | b                          | Gbɔ     | kábá |
|    |   | come quickly        |      | go-come                    | quickly |      |
|    |   | 'Come back quickly' |      | 'Go and come back quickly' |         |      |



Unlike the expressions in (10) and (12) above, whose propositional content essentially is a wish for the addressee to travel well to the place of destination, the propositional content of these formulae in (16) focus on the coming back of the addressee. The implication is that when they come back then the interactants will meet again. They are used in situations where the speaker assumes that the addressee is going to a place which is not far away and that s/he is not going to be away for a long time. As such they are used by people in the same household who are parting to go about their daily duties or others who meet someone on the way to some place close to the village and will come back after a short while. For example, when a child is leaving for school and will return home at the end of the day, the parents can farewell him/her with these formulae. Similarly when someone meets people going to the riverside, the market, the farm or just visiting another village nearby and will return on the same day, the forms can be used to say goodbye. The propositional content of these expressions 'I want you to go and come back quickly' underlies the Ghanaian English parting expression *go come*.

The third set of the future contact function type in Ewe are 'good night' expressions which focus on the waking up process. The speaker in these cases expresses the hope that s/he and the addressee would wake up so that they could meet again. These expressions are:

- 17 a Né ke mí-kpé  
if open 1PL-meet  
'Lets meet when day breaks'  
(idiomatically: 'See you/Talk to you tomorrow/in the morning')
- b Máwú né-fɔ mí  
God IMP-rise 1PL  
'May God wake us up'
- c Zã mé-dó haɖé o  
night NEG-put on yet NEG  
'Night has not yet fallen'

The expression in (17c) suggests an optimism on the part of the speaker that there is the possibility that s/he and the addressee might meet again

that day before night falls. This may not happen in reality. The semantics of the expressions in (17) are described in Section 6

To sum up the future contact type expressions, it may be observed that they share a number of linguistic features. First, they tend to be declarative and, in English, they are mostly elliptical. The imperatives that occur in Ewe have the force of a wish. Similarly one can find expressions marked for the subjunctive or irrealis or the future. Lexically they contain temporal adverbs with a no too distant future orientation such as *later, tomorrow, soon* etc. and markers of repetition such as *again* (cf. *re* in French *au revoir*). A significant feature is the use of verbs of contact such as *see, catch, meet, talk* etc. Interestingly, the verbs of contact used in Ghanaian languages tend to be those that translate as 'meet', i.e. make physical contact. Apart from the Ewe forms we have seen one can add formulae from Akan (18a below) and Sekpele (18b below) which use 'meet' verbs. By contrast, the expressions used in European languages tend to be based on the verb 'see' (cf. the English *See you*; the Dutch *tot ziens* 'till seeing'; and the German *auf Wiedersehen*)

- 18 a Ye-be-shia (bio) b Bo-tsyá kú li-tsyitsyó  
1PL-INGR-meet again 1PL-meet at CM-evening  
'We will meet again' 'We will meet in the evening'

The fourth and last semantic type of farewell expressions are those used to request the person departing to remember the host to those at the place of their destination. English expressions like *Greetings to X* (cf. the Dutch *de groeten aan X*); *Remember me to Z*; *Give my love to Y* are of this type.

The Ewe expression of this type literally means 'I greet the people at place X'. This is the frame the speaker in the following excerpt uses. The extract illustrates the different types of expressions used in a farewell. It begins with the remembrance type, continues with a blessing and finishes with good wishes for the addressee.

- 19 Me-dó gbe ná Tɔgbúí vɛnya, Fia Srí ...  
1SG-say voice to grandfather Wenya. chief Sri  
Gbedzɛha kplé Zigã kpakplé búbu-a-wó kátá-kátá  
G. and Z. and other-DEF-PL all-all  
'I greet Tɔgbui vɛnya, Chief Sri, ... Gbedzɛha, Zigã and all the others'

Máwú-gǎ	kplé	máwú	búbu-a-wó	kpakplé
God-big	and	god	other-DEF-PL	and
míá	tógbúi-wó	ná-kpó	mia	ta
1PL	grandfather-PL	SBJV-see	2PL	head
álé	bé	mia-de	dedie	
such	COMP	2PL-reach	safely	

'May the Supreme God and the other gods as well as the ancestors watch over you so that you may reach home safely.'

Mó	dzi	ná-kɔ
way	upper surface	SBJV-clear

'May the way be clear.' (Nyaku 1980MS: 36)

Evidently, the semantic types of farewell expressions cut across a typology of parting situations. For instance, some 'good night' expressions in Ewe are of the well-wishing type while others belong to the prospect for future contact type, as we have seen. Similarly, different equivalents of 'Safe journey' distribute over the same two categories.

One final remark to be made with respect to the language of farewells is that crosslinguistically, such expressions never have an interrogative form. The same conclusion was reached by Eble (1982) in her study of farewells in college slang. Questions occur, however, very commonly as greeting routines (cf. Coupland et al. 1992). There is thus an asymmetry between greetings and farewells – a piece of evidence that does not corroborate the intuitively felt relation between the two which has been reflected in studies on the margins of social interaction as noted above.

### 6.0 *The semantics of some Ewe ways of saying good night*

Thus far, I have described leave-taking in Ewe and in the southern Ghana cultural area within a near-universal framework of the structure and language of farewells. I now want to draw attention to some Ewe specific features of the use and meaning of leave-taking expressions focusing on the three fairly Ewe specific formulae in (17) above. The method of semantic representation follows the principles of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach as developed by Anna Wierzbicka (and her colleagues).

There are several factors that determine the choice of a farewell routine expression in a particular situation. Sociolinguistic factors that generally control language use such as age, status, gender, style and dialect background also influence the choice of parting formulae in context. For instance, *héde nyúie* 'safe journey' and *zɔ nyúie* 'safe journey' are dialect variants. The use of 'good night' expressions involving the verb *dó* 'pass the night' and its derivatives is constrained by age because of its sexual connotations. Some speakers even claim that *dɔdɔ nényó* 'May passing the night (sleeping) be good' should only be used to couples.

In addition to these sociolinguistic factors, the choice of farewell routine expressions in Ewe is dependent on at least three context specific or pragmatic factors: (i) What does the speaker perceive the visitor/addressee will do immediately after the encounter? For instance, is the speaker going to travel in the general sense of the word, i.e. move away from where they are? If so what is the departing person's destination? Is s/he going to his/her home in the same village; in a different village or to the farm or to the market? (ii) What time of the day is the parting taking place? Is it night time, and is the interlocutor going to bed? Or is there the possibility that the participants will meet again in the same day? (iii) How long is the separation between the participants perceived to last? Is the departing person going to a far-off place or a close by place? These are the decision making questions which play a role in the choice of the routines. The influence of some of these on the choice of the 'good night' expressions discussed here will become evident in the semantic description (see Ameka (1991: 619-627) for a discussion of these factors in relation to the other parting expressions).

### 6.1 'Night has not yet fallen'

The formula *zā médó hadé o* 'night has not yet fallen' is used when the parting takes place late in the afternoon or early in the evening, a time when people are not yet ready to go to bed. Since the speaker is aware that it is not yet bed time though it is night time or close to night time, s/he does not want to say the kind of thing that one should say to someone who is about to retire to bed such as a wish to pass the night well. Rather the speaker uses an expression which leaves open the

possibility that *s/he* may meet the addressee again before bed time, since the night is still young.

The literal meaning of the formula is very instructive in this respect. It is simply a statement that night has not fallen yet. The implication is that people can still meet each other before night falls. The illocutionary purpose of the formula is that the speaker wants the addressee to think that contrary to what people may think there is the possibility that they would meet again before night falls.

I propose the following explication for *zā mēdó hadjé o*

- 20 I know you and I will not be in the same place after now  
 One could think this: because of the time of day,  
     you and I cannot meet each other again today  
 I want you to think that I don't think the same  
 I want to say something to you because of it  
 I say: night will fall some time after now  
 I say it because I want to cause you to think that  
     we can meet each other again today

This explication captures the idea that the speaker does not commit him/herself to meeting the addressee again but leaves the possibility open. The second component is meant to capture the possible assumption that the interactants might not meet again. The only constraint on the use of this formula is the time of day, otherwise it is a fairly neutral phrase.

## 6.2 'When day breaks, let's meet'

The formula *Né ke mí kpé* 'When day breaks, let's meet' is used by people who are about to part at night and it is understood that they are going to bed. It can be said to someone with whom one sleeps in the same bed just before they each fall asleep. The message of the speaker is that *s/he* wishes that *s/he* and the addressee meet when it is day break. As noted above, it is equivalent to English expressions like *See you in the morning/tomorrow*. The Ewe expression like the English one does not make any explicit reference to sleeping itself. For this reason, it can be used in association with other formulae related to sleeping in the same move by a speaker. For example, the following dialogue may occur between two interlocutors who are parting at night:

- 21 A: Na           dó agbe  
       SBJV:2SG sleep life  
       Lit.: You should sleep life. i.e. 'Sound sleep'  
 B: Yoo, mló anyí nyúie, né ke mí-kpé  
       OK lie down well if open 1PL-meet  
       'OK, sleep well, let's meet when day breaks.'

On the basis of the discussion so far, I propose the following explication for the speech formula *né ke míkpé*

- 22 I think you and I know that we cannot say things to one  
     another  
         for some time because we have to sleep  
 I want us to be able to say things to each other after that  
 I want to say something to you because of that  
 I say: I want us to be able to meet when it is day time  
 I think I can cause it to happen because of what I say  
 I say it because I want to cause you to think I feel something  
     good towards you

It should be pointed out that parting expressions at night unlike general farewell expressions do not entail the idea that the interlocutors are going to be physically separated from each other. These 'good night' expressions can be used by people who sleep in the same place. This is the rationale for the way in which the first component is phrased. The use of 'you' and 'I' and 'us' in some of the components reflects the use of the pronoun *mí* '1PL' in the speech formula.

## 6.3 'May God wake us up'

The expression *Máwú néfó mí* 'May God wake us up' reflects some religious and cultural ideas of the Ewes. An inference that can be drawn from the literal meaning of the formula is that the Ewes believe that their sleeping and waking up is in some ways controlled by God. If He does not allow it, people who go to sleep may not wake up again. This is consistent with the Ewe view that God is the source of things that happen to people, which is also operative in speech formulae used when something good happens to people, that is for felicitations. One of such

expressions literally means 'God has worked' (see Ameka 1987, 1991 for the details).

The *Máwú néfó mí* expression can be used by people sleeping in the same place as a formula for 'good night'. It could be thought of as a kind of prayer or wish that people make for one another before they go to bed. Since this expression, like *Né ke míkpé* 'When day breaks let's meet', does not focus on sleeping, it can be used in combination with some other expressions that pertain to sleeping per se.

To account for the range of use of, and the cultural assumptions that underlie, this speech formula, I propose the following explication:

- 23 I think you and I know we cannot say things to one another  
     for some time after now because we have to sleep  
 I think it will be good for us to say things to one another after  
 that  
 I think we know that it cannot happen  
     if God does not want it to happen  
 I want God to cause it to happen  
 I say: I want this: God should wake us up  
 I think God will do it if he wants to  
 I think I can cause it to happen because of what I say  
 I say it because I want you to know I feel something good  
     towards you

The speech formula contains the third person imperative marker which is used by a speaker to express the wish that someone should do something. This is the reason for the way the propositional content or dictum, to use Wierzbicka's phrasing, is formulated. Since it is an imperative, the speaker assumes that by saying it s/he can cause the thing to happen. This is accounted for in the last but one component. The purpose of this utterance would appear to be the expression of good feelings towards the addressee.

### 7.0 Conclusion

The fact that leave-taking is very seldom discussed on its own has obscured the features of this communicative event. Even questions of its universality or culture specificity raised in the present study are couched in terms of its relation to greeting behaviour (cf. Firth 1972;

Youssouf et al. 1976). In this paper, I have described leave-taking in its own right with respect to the universals of the structure and the language of farewells. I have shown that parting tends to be made up of three stages – a pre-closing, a leave-taking and a final departure. This structure has been argued to be applicable to the practice of leave-taking in southern Ghana and in Ewe. The pre-closing phase in these societies involves the negotiation of permission to take leave.

In relation to the language, I have argued that farewell expressions universally belong to four broad semantic types: blessings, reciprocal good wishes, plans for future contacts and remembrances to people at the departing person's destination. The formal correlates of each of these types were highlighted. One striking tendency that was noted is that the languages of Ghana use the verb 'meet' while European languages tend to use the verb 'see' as the prospect for future contact verb. Furthermore, in terms of general speech acts, it was observed that interrogatives are entirely absent in farewell expressions while questions occur as greeting routines. This is one instance of an asymmetry between greetings and partings which calls into question the prevalent assumption in the literature that the two are counterparts.

In closing I want to suggest that parting or farewell is more aptly a counterpart of welcoming. To be more precise, I want to show that there are features of parting behaviour that correspond to welcoming. This is not to be unexpected since welcoming also occurs in the margins of conversation. In fact, evidence from English, which is usually used to support the claim that greeting and parting are counterparts, does not provide a single perspective but different perspectives on the relation between parting and different components of opening rituals. On the one hand, Firth argues that even though in many respects a 'parting' corresponds to 'welcoming': 'Yet to signalise a departure is not the mirror image of "welcome" [in the sense of "it is good you have come here" FA.], which would presumably be ill-go, but a goodwill term "farewell"' (Firth 1972: 7-8). Thus good feelings are expressed in both welcoming and parting routines. The discussions of Wierzbicka (1987), on the other hand, point out that farewell and good-bye – the lexical items involved in parting – seem to correspond to different events in the opening phase of social encounters. She observes that 'To farewell a person constitutes to some extent a mirror image of welcoming' (p. 222) and 'good-bye seems to be almost symmetrical with respect to greet' (p. 224). It must be emphasised however that Wierzbicka notes that the two are not fully symmetrical

counterparts. Nevertheless, if we assume that welcoming and greeting take place in the opening, and if Wierzbicka is right then at least the farewell (leave-taking) phase in the closing corresponds to welcoming and the departure phase – termination of contact corresponds to greetings.

There is an obvious symmetry between farewelling and welcoming in Ewe based on the factors that determine the choice of the routines used. There is a set of formulae that are used to welcome someone when the person has been away for a long time and is coming from a far away place. These are *atuu!*, *dzaa!*, and *wòé zɔ* 'you have walked' (Ameka 1992). Similarly someone who is departing to a far away place and will be away for a long time will be farewelled with the 'safe journey expressions' *héde nyúie* 'reach well' and *zɔ nyúie* 'walk well'. There is a similar discernible symmetrical pattern between the sets of formulaic expressions used to welcome or farewell people in situations involving a shorter period of time and shorter distances.

The boundaries of the beginning and ending of social interaction are recognised in many societies but by no means all. In the opening phase there may be welcoming as well as greeting. In the closing phase there may be an intricate leave-taking. Each of these are distinct segments and are said to generate different kinds of emotions. Openings are associated with pleasure while closings are associated with pain and a sense of loss (cf. Firth 1972: 7). In spite of the pain associated with parting, I hope I have demonstrated in this paper that it possesses some significant properties and that it deserves to be studied in its own right for different cultures and different languages.

*Leiden University*  
2300 RA Leiden – NL

#### Abbreviations

CM = class marker; CONN = connective; COMP = complementiser; DEF = definite article; IMP = imperative; INGR = ingressive; IRR = irrealis; LOG = logophoric pronoun; NEG = negative; NPRES = non-present; PL = plural marker; PRES = present; PROG = progressive; RED = reduplicative; REL = relative clause introducer; REP = repetitive; SBJV = subjunctive; SG = singular; TP = terminal particle; UFP = utterance final particle; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person. Ewe orthographic 'f' is phonetic  $\phi$  and 'v' is  $\beta$

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