Politeness in Language Use in Tswana Kgotla Meetings*

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Peggy Kololo · Ethelbert E. Kari (2021), Politeness in Language Use in Tswana Kgotla Meetings. *Studies in Linguistics* 59, 215-252. This paper focuses on politeness in language use in kgotla meetings among the Tswana ethnic groups of Balete, Bangwato and Bakhurutshe. It investigates how interlocutors' use of language reflects social behaviour and how it relates to the conventions of interaction, such as openings and closings and other typical features of meetings, in kgotla meetings. The data in this paper was obtained from video recordings and interviews and was qualitatively analysed based on the communities of practice (CofP) approach (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992) and on Watts' (2003) view of politeness. The results indicate that polite behaviour occurs both linguistically and non-linguistically during interactions and is enacted according to the norms of Tswana ethnic culture. Furthermore, the results indicate that the use of figurative language is evident in the interlocutors' discourse. The paper concludes that interactions in kgotla meetings show polite behaviour, and that interactions in a socio-cultural context are largely dependent on various factors that affect the

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Key Words: Botswana, communities of practice, kgotla, politeness, speech acts

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with issues relating to language and society. It aims at providing insights into the phenomenon of politeness, which is a discourse feature that is noticeable when people communicate. Different approaches have been used by linguists to analyse politeness. The difference between these approaches is primarily in the emphasis placed on the speaker or the addressee or both in respect of behaviour that is considered polite. Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory has been the most influential theory of politeness despite its inadequacies. Some of the inadequacies, which include not taking into account the socio-cultural factors involved in polite behaviour and the use of isolated requests or elicited responses instead of contextually embedded data (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1996), have resulted in a shift towards investigating politeness based on linguistic and extralinguistic factors (Pilegaard, 1997).

Research on language use is varied as it covers different domains, such as institutions (Backhaus, 2009), the military (Halbe, 2011) and social media networks (Chiluwa, 2012). Research has also been carried out in respect of various aspects of politeness that include speech acts such as compliments (Johnson and Roen, 1992), apologies (García, 1989), requests (Bremner, 2006), address forms (Sommer and Lupapula, 2012), greetings (Akindele, 2007; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2013) among others. Studies on various speech acts abound and have shown how they are realised in different speech communities. Most of these studies have been influenced by Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978). One general finding of these studies is that the context in which speech acts occur is significant for one to understand

what is being conveyed.

In recent years, research has explored politeness across cultures in different workplace contexts (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 2006; Holmes, Marra and Schnurr, 2008), including meetings which are contexts that involve complex human interactions (Mumby, 1988). Most research on meeting talk has examined the discursive strategies used in the management of meetings (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1996). Few studies on politeness have been carried out on Bantu languages but not much work has been done on the phenomenon in Botswana. A study that seeks to explore in more detail realisations of politeness on meeting talk in a cultural context that is undergoing transformation is long overdue.

Although some work has been done with regard to the kgotla as a traditional court system in Botswana (Moumakwa, 2010), relatively little linguistic research has been done on kgotla meetings as a context (Bagwasi, 2012). It has been observed that there still exists a gap as regards the dynamics of politeness and language use that is influenced by culture, the relationship between interlocutors and factors that are part of the interaction in kgotla meetings. As a way of bridging this gap, the present paper investigates politeness in language use in Tswana kgotla meetings. Three Tswana ethnic groups: Balete, Bangwato and Bakhurutshe were selected for this study, which focuses on how interlocutors' language reflects social behaviour and how it relates to the conventions of interaction in kgotla meetings. While the aim of this paper is not to contrast different ethnic communities that fall under the Tswana ethnic group, the purpose of the study is to carry out an in-depth investigation of how members of this group express politeness in kgotla meetings. The study moves away from the traditional views in the field of politeness and pursues a line of research on politeness according to Watts (2003) which includes both 'folk' understanding of politeness and the researcher's analysis of interactions, and the CofP (Wenger, 1998), making it possible to analyse politeness in naturally-occurring interactions. Through this framework of analysis, the interplay of context and social norms of interaction is explored. This is a particularly interesting area

of research regulated by complex culture-specific norms that enable one to understand the relationship between language use, context and the interlocutors' culture.

It is against this background that the researchers examine politeness by examining politeness strategies, social factors that determine the use of politeness in kgotla meetings and the influences that affect the use of polite language in this traditional cultural setting. The kgotla is a language domain where public meetings take place and authentic language is used by people of the Tswana ethnic groups. Research on how politeness is realised in this context has the potential to advance a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

2. Background

Botswana, formerly known as Bechuanaland Protectorate, is a Southern African country consisting of various ethnic groups which speak different languages. According to Guthrie (1948), Tswana[1] (Setswana) is a Bantu language spoken in Southern Africa. Tswana consists of a cluster of dialects that are mutually intelligible. "Setswana is the national language of Botswana spoken by 78.6% of the population" (Batibo, 2008: 17). It is also spoken in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

The kgotla (pl. dikgotla) in Botswana is a setting, which has been a central feature of Tswana life, where the business of the people was conducted (Makgala, 2004). A kgotla meeting, called by the *kgosi* 'chief' at the main kgotla, was a gathering of the *morafe* 'ethnic group', which mainly consisted of adult initiated males who sat in the kgotla according to their ranks (Ngcongco, 1989). The senior relatives to the chief, headmen and his advisers surrounded him while the rest of the *morafe* sat in front of him according to their wards.

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[1] The term 'Tswana' also refers to the major ethnic group in Botswana – the Tswana ethnic group.

The *kgosi* 'chief' was a respected 'hereditary ruler (Mgadla and Campbell, 1989: 49) who held all powers of government and acted according to Tswana custom in the interest of the community as a whole'. According to Gulbrandsen (2012), the British ruled the Bechuanaland Protectorate indirectly through the Tswana rulers and in the late 1920s and 1930s, the British colonial administration sought to regulate and curtail chiefly powers. The Native Tribunals proclamations made by the British colonial administration (Schapera, 1938) introduced many changes into the system, though the chiefs still performed many of their duties and enjoyed many of their former privileges. Since this study is carried out at a time when there are changes affecting traditional institutions in Botswana, we argue that an in-depth analysis of the politeness phenomenon within an ethnic group adds more value to the analysis of a context and variables that are involved during interactions.

3. Significance of the Study

In exploring politeness as an aspect of communication and as a system of acceptable social behaviour that governs the way people interact with one another in a given context, this paper has the potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the kgotla as a socio-cultural context and politeness as a phenomenon in face-to-face interactions at cultural meetings. This study will help in creating awareness that politeness is one of the pillars of harmony and mutual understanding between participants of different social positions, age, gender and other factors, and that politeness has the potential to prevent friction and conflicts among people.

This work will also provide the field of sociolinguistics with valuable data on how politeness is expressed in Tswana socio-cultural context. Botswana is populated by people who have similar and, in some cases, varied cultures. These varied cultures account for why some Botswana nationals use different linguistic features such as apologies, compliments, etc. in their social interactions. The linguistic features observed in social interactions among

people of different ethnic groups in Botswana need to be researched and documented. By looking closely at patterns of language use, this study will account for the phenomenon of politeness in kgotla meetings in Botswana.

Research on politeness in the kgotla is also significant for researchers in language-related disciplines. It provides a detailed understanding of how different linguistic features are associated with different social meanings in different contexts. Researchers will become aware of different ways of expressing politeness in the Setswana language and recognise the social meanings behind them. Researchers will also have a better understanding of socio-cultural life in Botswana through the linguistic practices observed at the local administrative unit – the kgotla.

Through this study, participants at kgotla meetings will be more conscious of each other's communication strategies as they interact during meetings. As people in their different cultural groups use politeness strategies in their daily communication, there is need to be well informed about interactional features that facilitate communication. This will help the people to make informed decisions and also to be aware of societal values. Tensions or misunderstandings that arise during meetings can be easily diffused if participants maintain friendly relations and promote social harmony among themselves. All in all, this study will encourage participants to work towards mutual understanding and social cohesion in their respective communities.

4. Methodology

The data collection method used in this paper is qualitative, relying on the actual exchanges of the interlocutors as well as other contextual variables, such as age, status and gender, that have a bearing on the phenomenon under study. Various methods used in collecting data for this study include observation, audio recording and interview. Observation was used to collect data on politeness using an observation protocol (Cresswell, 2014), paying particular attention to the setting and the cultural norms of the participants. The use of video recording was found to be invaluable in the study, as it

captured both verbal and non-verbal forms of politeness.

Group interviews and discussions were also carried out with a select group of participants in the kgotla area, after the scheduled kgotla meetings had ended. In fact, Spencer-Oatey (2000) recommends the need to supplement discourse data with post-event interview comments. A total of thirty (30) participants were interviewed: ten (10) people from each of the three (3) sampled dikgotla. A purposive sample included a select group of participants in the village who were elders and who had experience and vast knowledge about culture, the kgotla system and politeness in their communities; while the rest of the participants were members of the community whose ages ranged from twenty-two to seventy (22-70). The data collected was collated and documented in order to carry out an in-depth evaluation of politeness, language use and contextual variables.

The data from the kgotla meetings was obtained from five encounters in three kgotla meetings among the Balete at Ramotswa, the Bangwato at Serowe, and the Bakhurutshe at Tonota. These ethnic groups are coded X, Y and Z respectively. The participants who attended kgotla meetings at the time of the study include chiefs and deputy chiefs of the villages or their representatives, the villagers (men and women) and some officials who visited those villages. Needless to say that permission was obtained from the chiefs and the interviewees prior to the collection of the data.

5. Theoretical framework

This study is based on Watts' (2003) theory of politeness and Wenger's (1998) communities of practice (CofP). According to Watts (2003), the analysis of politeness involves identification, description and explanation of patterns of behaviour that are accepted socially to achieve effective communication in a context within the participants' culture, and a sociolinguistic theory of politeness. Watts (2003) proposes two approaches – emic and etic – to interpret politeness as a socio-cultural concept within a context. The emic analysis of politeness involves individuals' evaluation

of what constitutes polite or impolite behaviour during interaction, also known as 'folk interpretation'. Interviewees interpret utterances based on cultural and historical backgrounds and social norms that are shared by members of a particular society or a community of practice. In the etic analysis, the researcher discusses the data presented based on the theory adopted and the politeness instances in the context of the meetings recorded.

A combination of the two approaches to politeness is advantageous to analyse polite behaviour in the kgotla meetings during interactions. Social norms are important and they enable participants to use and interpret utterances within their CofP. Politeness norms are based on linguistic and social resources and research on politeness needs to pay attention to both linguistic and non-linguistic interactions represented by speakers and addressees; their intentions and how they are interpreted. Watts' theory of politeness makes it possible to 'locate possible realisations of polite or impolite behaviour and offers a way of assessing how the members themselves may have evaluated that behaviour' (Watts, 2003: 19). Watts' (2003) approach brings together features that will help us to examine politeness in kgotla meetings.

The second approach to the meeting discourse is the Communities of Practice (CofP) approach based on Wenger's (1998) notion of 'community of practice', which explains and describes learning that occurs in apprenticeship situations. This framework was applied to the context of language and gender research by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) who define the CofP as:

> an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a CofP is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464)

The CofP is a useful framework that explores interaction within a group of people through analysing discourse in a particular context. Linguistic patterns emerge as speakers engage in activities in their CofP, and their actions are observable and affected by variables such as gender, age, etc. This approach offers a new dimension to the manner in which notions of linguistic politeness are conceived.

Furthermore, the CofP approach is useful to the extent that it enables us to examine the 'practices of participants that involve aspects of behaviour' (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999: 175), which will reveal politeness in kgotla meetings. The kgotla and members of the community become a CofP where language use of the people is examined, and where group membership is constructed.

Three elements of a CofP are identified by Wenger (1998), namely: mutual engagement, a joint negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire developed or accumulated over a period of time. Mutual engagement suggests evidence of regular interactions among members of a CofP which can be formal or informal, discussing issues that affect the community in forums such as debates or meetings. In a joint negotiated enterprise, a community comes together to share ideas on how to tackle issues that are before them. Decisions taken are binding on all participants, and members of the CofP express politeness that is guided by their own social norms, and their own interpretation of such behaviour. Lastly, a shared repertoire refers to joint resources for negotiating meaning (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999) in a CofP. The resources available to participants in meetings include among others, strategies, specific linguistic routines that include openings and closings of a talk during interaction. Linguistic patterns can be distinguished as they relate to shared repertoire during interactions.

6. Data analysis

The data collected revealed instances of polite behaviour in the various practices and interactions that interlocutors at kgotla meetings were engaged

in. These instances are verbal (linguistic) and non-verbal (non-linguistic) expressions of politeness enacted according to the norms of Tswana ethnic culture.

6.1. Politeness performed through verbal expressions

Verbal expressions, which are routines associated with the meeting genre (e.g. meeting openings, as in greetings and address forms, and meeting closings), the realisation of speech acts and other dominant practices in this study, are examined.

Greetings and address forms are part of communication when people interact in kgotla meetings. Greetings are said to be 'the essential 'oil' of encounters of all types and a reassuring confirmation of human sociability and social order' (Schottman, 1995: 489). They are a ritual in the opening of a smooth interaction between participants, following some pattern in their formulation. Their meanings are culture specific and can be enacted verbally or non-verbally.

It is the practice in this CofP for members to greet one another, and there is an order that is followed to accomplish this. During introductions, the meeting chairperson (MC) initiates greetings by calling upon individuals according to their seniority/hierarchy in the community to greet and be greeted by members of the CofP. The participants in turn respond to the greetings appropriately in a polite manner as expected by members of the community. Example (1) is a verbal greeting, which is also an address form, a ritual enacted by a leader to initiate interactions with members of the CofP.

(1) Context: The MC introduces people present at the meeting and starts off by introducing the village chief. The chief then greets his subjects.

People involved: The MC, the Chief and the meeting attendees

Motsamaisa tiro: ...protocol observed, as I introduce, *tota beng gae le bone ba e leng baeng, ke tla ba itsise hela jaana ka go ba soboka.*

Mme ke tla simolola ka bogogi jwa motse one o re leng mo go one o, wa Ga X, re na le Mothusa Kgosi Kgolo ya Ga X, Kgosi NM.

Kgosi NM: *Pula! ditlhaolela nageng!*

Morafe: *Pula!*

Translation

MC: '...protocol observed, as I introduce those who are based here at home and those who are visitors, I will introduce them by not singling them out. But I will start with the village leadership of the ethnic group X. We have here the Deputy Chief of ethnic group X, Chief NM.

Chief NM: 'Let there be rain! Those who wean their young ones in the bush'. In other words, 'Let there be rain, the brave Buffaloes!'

The Audience: *Pula!* 'Let there be rain!'

MCs open meetings by first introducing the most senior person (the chief or deputy chief present in the meeting) followed by individuals who are lower in status according to the established hierarchy in the community. It is common in introductory greetings for MCs to indicate the status of the leader by mentioning the name of the group he leads or by referring to the leader using the name of the ethnic group. The speaker through the address form establishes the social relations in the community, acknowledging his status as the leader.

From example (1), it is evident that the official title of the leader in kgotla meetings is *Kgosi* 'Chief' or *Mothusa Kgosi* 'Deputy Chief'. It is observed that what follows the title may be the name of the one introduced, which is sometimes a combination of the first and last names, e.g. Chief NM.

Although the inclusion of the group name as part of the introduction by the MC is optional, its inclusion indicates that the chief 'derives his being from members of a particular community' he serves. This 'relationship is made explicit' to all attendees (Bagwasi, 2008: 7).

Pula! 'Let there be rain!' is a ritualised greeting and also an acceptable response among participants to the speaker's greeting. This greeting as well as the response shows respect and politeness by the chief and the participants. Apart from its usage as a greeting, it is also a Botswana national slogan that unifies people. It is commonly used in openings and closings of formal speeches and greetings at public gatherings to express a wish by Batswana (citizens of Botswana) to always have more rain in their country. Bagwasi (2008) highlights the fact that since Botswana is a country with scarce rainfall, rain is associated with prosperity and peace. It is not surprising that the participants also respond to the chief's greeting with the word *Pula!*. The interviewees explained that the use of the word *Pula* expresses the people's continual prayer to their 'spiritual mediums' for rainfall. That is why a greeting exchange ends with a very loud *Pula!,* meaning 'Let there be rain!'

A greeting may include an address form, e.g. *ditlhaolela nageng,* which literally means 'those that tend and keep their young ones in the bush'. In example (1), the expression *ditlhaolela nageng*, which is specific to Group X, used by the leader of the village, is a traditional polite address form that distinguishes one ethnic sub-group from the other. It is a figurative formulaic expression, a metaphor referring to 'the buffalo', which is a totem[2] of one of the sub-groups of the Tswana ethnic groups. The use of the totem as an address form shows respect to the addressees according to Setswana custom. The chief uses this greeting/address form, *ditlhaolela nageng*, as a strategy to initiate the conversation in order to please the people and win their approval as he stands before them. It is a way of being polite and building solidarity with the people. Thus, the chief uses a formulaic expression

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[2] A totem, according to Setswana culture, is a revered animal, and the chief is an elder, a custodian of culture in the village. He is knowledgeable in address forms applicable to his people according to tradition.

indicated as Pattern 1:

Pattern 1
Noun Phrase (NP): *Pula!* 'Let there be rain!' + *ditlhaolela nageng,* a cultural formulaic phrase or expression

There are specific terms used in greetings. *Dumela* (singular) 'Greetings' is a key term used as a polite expression among Batswana uttered at first encounter with other individuals. This word means 'agree', asking the addressee to be agreeable (Bagwasi, 2012: 95). Its usage can be said to be a ritualised expression in kgotla meetings, including its derivatives like: *Dumelang* (plural) 'greetings to you all', *Go dumedisitswe...* literally, 'previous speakers have greeted you', *Ke a dumedisa...* 'I greet you all'.

From the data, *dumelang* 'greetings to you all' is a general greeting expressing respect to all participants as a group. It is common that after several speakers have continually greeted (according to hierarchy/position in the village), the participants' greeting usually changes slightly with subsequent speakers. Speakers would briefly utter phrases that would otherwise mean 'Protocol observed...' in English, though with reference to people to whom the greeting is directed. Literally translated data is shown in (2):

(2) *Go setse **go dumedisitswe...***literally, 'They have already greeted you'
     *Bagolo, **go setse go dumedisitswe**...* 'Elders/parents, they have already greeted you'

These greetings and address forms are appropriate and regarded as polite according to interviewees because the speakers address all participants, though they may at some point single out one or two individuals (within the group) they feel deserve such special greeting. Bagwasi (2012: 95) notes that a greeting may be 'used to establish rapport and friendship, and transmit a message of goodwill'. Apart from the use of *Dumela,* as a polite word independently, it can be used with other alternative polite phrases. Various

patterns associated with the ritualised use of *Dumelang* 'Greetings' in kgotla meetings are given in Pattern 2:

Pattern 2
a. *Dumelang!* 'Greetings' + Ø (the null sign)
b. *Dumelang!* 'Greetings' + NP
   e.g. *Dumelang Ba gaX!*[3] *Dumelang botsadi/batsadi!*[4]
c. *Dumelang* 'Greetings' + plural collective stem (communal)
   e.g. *Dumelang bagaetsho!* 'Greetings, my countrymen'

Pattern 2b, *Dumelang Ba gaX!,* 'greetings people of the ethnic sub-group X!', is a kind of greeting where the name of a sub-group is used by an interlocutor to show solidarity with the people being greeted. This polite address form is usually associated with the leadership greeting their subjects. Responses from the audience will be either a clapping of hands or the national slogan, *Pula!.* The response is *Pula!* if the speaker has also used this term, *Pula!,* otherwise the audience will respond with a clapping of hands.

A stem *-etsho*, which has a meaning indicative of a community, may be used in polite or honorific speech and forms of address, e.g. *bagaetsho!* 'my countrymen!' or *betsho!* (a contraction of '*bagaetsho*'), as in pattern 2c. This form of address is used in addressing a gathering, such as a kgotla meeting. The use of the term *Dumelang* 'greetings' with the address form '*bagaetsho*', shows respect and is an act of politeness towards the group of people being addressed.

The Tswana ethnic community is built around relationships and talk that show respect or deference. Generally, these relationships reflect relations which extend to the wider community.

Address forms identified in the kgotla meetings occur during the meeting openings, the body and the closings of meetings. When members of the CofP

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[3] *Ba gaX* refers to a sub-group of the ethnic group, e.g. *Ba gaMalete.*

[4] *botsadi/batsadi* is a name used to refer to a group of elderly people that may not necessarily be one's parents.

interact, they are addressed by different titles. These titles are either bestowed on individuals culturally within the society or professionally as a result of the position they hold in their places of work. It is observed that titles can be used as address forms in kgotla meeting interactions and they indicate an act of politeness. Some domains from which titles are derived include those indicated in example (3):

(3) a. occupation, e.g. *mokhanselara* 'councillor', *motlotlegi* 'the honourable one'
b. culture, e.g. *kgosi* 'chief', *mma G* 'Mrs/Miss G' (if the addressee is a woman)
c. activity-related role, e.g. *motsamaisi* 'master of ceremony'.

As indicated in example (3), titles are an indication that members of the community operate as a CofP. Members of the CofP are aware of titles and they understand how they are earned, e.g. from one's social status, education or age. The society expects interlocutors to be addressed by those titles; otherwise, it can be considered an insult or disrespect to the addressees.

Furthermore, kinship terms/gender-related titles, such as *mme/mma* 'mother, Mrs. or Miss' and *rre/rra* 'father or Mr.' (as in *mme/mmaBogatsu* 'mother/Mrs. Bogatsu' and *rre/rraBotho* 'father/Mr. Botho') are used to express politeness in kgotla meetings. During interviews, informants explained that an expression like *tumediso ga e a tshwanela go sa tswala* 'greetings have to be clothed' should be understood as 'greetings to elders have to be uttered in a polite manner', i.e. using the correct titles when addressing persons. Although many address forms are in Setswana, there are some that have been borrowed from other languages. For example, those borrowed from English include *mokhanselara* 'councillor', *mopalamente* 'parliamentarian' and these are used when referring to participants who hold those positions of responsibility within these communities.

6.1.1. Speech acts as polite expressions

Speech acts are commonly used by interlocutors in meetings, and they convey politeness during the interactions. During the course of social interaction, interlocutors try to be polite to one another, employing various strategies to communicate the messages in their talk. Fe´lix-Brasdefer (2006: 2159) describes politeness as 'a form of social interaction that is conditioned by the socio-cultural norms of a particular society', which are employed by speakers to maintain relationships in the course of interactions. Giving thanks, compliments and apologies are speech acts that the interlocutors performed within their CofP.

Giving thanks is a common speech act among interlocutors in meetings. The functional aspect of 'thank you' is closely related to the activity that is performed during interactions. From the data, it is evident that speakers use 'thank you' to reflect their awareness of what is expected in terms of politeness towards one another. As an opening and closing strategy, it is utilised by both male and female speakers alike. Participants tend to give thanks as soon as they are given the floor and when they end their remarks, e.g. *Ke a leboga kgosi yame* 'I thank you my chief'. A speaker thanks the MC for giving him the opportunity to participate in the discussions. It is a polite expression and at the same time it gives the interlocutor an opportunity to prepare for the verbal exchange that they are about to share with other participants. Usually there is little variation on the structure of this speech act. The key word in this speech act is '*leboga'* 'thank'. Its variant forms include *Ke lebogile* 'I thank you'*, Tanki* 'thank you', etc.

In some instances, an interlocutor may extend the thanking act by using a different form from the usual *Ke lebogile* 'I thank you', e.g. *tanki ngwana wa bomme!* 'thank you, my sibling!'. In this example the expression shows solidarity on the part of the speaker to the addressee, sharing some form of closeness as participants. The word *tanki* 'thank you', which serves as a ritual conversational closer, is borrowed from the Afrikaaans word, 'dankie'. Tannen (1994) notes that 'thanks' is a common term in institutional settings.

Giving thanks, as a common practice in kgotla meetings, is a ritual expression on the part of the speakers and also an expected expression on the part of the audience at the point when one speaker takes over from the other (Tannen, 1994). The use of the word *Tanki* 'thank you' or *Ke lebogile* 'I thank you' is multifunctional in that it signals the opening and ending of one's talk and also conveys politeness to the audience. In kgotla meetings, it is usually followed by non-verbal politeness behaviour of bowing down the head. The following patterns emerge when giving thanks, to show politeness.

> Pattern 3
> The 'thank you' speech act patterns:
> - 'I thank you' / thank you + NP Ø (optional)
>   e.g. *Ke a leboga*
> - 'I thank you' + NP
>   e.g. *Ke a leboga, motsamaisa tiro... / botsadi jwa me ...* 'Thank you, MC...'/ my parents'
>
> or some variation:
> - *Re lebogile,* 'We thank you'
> - *Tanki,* 'thank you'

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly bestows credit upon the addressee for some possession, skill, characteristic, or the like, that is positively evaluated by the speaker and the addressee (Holmes 1988). From the data presented, it was observed that some interlocutors included compliments in their talk. In one instance, such as example (4), the Deputy Chief commended a lady who is deceased, and who had the skill of ululating during kgotla meetings.

(4) Context*: A participant given a compliment by a chief.
    Mothusa Kgosi: *Ithuteng go itaya mogolokwane ... ha e sale ka*

kgaitsadiake MB Modimo a mo tsaya, owaii!...(Morafe wa Batswana wa Kgotla Y)

Translation
Deputy Chief: Learn how to ululate.... since my sister MB passed on *((showing despair))*.... (Tswana ethnic group Y)

He wished some of the women had learnt from the deceased the skill of ululating before she passed on. This is a posthumous polite remark made about the lady in question because it seemed there were no longer women who could ululate during kgotla meetings like the deceased. This compliment is regarded as 'genuine expressions of admiration' (Holmes, 1988: 106). The chief commended the deceased woman for the good work she did while she was alive.

Giving compliments also applies to groups of people, as in example (5). This group, according to the chief, excelled in singing the national anthem like no other group he had known. For this reason, the chief advised members of the CofP to visit the village of these excellent singers to learn how to sing the national anthem.

(5) Context: A chief giving some people a compliment.
Kgosi: *Ha re ka ya kwa Morule, motse hela o monnyenyane, la utwa gore pina ya setšhaba ba e sobota jang ko Morule, ((o ema go gole gonnye)) ko Morule! ((ka kgatelelo)). ...ba kopane ((o kopanya diatla go supa tshwaragano)).* (Morafe wa Batswana wa Kgotla Y)

Translation
Chief: If we get to Morule, a very small village, and you hear how they diligently sing the national anthem...((*pause*)) in Morule, ...((*emphasis*))...singing as one (in unity) ((*clasping hands showing unity*)). (Tswana ethnic group Y)

A compliment shows a positive relationship that the speaker has with the

addressees and is understood by participants to be polite and friendly.

Apologies, like giving thanks and compliments, are a speech act that is easily and frequently uttered by interlocutors during meetings when some social norms have been violated by certain behaviour. They are strategies embedded in utterances and seem to come out as formulaic and ritualised expressions. An apology may be an explanation that one offers to another for one's action or inaction. It usually expresses regret on the part of the speaker. According to Deutschmann (2003: 44-47), "an apology includes a component in which an "offender" or one who feels directly or indirectly responsible for some offence committed takes responsibility for such offence". This is illustrated by the expression in example (6) uttered by a chief who came late to a gathering of people waiting for the kgotla meeting to start.

(6) Context: A chief tendering an apology for lateness
   Bagaetsho le **intshwarele** *ga le a bolo go ta ha. Ke raya gore bagaetsho, le se ka la re re a bo re le latheletse. Ke tiro. Amen.* (Morafe wa Batswana wa Kgotla Z)

   Translation
   'My countrymen **I apologise** that you have been here for a very long time. What I am saying, my countrymen, is do not think that we do not care or have forgotten about you being here. We have been working on something. Amen'. (Tswana ethnic group Z)

Example (6) sheds light on Tswana ethnic groups speakers' understanding of apology as a speech act in kgotla meetings. An apology promotes peace among people as it restores relationships and prevents conflicts, especially when participants understand how and when to apologise in a given context.

According to the interviewees, the discourse in (6) is an apology. The speaker tries to be polite in order to soften the hearts of the participants by calling them *Bagaetsho* 'my countrymen' followed by *le* **intshwarele** 'I apologise'. The main function of this apology by the chief is to express regret

and politeness. By this apology, the chief attempted to redress any damage, such as his delaying the start of the meeting, which he may have caused his people who had long assembled for the meeting. The chief's words express an unintentional act and indicate at the same time that the chief accepts responsibility for his lateness. The words of the chief imply 'I didn't mean to, I had work commitments'. This is similar to the English *I'm sorry*, which expresses an apology.

It is important to note that the act of apologising involves an apologiser and a recipient. The apologiser is the one who is remorseful for having done something (i.e. the offence) that has negatively affected the addressee, and accepts responsibility for what has happened.

Sometimes, an apology is directed at a community and not necessarily at an individual. In this case, the speaker wants the CofP to accept the apology. A speaker may include terms that maintain good relations between the interlocutors, as in *betsho! ka phosego eo. ...* 'I am asking for forgiveness, my countrymen, about that mistake ...'. Although the content of the situation that deserves an apology may be reflected, strategies can be modified to suit the situation. According to Vollmer and Olshtain (1989: 199), a strategy can be modified by linguistic expressions such as hedges, mental state predicates or intensifiers to emphasize or soften the violation of the offence. The word *betsho!* 'my countrymen!' acts as a polite hedge.

When a speaker apologises to members of the CofP; it is an act of politeness and the apology is well received because in all cases, nods are evident from the persons at whom the apologies were directed. A nod is appropriate among members of the CofP, since in a meeting, the recipients of the apology cannot take the floor to accept the apology.

An apology depends mainly on the environment, which often varies. Apologies, therefore, are situation and culture specific. At the kgotla, listeners are bound to accept explanations given together with the apologies as long as they are given in a polite manner according to the norms of the CofP. It can be generalised that members of the CofP, according to their culture, use apologies when something has not gone as expected, and therefore an

addressee deserves an apology.

   In the case of kgotla meetings, the speech acts discussed above can be said to be semi-formulaic polite expressions. According to Watts (2003: 169), semi-formulaic expressions 'carry out indirect speech acts appropriate to the politic behaviour of a social situation'. These expressions need to be interpreted as polite according to a given context.

   6.1.2. Politeness expressed through the use of figurative language

   There are instances in the data that show the use of figurative language to express politeness, and these include the use of proverbs and idioms by interlocutors in kgotla meetings. Interviewees indicate that the use of proverbs and idioms is to express ideas in an eloquent way.

   Knowledge of figurative language and one's culture, when issues are discussed in meetings, come in handy as they can help participants in one way or the other. For example, a speaker mentions various activities that needed to be done before a cultural celebration and he came up with a proverb that resolved what they should do in order to accomplish those activities. The use of the proverb, *kgetsi ya tsie e kgonwa ke go tshwaraganelwa* "work done collectively is easier to accomplish successfully", helped in resolving the issue. Participants understood from the proverb that by working together, tasks assigned to them would be easy, making the activity a success. Proverbs are a language strategy 'marked by a figurative mode of expression abounding in metaphor' (Finnegan, 1976: 399), which is skillfully introduced into speeches. It is not surprising to find their use in kgotla meetings as they play a role in the actual decisions that are reached.

   Indirectness during interaction through the use of other figurative language is a common phenomenon among members of this ethnic group, as they perform acts of politeness. Example (7) is a case where a downgrading expression in the form of a metaphor is used as a politeness strategy.

 (7) Context: A participant at the meeting using a downgrading expression.
     Mongwe wa ba ba tseneletseng phuthego: Kgosi le batlhanka ba gago,

ke a le dumedisa. **Nna ka ke le gopane**, *ka kgang e e re tsentseng tsebetsebe, ga ba kake ba ntheetsa fa ke akgela. Ke raya gore ke ema, ke le mokhutshwane jalo.* (Morafe wa Batswana wa Kgotla X)

Translation
A participant: 'Chief and your servants, I greet you. **As I am just an iguana**, with this complex issue that we are grappling with, they will not listen to me as I contribute to the discussions. I am as brief as that'. (Tswana ethnic group X)

The speaker in (7) is an elderly person who regards himself as a reptile because he feels he is not important and that no one would listen to him when he gives his word of wisdom. According to the interviewees, in Tswana culture, a person can lower or downgrade himself/herself to show politeness. The speaker understands that he might not be in touch with modern complex issues, and at the same time he indicates that the audience will not welcome his suggestions. He even goes further to say *ke le mokhutshwane jalo* 'I am as brief as that', thereby bringing the downgrading expression to an end. This is an example of politeness from a speaker making himself modest in his speech by speaking in an indirect way. Sew (1997) states that indirectness is a form of politeness whereby a speaker avoids expressing himself/herself explicitly either in conversation or writing.

Watts (2003) reiterates that for polite language usage, people might resort to using expressions that avoid being too direct or using language which display respect toward or consideration for others.

6.2. Politeness performed through non-verbal acts

Politeness can also be performed through non-verbal acts. Politeness performed through non-verbal acts is called non-linguistic deference, and it is based on norms in kgotla meetings. According to Bagwasi (2012), participants may stand up, wave hands, shake hands, take off hats and bow

to show polite behaviour to others. The following practices were observed in kgotla meetings and the interviewees also indicated that they show politeness among participants.

Offering someone a seat is respectful behaviour expected and practiced in a kgotla meeting especially by the person offering a seat. It is the person who is lower in status or younger that offers a seat to the one who is higher in status or older. Example (8) shows how offering a seat to a person of high status constitutes an act of politeness or respect.

(8) Context: the MC requests that a participant (an elder/person of high status) who came late to the meeting and didn't have a seat be given a seat.

MC 2: *Ehe! ((ka monyenyo)) mme, re na le bodiredi, go tswa go ba Kaboditsha. Ke dumela gore o hano mo boemong jwa Mokwaledi wa Kaboditsha, rre MLT.* **Rre MLT o eme ka dinao fale batsadi, ke kopa motsamaisi le mmatlele setilo, a atumele ka kwano....'** (Morafe wa Batswana wa Kgotla X)

Translation

MC 2: 'Yes! ((*with a smile*)) well, we have an official from the Land Board. I believe he is attending this meeting on behalf of the Secretary of the Land Board. **Mr MLT does not have a seat and he is standing right there, kindly MC1 find a chair for him, and let him move closer....'** (Tswana ethnic group X)

This is a situation whereby, according to the norms of this CofP, a person of high status is shown respect by being offered a seat. Members of the community show politeness by performing this act. According to the MC, this man was attending the meeting on behalf of his colleague, who is senior to him at their workplace. Since the MC knew the status of the senior official, he deserved to be respected and be given a seat. Interviewees explained that culturally, when all seats have been taken up in a meeting, young people

including women are expected to offer their seats to guests or people of high status. According to our interviewees, for the fact that the government official is a man, even if he was not attending this meeting on behalf of his boss, the behaviour expected in a kgotla meeting is that he be respected by being offered a seat.

It was observed at all kgotla meetings that when the chief and his delegation (this includes other high-ranking officials from government) arrived, all participants would rise from their seats as a sign of respect, even before they are ushered to their seats. Informants explained that if a person of high status arrives at a meeting when people are already seated, the expectation is that participants have to rise from their seats. They also explained that those who are lower in status are expected to show respect to those who are high in status by rising from their seats. In other words, attendees are to occupy their seats only after those of high status have done so.

Taking a hat off one's head is a tradition that is associated with giving respect to the participants at the kgotla. At one of the kgotla meetings, a young man was asked to take off his hat, as soon as he stood up to respond to the chief's talk, during a question-answer-comment time. Interviewees informed the first author that men are expected to remove their hats as soon as they occupy their seats at the kgotla. Acts of respect are expected of women too because they are not to wear trousers and are required to put shawls on their shoulders when they attend kgotla meetings.

It is observed that politeness includes both verbal and non-verbal forms according to how they are used in this particular culture. The interviewees explained that Tswana ethnic groups have a tradition of greeting and addressing one another in a polite manner. The language used in ritual greetings can convey the identity of the speaker in relation to the participants. Though polite behaviour may seem to communicate minimum information at face value, it carries specific messages which show that the speaker is aware of the social rituals of the society during interaction, and is willing to adhere to them.

The social convention as it applies to kgotla meetings is such that greetings and address forms act as conversation openers and closers. There are various ways of enacting politeness through greetings and address forms and these depend on factors and strategies that are employed, based on the social norms in the context of the CofP. It has been shown that interlocutors choose appropriate forms from a variety of greeting and address forms and that their choice of appropriate greeting and address forms depends among other things on the interlocutors' social status, age and sex.

6.3. Discussion

In analysing the data, it was found out that the relationship of the participants, the context and the strategies play a major role in deciphering politeness situations. Research on politeness, as characterised by the researcher's interpretations of linguistic behaviour, relies on concepts and categories derived from theories of social behaviour and language usage (Watts, Ide & Ehrlich, 2005). This needs to be corroborated by views from the participants. Since politeness is culture-dependent, Locher & Watts (2005: 29) have emphasised the role of *habitus,* explaining that 'individuals evaluate the actual context of interaction' because what is considered polite in one society may be different from what is considered polite in another society. The theory of politeness adopted in this study provides for such an analysis, making it possible to 'locate possible realisations of polite behaviour and offer a way of assessing how the members (of a CofP) themselves evaluate that (polite) behaviour' (Watts, 2003: 19).

The results from the study of these Tswana cultural groups, supported by data from the interviewees, have shown the flexibility and diversity of the Setswana language using various verbal and non-verbal expressions to enact politeness. The use of strategies and the effect of factors, such as status, age, etc. during interactions have to be taken into consideration in matters of politeness to avoid misunderstandings. It can be argued that the use of appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic forms helps an addressee to

understand what a speaker wants to convey. This study has shed some light to the effect that politeness, as expressed by members of the Tswana ethnic group in kgotla meeting interactions, conveys among other things, respect and oneness of the group as a whole.

Several features associated with politeness were identified in the description and analysis of this concept in kgotla meetings based on the etic and emic analysis of politeness, and the CofP perspective. From the observations made during kgotla meetings, the expressions of politeness were in accordance with the norms established by the society, and the behaviours of the interlocutors were accepted by members of the CofP. The interviewees' verbal reports implied that politeness in their cultural groups places emphasis on the collectiveness of the members of the CofP. The polite behaviour described in the Tswana ethnic group data shows that politeness can be group-based with an inclination towards satisfying the criteria of a CofP.

It is important to note that various strategies and factors were evident in expressing politeness as expected by members of this ethnic group, as interactions are based on the norms of this context. The kgotla provides a context that is different from other social situations as it determines who is greeted first and how one is greeted. Generally, within the Tswana ethnic culture it is considered ill-mannered or impolite not to greet people. Within the kgotla meeting environment, greetings are still an important part of showing *botho*, the concept of being humane. In kgotla meetings, greetings are usually expressed with the term, *dumelang* (plural of *dumela*) and other variants according to usage. It is an appropriate greeting addressing members as a group. This greeting is used 'to establish rapport and friendship, and transmit a message of goodwill and solidarity between the interlocutors' (Bagwasi, 2012: 95). Greetings in this setting acted as openers to the talk that members had and they also helped to bring people together. *Pula!*, as a popular national slogan or term meaning 'Let there be rain', was used more often by speakers during opening and closing of their talk.

The greeting behaviour seems to be determined by the relationship one has with the interlocutors and factors that influence behaviour are status, age

(seniority), kin relationship and to a lesser extent familiarity in the kgotla meeting context. It is observed that the performance of the greeting routine as regards the use of address forms differed slightly according to the locality of the CofP. For example, ethnic group X tends to use more elaborate address forms than ethnic groups Y and Z. Various ritualised and lexicalised openings (greetings and address forms), often comprising formulaic and non-formulaic expressions and often plural forms, are evident during kgotla meeting interactions because participants are addressed as a group of people, the CofP.

As address forms are part of the greeting routine, they vary according to the status, seniority / age and gender relationship between the speakers and the addressees. The address forms were varied and they show respect or reverence to the individual or group being addressed. Some ritualised and lexicalised openings and closings were associated more with participants who had a higher status in the community, e.g. the leadership, elders and visiting officials in the communities.

Interlocutors addressing participants do have a choice of particular linguistic or non-linguistic forms that include forms like a polite plural, a title, bowing or a kinship term to show respect. Participants are expected to show respect to one another and age, status, gender and the social situation shape the way participants in kgotla meetings communicate. Some participants used formulaic expressions and nominal forms that included different kinds of titles and kinship terms to show politeness (e.g. *Ke a dumedisa kgosi / mong wa me,* 'I greet you my chief / my leader'; *Dumelang bagolo / batsadi*, 'greetings elders / parents', etc.). As Bagwasi (2012: 93) noted, indeed greetings are 'a common marker and an integral part of politeness in Setswana culture'. Appropriate performance of greetings and address forms routine are followed according to the norms that govern the community and the kgotla.

Scollon & Scollon (1995: 45) indicate that '...participants recognise and respect the social differences that place one in a superordinate position and the other in a subordinate position'. Such recognition and respect based on social differences were evident in the kgotla meeting discussions. This argument resonates with the interviewees' discussions about high status

individuals deserving respect during the kgotla meeting interactions. For example, a chief may be addressed as *kgosi* 'chief' or *mong wame, literally* 'the one who owns me'. The collective address forms for participants may be kinship terms, such as *bagolo / batsadi* 'elders / parents' or *mma / rra* 'Mrs or Miss / Mr, used for males and females. Specific nouns, e.g. *bagolo, batsadi* 'elders, parents', which refer to elders who are participants in the kgotla meetings, were used as a sign of respect to show politeness for a member of the CofP. These participants were not singled out by their first names.

Kinship terms were used to show seniority, status and are linked to gender reference. It was found out that age differences among the Tswana cultural groups required politeness regardless of the informality or formality of the discourse. By observing the use of specific terms, participants understood the relationship between a speaker and an addressee, and were able to make assessments about the personality and manners of a speaker. According to Kumalo (1992), these kinds of address forms are common when addressing non-kin elders in some African languages. Terms expressing kinship and relationships in the Tswana community are significant.

Apart from participants being addressed with their titles and kinship names, the name of their totem may be used for a particular cultural group to show respect and solidarity. For example, the expressions *ditlhaolela nageng* or *ditlhoka batlhaodi*, which literally means 'those who are fierce and cannot be separated / kept apart' was used to address the participants whose totem is the buffalo. Likewise, the expression *baphoting / photi* was used to address the participants whose totem is the 'duiker'. Similarly, the expression *phohu*! was used to address the participants whose totem is the 'eland'.

In almost every greeting and ending of one's speech, the chief or his representative reminds the participants about their totem (in most cases an animal). This is done artistically by a speaker while addressing participants. The Balete ethnic group, for instance, is addressed by the expression *ditlhaolela nageng*, which literally means 'those that keep apart in the bush'.

The group is likened to a buffalo, which is a large animal of the cow family. Thus, the buffalo, as Balete's totem, is captured in formulaic phrases often recited in the praise poems that are associated with this cultural group. The Buffalo is described as a ferocious animal with wide curved horns with which it can easily pounce upon, trample down and gore its enemies or victims. The language used in most cases is special in that it depicts the culture of a people as it can be a source of historical information. Members of the CofPs indirectly express their culture during interactions, as in the use of address forms that are polite.

Other forms of address include use of the name of a person's age-set, praise name or nickname, e.g. *Letsosa / Letshosa le le tona* 'the great *Letsosa / Letshosa*' (one who awakens / frightens people), and the name of their cultural groups (e.g. *ba GaMalete* 'people of Balete cultural group', *ba GaMmangwato* 'people of Bangwato cultural group' and Bakhurutshe 'people of the Khurutshe cultural group'. In kgotla meetings everyone is respected, and members of a cultural group address one another in a polite manner. They agree with each other on issues that are discussed and work together. This brings cohesion within a cultural group, and participants maintain smooth communication with one another in kgotla meetings.

Politeness can also be performed through non-verbal acts, based on the norms in kgotla meetings. Participants may stand up, wave hands, shake hands, take off hats and bow to show polite behaviour to others. Non-verbal greetings were also evident, where addressees are greeted with deference, considering variables that are at play in the context. The common ones were handshakes and bowing among participants. These acts can occur before the meetings commence, during the meeting, while participants are sitting next to each other, or at the end of the meetings as people disperse.

The findings of this study also suggest that there are a number of complex factors that need to be taken into account when analysing verbal and verbal politeness in kgotla meetings, revealing an interplay of various factors. From the analysis, the study shows that social factors such as age, status, gender, power and the social situation shape the way participants communicate.

Language that emphasises age as well as one's position is used very explicitly. Participants are expected to show respect for an older person and / or one of higher social status in kgotla meetings. Specific terms that are address forms show the status of a participant. Some of these address forms, *mmaetsho / rraetsho,* 'mother or father belonging to our own group', were gender sensitive. The interviewees indicated that it is important for one to respect one's elders and that this would in turn make the speaker also to be respected in the whole community. According to them, parents and elders have a role to play in instilling good morals and values in their children. In this regard, parents have to be role models and lead by example.

In respect of gender, the study shows that politeness is associated with both females and males. Various politeness markers were evident in their speech, disputing earlier language, gender and politeness studies which had concluded that females were more likely to be polite than their male counterparts. Research on language and gender during the past decades had the view that women were more 'polite' than men (Tannen, 1994; Brown, 1998; Holmes, 1988). This view is stereotyped and does not hold true for the situation in Tswana kgotla meetings because almost all participants (men and women) were equally polite.

Power was exercised by various participants at different stages of the meetings. The enactment of power among the participants is found not only to be related to the participants social status but that participants can temporarily gain it by depending on their role and certain circumstances during the meetings. Participants have power because of their roles in the institution (e.g. as a chief being a leader in the community, or an MC carrying out his duty). They may also gain power when they are given the floor. Participants gained 'local' or interactional power only for a particular time when they were interlocutors. An observation made during the kgotla meetings is that power is not only for specific participants but is 'dispersed' among participants as they interact with one another.

From the CofP perspective, Mills (2002: 77) viewed linguistic politeness as 'a set of strategies or verbal habits which someone sets as a norm for

themselves or which others judge as the norm for them, as well as being a socially constructed norm within a community of practice'. In the kgotla meetings, various strategies were employed by participants showing appropriate polite behaviour in kgotla meetings. These include apologies, giving thanks and compliments, and indirectness in using the Setswana language. Through these strategies, politeness is found to be an important aspect in further showing how people communicate amongst themselves as a CofP. Though members of this CofP were able to discuss, laugh, ask questions, and give comments on issues discussed, they still maintained a sense of solidarity among themselves. Mills (2002) argues that politeness norms and conventions specific to a context are dynamic and change depending upon the CofP within which participants are interacting. Based on the CofP politeness theory, it was found that interlocutors applied politeness strategies, which were appropriate to the meeting contexts and behaved in a polite manner.

The use of figurative language to express politeness among members of the communities in kgotla meetings is common. Other expressions that are common are the use of metaphors and self-down-grading expressions to show respect and express politeness to those who are involved in the discussions. Figurative language has a function of unifying participants as a CofP, expressing politeness among members of the Tswana ethnic group.

The kgotla and its members act as a joint negotiated enterprise. Participants are aware of how the kgotla meetings operate (i.e. *mmualebe o bua la gagwe*.... 'everyone in attendance at meetings can say his / her mind and need not be interrupted when he / she expresses his/ her thoughts or disallowed to do so.....,'), including how one expresses politeness in their speech and behaviour. Though members of the CofP still value this cultural context, they fear that there are changes that are affecting the behaviour of participants in relation to language use. Kgotla talk sheds light on the complicated relationship between language and society.

7. Conclusion

Research continues to examine politeness in communication among different domains and cultures (Mullany, 2004; Halbe, 2011). The purpose of this study was to add to theoretical considerations and empirical investigations of politeness by expanding research in the area of meeting discourse. Specifically, the paper gives some insights into politeness and language use in Tswana kgotla meetings. In this study, politeness was investigated among the Balete, Bangwato and Bakhurutshe cultural groups by examining strategies, factors and language use. Generally, little research has gone into studying politeness in Botswana except for (Bagwasi, 2012) who examined the effect of age and gender on the performance of greetings in Setswana culture. The present study examined the enactment and interpretation of politeness based on Watts (2003) view of politeness and the CofP perspective. The CofP perspective on politeness in the kgotla meeting environment was adopted to investigate strategies and factors that result in politeness. This perspective was important as it provided information that was useful for the analysis of politeness. Aspects under investigation were analysed based on the researcher's interpretations of polite behaviour derived from theories of social behaviour and language usage, and views on politeness by members of the communities. Participants' verbal reports on politeness were also included to bring in the interviewees' perspective on this concept among the Tswana ethnic group.

The kgotla is a special type of setting and has a very special type of communication. The qualitative analysis of data shows that language use in kgotla meetings seems to range from flexible, not too formal to formal and interlocutors are able to communicate messages effectively. The meeting talk is observed to be varied. It varied from formulaic to less formulaic; ritualised to less ritualised, and punctuated by use of language that is figurative. In addition, it is observed that communication in this CofP is mostly influenced by factors, such as age, status and gender.

Data from interviewees corroborated the data obtained through

observations and recordings made during the kgotla meetings. It was found out that politeness can be conveyed linguistically and non-linguistically through the use of greetings and address forms, use of speech acts and other features associated with the meeting genre. Patterns of performance of the various linguistic practices were varied according to the participants' knowledge of the norms of the setting and their conversational skill.

Based on these findings, this study argues for an examination of politeness from the interpretation of group participants involved, based on the institutional norms at play and the use of naturally occurring data. The evidence presented in this study corroborates Watts (2003) theory of politeness and the CofP perspective. It faults the traditional theories of politeness which focused on isolated utterances, decontextualising the examination of politeness in a given context. The present study has demonstrated that there is need for a more context-specific examination of politeness that includes factors that affect the level of politeness and the strategies employed by participants. The research provides some useful insight into institutional discourse. A study of the Tswana cultural group has shown that the culture of a community of practice is unique to itself.

The examination of politeness phenomena in natural settings has its own challenges. This study was conducted within a context that has its own limitations. The study relied on kgotla meeting participants from three main dikgotla. Therefore, the results of the present study may not be generalised to all meetings of the Tswana ethnic group.

It is possible that politeness may differ among participants of different ages, educational levels, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, there are some young people who still feel that the kgotla is a place where the elderly meet, referring to it as 'their (the older people) meeting place'. As such, few young people attended these kgotla meetings. Incidentally, even some of those who were present at the kgotla meetings contributed little or nothing to the discussions. It is possible that the linguistic realisation and social perception of politeness regarding age and the educational level of members as factors may not have been covered well

because most youths were not in attendance. Also, the working class was away at their different workplaces when kgotla meetings were in session.

Since the present study explored politeness in its broadest sense, a focus on one or two strategies or even factors may help zero in on polite interpretation to investigate the concept of politeness in more detail. Although this corpus of kgotla meeting data turned out to be small in terms of not having been possible to include female chiefs as part of the sample, it does raise questions which could be answered to further this research. Questions that arise may include the following: What type of data would be generated where the speaker is a female leader and the addressees are predominantly male in a kgotla meeting discourse? What politeness strategies are likely to be used, if any? Though this study serves to illustrate politeness during interaction in a context that is slowly changing because of local and global forces, future studies may also need to examine impoliteness as a phenomenon in a cultural context like this one. In all, an in-depth comprehensive account of politeness among Tswana ethnic groups is open to future research. Further research is also recommended to investigate these interactions in respect of other ethnic groups or a comparison between these interactions in other ethnic groups and those in the Tswana ethnic group.

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