The speech act realisation of requests and greetings by non-native and native speakers of siSwati:

Communication challenges faced by American Peace Corps
Volunteers in their interaction with Swazi people

by
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Declaration

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Abstract

This study investigates the differences in the communication styles of siSwati and American English speakers. Specifically, it investigates the realization patterns of the speech acts of request and greeting in siSwati, by native and non-native speakers of siSwati. It also investigates how these same speech acts are realised by the non-native speakers of siSwati in their first language, English. The participants were 10 Swazis and 10 American Peace Corps volunteers living in Swaziland, Southern Africa at the time this study was conducted. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire followed up with a semi-structured interview. The data were analysed using the framework of the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project as developed by Blum-Kulka (1989). Common trends were noted in the realization of the two speech acts by native speakers and non-native speakers and conclusions were made based on the similarities and differences observed. Overall, the results suggest (i) that there are marked differences in the way in which American English speakers and Swazi people perform and interpret greetings and requests, and (ii) that such differences emanate from the different cultural orientation of the two groups of people. Since such differences sometimes lead to misunderstandings, there is evident need to make people aware of cultural differences in order for understanding and tolerance to prevail in cross-cultural interactions.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie ondersoek die verskille in die kommunikasiestyle van sprekers van siSwati en Amerikaanse Engels. Dit beskou spesifiek die realiseringspatrone van die taalhandelinge versoek en groet in siSwati, deur moedertaal- en nie-moedertaalsprekers van siSwati, en in Engels. Die deelnemers was 10 Swazis en 10 Amerikaanse Vredekorps-vrywilligers woonagtig in Swaziland, Suid-Afrika, ten tye van die studie. Die data is ingesamel deur middel van 'n vraelys wat opgevolg is deur 'n semi-gestruktureerde onderhoud. Die data is geanaliseervolgens die raamwerk van die Kruiskulturele Spraakhandeling-realiseringsprojek, soos voorgestel deur Blum-Kulka (1989). Algemene tendense is opgemerk in die realisering van die twee spraakhandelinge deur moedertaalsprekers en nie-moedertaalsprekers en afleidings is gemaak op grond van die waargenome verskille en ooreenkomste. Oor die algemeen dui die resultate op (i) duidelike verskille tussen die wyses waarop sprekers van Amerikaanse Engels en Swazis versoeke en groethandelinge uitvoer en interpreteer, en (ii) die verskillende kulturele oriënterings van die twee groepe as oorsprong van hierdie tipe verskille. Aangesien laasgenoemde dikwels aanleiding gee tot misverstand, is dit duidelik noodsaaklik dat mense bewus gemaak word van kulturele verskille ten einde begrip en verdraagsaamheid te laat hoogty vier tydens kruiskulturele interaksie.

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<div align="right">Faith Sithebe-Mahlalela</div>

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study aims to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge on speech act realization across cultures and languages, an aspect of cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) which has attracted a great deal of interest among scholars for quite some time now.

According to Kasanga and Lwanga-Lumu (2007:67), very little work has been done in African language linguistics to investigate the performance and realization of speech acts by either native speakers or second or foreign language learners of African languages. With the current research, I wish to contribute to this topic by investigating the realization of the speech acts of greeting and request by both native speakers and foreign language learners of the siSwati language. I intend to examine the differences in the way in which Swazis perform and interpret these speech acts in their first language, siSwati, and how American English speakers perform and interpret such speech acts, first in their native language, English, and then in siSwati.

It is worth noting from the onset that differences in cultural practices, communication style and behaviour sometimes give rise to miscommunication or misunderstanding when people from different cultural backgrounds and languages come together. This study aims to examine the influence or the role played by cultural difference and communicative style on the way in which both speech acts are performed and understood. It also seeks to find an explanation and possibly a remedy for the misunderstandings or misconceptions that may arise in interactions of this kind. The results of this research could be useful in making the two groups of people come to a better understanding of each other's linguistic and general behaviour.

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The results could also assist the trainers, who give lessons in the siSwati language to the Peace Corps volunteers when they first come to Swaziland. This study could help identify more avenues to be explored in the designing or improvement of the curriculum for such language courses. Specifically, it can help in the integration of the aspects of culture and language in the siSwati as a foreign language courses. Owing to the tremendous influence that culture has on language, it would benefit the learners if the two were not treated as separate entities. Understanding the differences in the way in which speech acts are performed and understood by Swazis and Americans could also help to eliminate certain stereotypes and prejudices that might exist between the two peoples. Boxer (2002:52) observes that as "cross-cultural interactions have the potential to cause stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against entire groups of people, research in CCP has the potential to ameliorate these consequences." Simply put, the results of this study could help the two groups of people under study come to a point where they understand why they behave the way they do when they speak.

According to Schmidt and Richards (1980), speech acts and speech events have been studied extensively in recent years and have constituted topical foci for scholars from a great number of disciplines. The main issue this study will address is the similarities and differences between requests and greetings produced by native speakers of the target language (siSwati), by learners of the target language, and by the learners in their first language (English). Focus will be on requests and greetings by siSwati first language speakers, by American English speaking learners of siSwati, and by the Americans in their native language. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984:209) note that "one of the central issues in the study of speech acts in general is the question of universality", that is, the extent to which basic pragmatic features of certain speech acts "are manifested in any natural language". Closely related to the concept of universality of speech acts

is the issue of pragmatic transfer, which, according to Kasper (1992:207), is "the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information". When people interpret utterances and situations in a second or foreign language using the rules of use from their own language and culture, problems sometimes arise because those rules of use may not be applicable in the target language.

The importance of cross-cultural speech act realization cannot be overemphasized because of the great potential there is for miscommunication and misperceptions based upon differing norms of interaction. The same speech act may exist in two languages and cultures but there might be major differences regarding when and, most importantly, how it is performed in each culture. Also, the same linguistic item may constitute a particular speech act in one culture but may constitute a different speech act altogether in another culture. A way of reconciling such differences then is necessary for successful intercultural speech act realization to take place. Blum-Kulka (1982:51) makes the observation that "whereas the principle of co-operation is a universally respected norm, the maxims of quantity, relevance, quality and manner might be interpreted differently by members of different cultures". The maxims of quality, relevance, quantity and manner were proposed by Grice (1975) as principles underlying the efficient co-operative use of language. In short, the maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly, and clearly, while providing sufficient information (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1987:102).

Sometimes a speaker will say something and expect the hearer to make some inference; if the hearer fails to make that inference, misunderstanding occurs. Researchers agree that one of the

main source of misunderstanding and miscommunication in cross-cultural speech act realization is the differing norms of usage and social acceptability. All languages and cultures have certain standards for determining the acceptability of utterances, such standards often being violated by the second language learner. It is therefore incumbent upon the second or foreign language learner to familiarize him/herself with the rules and norms of usage of the target language if they are to communicate effectively and acceptably with the native speakers. It is worth noting, however, that speech act realization patterns do not only differ cross-culturally but intra-culturally as well. Individuals within the same society might differ in their speech act realization patterns, depending on personal variables such as sex, age or level of education (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1992:197). This study focuses solely on cross-cultural communication, however, so such variables are not taken into account.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

(i)   Do differences in cultural background between Swazis and speakers of American English affect their performance and understanding of speech acts in siSwati? If so, what are these differences?

(ii)   What pragmatic knowledge is necessary for American English-speaking learners of siSwati to have in order for them to perform greetings and requests successfully in siSwati?

Every year volunteers from the United States of America Peace Corps movement come to Swaziland to live and work among the Swazi people, particularly in the rural areas. Soon after they arrive, they are given some basic lessons in siSwati to enable them to communicate with the locals. One area of interest regarding the communication style of Americans and Swazis has to

do with speech rate. Americans, as generally perceived by Swazis, speak very fast, whereas Swazis tend to "take their time" when speaking. For instance, under normal circumstances, siSwati greetings are rather long and elaborate. According to Swazi culture, a person who makes a quick greeting and then goes on his way or one who simply goes straight into the matter he wants to talk about is considered to be rude and inconsiderate. A typical greeting in siSwati would be: *Sawubona*, to which the addressee should respond, *Yebo, sisi/ make/ babe*, etc. The first speaker goes on to ask, *Unjani lamuhla?* and their interlocutor is expected to respond to that and the greeting sequence goes on and on. A typical greeting in American English is *Hi, how're you doing?* which is rather brief and informal in nature. This is one potential area of misunderstanding in the communication between Swazis and Americans. The author of the present study, as a native speaker of siSwati, is interested in finding out how this and other differences may affect communication between the two groups of people.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Firstly, a brief overview of the literature in the field of speech act performance, pragmatic competence and cross-cultural speech act realization, is provided in chapter 2. In chapter 3, a discussion of the methodological framework that was used to conduct this research is given. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study together with an analysis and discussion of these results. Finally, in chapter 5, a conclusion, which is a summary of the main points of the study, is given.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

According to Schmidt and Richards (1980:129), " speech act theory has to do with the functions and uses of language, in the broadest sense we might say that speech acts are all the acts we perform through speaking, all the things we do when we speak". Speech acts occur in everyday conversations and, according to the proponents of speech act theory; we do many things with words: we greet, apologize, make requests, argue, complain, and so on. In fact, the speech act is considered as the basic unit of communication. Speech acts, then, form a very important aspect of human communication. Speech act theory was originally developed by Austin in 1962 and further expanded on by Searle in 1969. It has been used extensively by many scholars to explain speech act phenomena.

On the structure of speech acts, Finegan and Besnier (1989:329) note that every speech act has two principal components: the utterance itself and the intention of the speaker in making it. This means that sometimes a speaker may say something and yet mean something different by it. It is then up to the addressee to discern the real meaning of the uttered words. Thomas (1995) records that Austin made a three-fold distinction regarding a speech act: (i) **locution**, which refers to the actual words spoken, (ii) **illocution**, which is the force or intention behind the words, and (iii) **perlocution**, which is the effect of the illocution on the hearer. The term "speech act" refers specifically to the illocutionary act. **Uptake** is the understanding of both the force and content of the uttered words by the addressee. For example, a wife may say to her husband, *I won't attend the Christmas party because I don't have the right clothes to wear*. The illocutionary force or

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intention behind the words could be a complaint, the wife complaining that her husband is failing to fulfill his obligation of providing adequately for his family. In addition to complaining, the speaker could also be making a request for clothes from the addressee. The effect of the utterance on the hearer (perlocution) could be that the hearer offers to buy the speaker a new outfit. In this case, the hearer would have been successful on the uptake. If however, the hearer interprets the utterance as the speaker only informing her husband of the reason why she is not attending the said party, the uptake is unsuccessful. In that case, the addressee would have misunderstood the force of the utterance.

Austin produced "a typology of conditions which performatives must meet if they are to succeed or be 'happy'" (Levinson 1983:229). These conditions are called felicity conditions, and can be divided into three main categories:

A. (i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect.

(ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate as specified in the procedure.

B. The procedure must be executed (i) correctly and (ii) completely

C. Often, (i) the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedure and (ii) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must so do.

(Levinson 1983:229)

What this means is that utterances must 'qualify' to be considered as the speech acts they are meant to be.

De Kadt (1992) records that Searle has offered a classification of illocutionary acts: he differentiates assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. Requests, one of the speech acts examined in this study, are included under directives. Requests can be made for

action, information, permission, etc. Greetings, on the other hand, are included under expressive speech acts.

Another important distinction made regarding speech acts is between direct speech acts, "where the speaker says what he or she means", and indirect speech acts, "where he or she means more than, or something other than, what he or she says" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:2). This is a crucial distinction between different types of speech acts. Blum-Kulka (1982:30) also observes that "though languages provide their speakers with explicit direct ways for achieving communicative ends, in day to day communication speakers seem to prefer indirect ways". It is the realization of indirect speech acts that tends to be a challenge to the second language speaker. For example, a speaker may say, *It is so cold in here*, when he actually means, *turn on the heating system*. This utterance may be taken literally by a second language speaker, as a simple comment about the weather condition that day and not as a request for action on the part of the addressee. As a result of the misunderstanding, he may not take the necessary action to correct the situation. On the other hand, second language learners sometimes use a direct speech act where a native speaker would use an indirect one. For the second language learner to recognize and interpret accurately indirect speech acts such as the one above, he needs to acquire adequate background knowledge of the pragmatic forces at work in the target language. The degree of directness in speech act performance varies from one language to another and from one culture to another. Appropriate performance and interpretation of any speech act, indirect speech acts in particular, requires not only knowledge of the language but also appropriate use of that language within a given culture. In other words, proper knowledge of the situation or context in which an act takes place is of utmost importance for all participants.

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Then there is the issue of politeness in speech act performance. According to Carrell and Konneker (1981:18), Brown and Levinson (1978)

> proposed a detailed cross-linguistic taxonomy of politeness strategies. In general terms, their model assumes that politeness is motivated by two kinds of 'face' and two related kinds of politeness. Negative politeness is used by a speaker to satisfy a hearer's negative face: it functions to avoid or minimize the imposition of face-threatening act on a hearer. Positive politeness is used by a speaker to satisfy a hearer's positive face; the speaker indicates solidarity with the hearer's positive self-image.

Requests have been classified under face-threatening acts. Both the speaker and hearer's face are threatened in the performance of requests. Requests are pre-event acts in that they express the speaker's expectation of the hearer with regard to prospective action. Lakoff (in Carrell and Konneker 1981) says that in making requests, imperatives are less polite than declaratives, which are in turn less polite than questions. Some syntactic and lexical features have been found to play a role in politeness, e.g. the politeness marker *please*.

Greetings are used to open conversations and they determine the direction that a conversation may take. According to Ebsworth, Bodman and Carpenter (1996:98), "greetings are among the first speech acts that are learned by children in their native languages." They go on to note, following Levinson (1983), that "greeting rituals have been found in nearly all cultures". Youssouf, Grimshaw and Bird (1976:812) point out that greetings "are by definition the set of linguistic and/or nonlinguistic devices used for the initial management of encounters", where an encounter "is defined as the social recognition of an individual or a set of individuals by another individual or set of individual" and as such they are highly formulaic.

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Apart from opening conversations, another function of greeting is to establish a platform for acceptance creating a positive social bond between interlocutors. According to Finegan and Besnier (1989:344), greetings convey the message "I want to talk to you". However, people have different perceptions of the speech act of greeting. For example, Wilkins (1976 in Ebsworth et al., 1996:90) sees greetings as "straightforward and highly routine". It can also be argued that in many cultures, greetings are quite ritualistic and are greatly lacking in the sincerity aspect. Ebsworth et al. (1996:90) point out that most speakers are consciously aware of only a few high-frequency ritualized semantic formulas as greetings. It is quite normal for second or foreign language learners to know and use two or three formulas of greeting in the target language. Compared to many other speech acts, greetings may be easier to remember and perform in a second language, but even so, there is often a marked difference in their performance by native and non-native speakers (Ebsworth et al. 1996).

According to Krivonos and Knapp (1975), greetings can be verbal as well as non-verbal. Typical verbal greetings involve topic initiation, verbal salutes and references to the interlocutor. Non-verbal greetings include head gestures, mutual glances, and smiles. Furthermore, Salmani-Nodoushan (2006) notes that "there is a strong indication that social distance and amount of shared knowledge about one another's lives have a strong influence on the frequency with which non-formulaic greetings are used".

Sometimes misunderstanding or miscommunication may occur when the second language learner has very little awareness of the pragmatic aspects of the target language. When a greeting is not performed well, for instance, it can result in confusion, awkwardness and hostility. Thomas (1983:101) observes that one source of pragmatic failure is the inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from one language to another. In fact, such pragmatic failure may result in

complete breakdown in communication. This observation brings to our attention the issue of universality of speech acts. Some speech acts exist in all languages; they are universal speech acts, but the only difference may be in the realization strategies for these speech acts. Schmidt and Richards (1980:140) point out that "even if speech act strategies are to a certain extent universal, learners of new languages still need to learn several important things". They need to learn the general 'ethos' of the new speech community, whether the interactional style in general is stiff and formal or relaxed and open. They need to learn which speech acts are threatening in a particular culture. In their study of speech act realisations in different cultures, "Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986) interpreted the findings of their study to mean that in the process of acquiring norms of usage, exposure to native interactional style seems more important than linguistic proficiency" (Blum-Kulka and Levenston, 1987:158).

In his study on the sociopragmatics of greeting forms in English and Persian, Salmani-Nodoushan (2006) examined greetings in Tehrani Persian, investigating whether these varied according to the relationships between interlocutors, and how they compared to greetings in American English. His conclusion was that, because of the difference observed between Persian and English greetings, Iranian learners of English would have difficulty with the appropriate realization of greetings, and would exhibit pragmatic failure because of the inappropriate transfer of social norms from their native language, Persian.

Requests and apologies have attracted a lot of interest from sociolinguists because they have been used to reveal the role that pragmatic competence plays in speaking a language. Some studies suggest that, rather than linguistic proficiency, length of stay in the target community influences interlanguage pragmatic behaviour (Kasper, 1992). In other words, the longer a

learner stays in the target community, the better able he is to understand the pragmatic perceptions and behaviour of the target community.

Then there is pragmatic transfer, which is the transfer of speech act knowledge from one's first language to a second language. Now the question is how much pragmatic transfer is 'safe'? Kasper (1992:213) observes that "the main concern with transfer has… been one where the outcome is negative – L1-based sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge being projected onto L2 contexts and differing from the pragmatic perceptions and behaviors of the target community." Learners of a language sometimes tend to take from the first language to the target language utterances that are equivalent but, because of different rules of use, tend to convey a different pragmatic force in the target language. The importance of pragmatic competence in the performance of speech acts therefore cannot be overemphasized. Rintell and Mitchell (1989:248) observe that "no 'error' of grammar can make a speaker seem so incompetent, so inappropriate, *so foreign* as the kind of trouble a learner gets into when he or she doesn't understand or otherwise disregards a language's rules of use." It has been observed that in speech act realization as in all communication, the usage of learners often violates social acceptability norms in the target language. Though interlocutors from different language and cultural background may have communicative styles that differ greatly from each other, scholars seem to agree that divergent communicative style does not necessarily have conflictive results.

Thomas (1983) uses the term "socio-pragmatic failure" to refer to difficulties on the part of the non-native speaker in using appropriate realization forms according to situation. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) conducted a study investigating cross-cultural variation in the realization of two speech acts viz. requests and apologies, across six languages. The study was conducted as part of a project known as the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project

(CCSARP). The aim was to establish the similarities and differences between native and non-native speakers' realization patterns in the two acts in each of the languages studied. The results of the present study were analysed using the CCSARP framework, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Some recent examples of studies of cross-cultural speech act realization include Afghari (2007) who conducted a study investigating the performance of the speech act of apologizing in Persian. Afghari examined the range of strategies used in performing apologies in Persian. He used a modified version of a discourse completion test called an 'open questionnaire' which included a brief description of the situation and a one participant dialogue. The data was coded on the basis of the CCSARP with some modification. Two main social factors were included in the situations: social distance and social dominance. This study found that Persian apologies are as formulaic in pragmatic structures as English apologies are. The most intensified apologies were offered to close friends and the least intensified apologies were offered to strangers with no dominance. Allami and Naeimi (2011) provide a cross-linguistic study of refusals, looking at Iranian learners of English. This study investigated the types of refusal strategies which English as a Foreign Language learners use in situations that require refusal, in order to study the extent to which their refusal strategies compare with those used in their first language. The results of this study reveal that refusing in a second or foreign language is by no means an easy task, since it requires the acquisition of the socio-cultural values of the target culture. It was discovered that, unlike the Persian, the American patterns for refusals were quite consistent regardless of status level.

Another recent study in cross-cultural speech act realization was done by Prykarpatska (2008), who conducted a cross-cultural study of complaints in American English and Ukrainian.

Prykarpatska examined culture-specific differences in the way a sample of American English and Ukrainian speakers make a complaint to their friends. In order to find out which differences are culture specific, Prykarpatska used the dimensions of culture by Geert Hofstede (2004) and Edward Hall (1976). Hofstede established four dimensions to explain cultural difference. The first dimension was Power Distance, which has to do with relationships between people of different social classes. It can be low or high. High power distance cultures are characterized by formal relations between unequals whereas in low power distance societies relations between people of different classes are more relaxed and informal. The Collectivism/Individualism dimension measures the degree of relatedness of a person to a group. In collectivist cultures people look after people that they feel belong to their group and they also expect to be looked after by their "ingroup". Individualistic cultures, on the other hand, lay great emphasis on self sufficiency and independence. The Femininity/Masculinity dimension has to do with social gender roles. In high masculinity societies, gender roles are clearly distinct and men are supposed to be tough and concerned with material success, while in femininity, the roles overlap, both men and women are expected to be tender and modest and concerned with the quality of life. The fourth dimension was Uncertainty Avoidance which measures the degree to which people across societies feel threatened by uncertainties and then set rules and set procedures to contain the uncertainty. The Americans were found to use the most indirect and conventionally indirect strategies while the Ukrainians apply the whole range of complaint strategies from the least offensive to the most severe. What these studies show is that the investigation of cross-cultural speech act realization is still a vibrant field of research, especially when undertaken in new non-western contexts.

As noted in the introduction, African language pragmatics is an under-researched field. Some exceptions to this are de Kadt (1992a, 1994, 1995, 1998), who has examined the realization of request speech acts, and other directives, in isiZulu, as well as the applicability of concepts of politeness and face to the isiZulu language. In her 1992 study of requests, one of de Kadt's concerns was the universality of request strategies, whether the basic principles were the same for all languages given the specific contextualization in different languages. She concluded that in isiZulu many factors contribute to politeness in requests, for example, posture and avoidance of eye contact. Therefore the issue of politeness in isiZulu cannot be sufficiently explained in terms of single requests. Gough (1995) critically examined de Kadt (1992)'s analysis of isiZulu and proposed his own examination of requests in isiXhosa. He argues that the universal scale of politeness does not take into account the different cultural norms relating to requests, and that a classification of request strategies has been imposed across languages without investigation as to whether the socio-cultural basis of this classification is indeed true of the languages involved." (Gough, 1995:125).

Some other exceptions are those of Lwanga-Lumu (2000), who examined the speech act realization of requests and apologies in Luganda. She investigated whether Luganda speakers of English as a second language inappropriately transfer the norms and perceptions of Luganda to their target language, English. Specifically, her study was concerned with the differences and similarities in the way that English speakers and Luganda speakers use internal modifiers in making requests. She also tried to establish whether the Co-operative Principle proposed by Grice applies to Luganda culture. Her study shows much overgeneralization and verbosity on the part of the Luganda speakers of English who used the politeness marker *please* inappropriately as an attention getter, thereby deviating from the British native pattern of use. Kasanga and

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Lwanga-Lumu (2007), examined the speech act realization of apologies in Setswana. Theirs was a contrastive study of apologies in Setswana, the variety of English spoken as a first language by some white South Africans and the Setswana variety of English. This was one of the first studies to investigate the realization of requests, apologies and politeness in English and an African language. From this study, it was discovered that there are major differences in the apology strategies employed by the groups under investigation. The English first language speakers were found to acknowledge responsibility in apologizing more than did the Setswana English and Setswana speakers. Kasanga and Lwanga-Lumu highlight the importance of taking the social structure of Tswana society into consideration in order for one to fully understand the politeness phenomena in Tswana.

Dlali (2001, 2003, 2004) examined negative politeness as well as the speech act realization of complaints and apologies in isiXhosa. In his analysis of negative politeness in isiXhosa requests, Dlali employs the politeness theory framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978), as he notes that politeness is an integral part of requests (Dlali, 2001:367. The data from this study was collected from four isiXhosa literature books. The findings show that the basic principles of politeness theory and request strategies are not the same for all languages. In making requests in isiXhosa, speakers generally avoid imperatives. In 2003, Dlali conducted a study in which he examined the pragmatics of the face-threatening act of complaints in isiXhosa. By nature, a complaint is a non-polite act but speakers always have at their disposal devices to mitigate the force of their complaint. The findings reveal that the communicative act of complaining is an extremely difficult act to master (Dlali, 2003:138). In his 2004 article, Dlali examines the role of apologies in interaction as well as the range of apologies in isiXhosa and the linguistic formulae used in such exchanges. The findings of this study reveal that in isiXhosa requests are basically

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social acts in that they are primarily oriented to supporting the relationship between participants rather than the expression of referential information or propositional meaning (Dlali, 2004:130).

Egner (2006) investigated the reasons for frequent misunderstanding between Africans and Westerners with regard to promising. She discovered that Westerners and Africans have a different understanding of the act of promising. She examines the African promise against Searle's felicity conditions to determine if it can still be regarded as the illocutionary act of promising. The African promise is merely a means to politely close a verbal exchange while for the westerner making a promise is a serious act which should always be governed by sincerity and commitment. From this study, it is clear that for an African it is quite normal for one to make a promise they know perfectly well they will not be able to keep, but for a westerner that kind of behaviour is quite strange. Of course, all these studies focus on speech act realization in African languages by first language speakers and/or in English by second language speakers. While the present study also focuses on speech act realization in an African language (siSwati) by first language speakers, it also goes further to compare how non-African learners realize some speech acts in an African language as well as in their first language.

Another focus of research in African language linguistics has been on the realization of speech acts in second language varieties of English by native speakers of African languages (De Kadt, 1992b, Kasanga, 2003, 2006). Again, though, very little attention has been paid to the realization of speech acts in African languages by non-native speakers, the focus of the present study. By examining the differences between Swazis and American's speech act realizations in different situations, I will be highlighting pragmatic issues that need to be addressed by the siSwati language instructors. As Allami and Naeimi (2011:400) point out, "it is crucial for second language teachers to help learners enhance their knowledge or competence of appropriate use of

speech acts in the target language and make them aware of L2 socio-cultural constraints on the speech acts in order to be pragmatically competent". In the next chapter, I will present the research methodology followed in the present study.

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Chapter 3

Research design and methodological framework

As noted in Chapter 1, the aim of the present study is to investigate the intercultural performance of two speech acts, namely greetings and requests, and to determine whether miscommunication sometimes occurs when people from diverse cultural and language orientation perform these acts. In order to achieve this aim, data were collected on the speech act realization of greetings and requests by native and non-native speakers of siSwati and native speakers of English. This chapter gives information on the subjects from whom the data were elicited, the instruments that were used to collect the data, and, finally, the methods for data analysis.

3.1. Subjects

At the time of this study, all the subjects were living in Swaziland, a small landlocked country in Southern Africa surrounded by the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique. The land area of Swaziland is approximately 17,364 square kilometres. The Swazi population is slightly above one million: 97% African and 3% European. There are two official languages, siSwati and English, and about 80% of the Swazi population (specifically people over 15 years of age) understands and speaks English (with differing levels of ability of course) as a second language. English is the language of the former British colonial masters from whom Swaziland gained independence in 1968. English is the main language used to conduct government business and is also used as the language if instruction in schools. Sadly, Swaziland is the country with the world's highest known HIV/AIDS prevalence rate.

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The subjects for the present study were divided into two groups: the first group comprised ten American native speakers of English of mixed gender, who were learning to speak the siSwati language. They had received some basic training in siSwati when they first arrived in Swaziland and they often communicate informally with the locals in siSwati. All of these participants have English as their first language and speak French, Spanish, German or Serbo-Croatian as a second language. All the subjects in this group had college degrees and 30% had post-graduate qualifications. These people are American Peace Corps volunteers, in Swaziland to help rural communities by initiating and coordinating various projects that aim to fight the effects of poverty and the HIV /AIDS pandemic. Their work is to help to develop the Third World countries in health, economically, educationally, etc. They arrived in Swaziland at different times. At the time of this study, they had been living in Swaziland for periods ranging from nine months to three years.

While in Swaziland, the American Peace Corps volunteers are each allocated a Swazi family to live with for the duration of their stay in Swaziland. They become so much a part of their Swazi family that they are given Swazi names and surnames. This allows them to gain experience and appreciate Swazi life at grassroots level. Before they go out to live in the communities, they are taught some basic siSwati to enable them to communicate with the local people, especially those who are unable to or have difficulty communicating in English. About 90% of this group of participants lived in rural areas. 50% of the participants lived in and around Siphofaneni in South-Eastern Swaziland. Siphofaneni is in the lowveld, Lubombo Administrative Region and is a rural community which has a small business area that comprises a police post, clinic, petrol station and a few shops. The nearest city, Manzini, is about 45 kilometres away. The remaining 50% lives in different localities throughout the country.

The second group of participants consisted of ten Swazi people (ranging in age from 16 to 52) each of whom had a Peace Corp volunteer staying in their home. About 80% can speak, read and write in one other language, which is English. Details about the participants are summarized in Table 1 below.

Nationality	No of subjects	Gender	Age	Mother Tongue
American	10	Male: 4 Female: 6	20-30	English
Swazi	10	Male: 5 Female: 5	16-52	siSwati

Table 1 – Participants

To explain the disparity in the age range of the two sets of participants: only two of the Swazi subjects were aged 16 and 52 respectively, otherwise the rest of the participants were in the same age range (20-30) as the American subjects. 30 % of the Swazi subjects did not finish their high school education, 30% went through high school and the rest had acquired some college education.

3.2.Instruments

The instruments used to collect the data for the present study were a written Discourse Completion Test (DCT), which was in the form of a questionnaire, followed up by a semi-structured interview. Kasper and Dahl (1991:221) point out that DCTs are a much used and much criticized elicitation format in cross-cultural pragmatics; however, they remain an effective means of data collection when the purpose of the study is to "inform about speakers' pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms by which communicative acts

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can be implemented, and about their sociopragmatic knowledge of the context factors under which particular strategic and linguistic choices are appropriate" (Kasper, 2000:329).

There were two sets of questionnaires: one for the Americans, presented in English, and the other for their Swazi hosts, presented in siSwati. The one for the American English native speakers required responses in both English and siSwati and the one for the native speakers of siSwati had to be completed in siSwati only. Both questionnaires had hypothetical role-play situations which were briefly described and the participants were required to write down the conversations (greetings and requests) that would be typically made by people in those situations.

The researcher contacted the subjects one by one, gave out the questionnaires and collected them personally at a later date. They were distributed on the basis of two per home; one for a volunteer and one for one member of his/her Swazi family. A total of twenty questionnaires were completed and collected. Getting hold of the subjects the first time was not easy, since they lived in different places. The number of questionnaires given out was limited by the number of Peace Corp volunteers that the researcher was able to get to participate in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of seven situations for which participants were asked to construct typical dialogues (see Appendix A). These situations/questions were intended to elicit greetings and requests in both English and siSwati. Below are some of the situations outlined in the questionnaires that the subjects had to respond to:

1.   You have lost your way to the post office. You meet a stranger and ask for directions. How would you start such a conversation, and how would it proceed?

2.   You meet an acquaintance in town while you are hurrying to get to the bank before closing time. How do you greet each other?

3.   You want to ask a friend of the same sex to be present at your birthday party at the weekend.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher after the subjects had filled out the questionnaires. However, it was not possible to interview all the participants because in some cases, for various reasons, the researcher could not meet with the subjects during collection of the questionnaires. Only 60% of the subjects were therefore interviewed. The interviews were conducted in siSwati for the Swazi subjects and in English for the Americans. The original intention was to interview the subjects who had completed the questionnaire, people who would have an idea of what the interview was about. The interview questions, which are set out in Appendix C, included the following:

1.   Would you say there are any differences in the way Swazi and American people:

    (i)   greet other people.

    (ii)   make and respond to greetings?

2. Please tell me about the first few weeks of your contact with your Swazi hosts/ volunteers.

The researcher is well aware of that in sociolinguistic research the means of data collection are a major concern and would have preferred to capture the data of naturally occurring conversation (which would have been more ideal) for this study, but in the circumstances it would have been extremely difficult to do so. The researcher is confident, however, that the data collected here is close enough to the language used in natural discourse for the purposes of this study.

3.3. Procedure

Each of the Swazi subjects was given a questionnaire to fill out in their native language, siSwati. The American subjects, on the other hand, had to respond to the questions first in their mother tongue, English, and then in siSwati. They were requested not to make a translation as such but to write a conversation as it would naturally occur in each language. The respondents were left on their own to complete the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted when the researcher went to collect the questionnaires and took about twenty minutes in each case. The request to ask the questions was made when the respondents were given the questionnaires to fill out. The answers were written down by the researcher as they were given by the participants during the interview.

3.4. Data Analysis

3.4.1. Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project Framework

The speech acts of request produced by the participants were analysed using the framework of the Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) as developed by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989). "The main objectives of that study were:

1. To establish native speakers' patterns of realization with respect to two speech acts – requests and apologies – relative to different social constraints, in each of the languages studied (situational variability).
2. To establish the similarities and differences in the realization patterns of requests and apologies *cross-linguistically*, relative to the same social constraints across the languages studied (cross-cultural variability).

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3.   To establish the similarities and differences between native and non-native realization patterns of requests and apologies relative to the same social constraints (individual, native versus non-native variability)".

(Blum-Kulka et al.1989:19)

The same framework was used, though to a limited extent, to analyse the speech act of greeting. The data for the two speech acts were also analysed against the background of speech act theory. The CCSARP dealt with the speech act of request and apology; their framework for the analysis of requests will be used to analyse requests in the present study. The speech act of request in the CCSARP was segmented as follows:

A.   The Head Act (the request proper): is that part of the request sequence which might serve to realize the act independently of other elements

(Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:17)

For example:

(1)   Excuse me; I seem to have lost my way. *Can you show me the post office?*

In the above utterance, taken from the data of the present study, the italicized words constitute the head act, which according to the CCSARP is the core of the request sequence. A request sequence as identified in the CCSARP refers to all the utterances involved in making a request. Head acts can vary on two dimensions: strategy type and perspective. Requests in the present study were classified on a nine-point scale of mutually exclusive categories (on a scale of directness). By directness is meant the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989:278). This classification of request strategy has been used in previous studies by Ervin-Tripp (1976), House and Kasper (1981) and many others, and is outlined below:

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1. *Mood derivable*: utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force ('Leave me alone'; 'Clean up the mess'.)

2. *Performatives*: utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named ('I am asking you to clean up that mess'.)

3. *Hedged performatives*: utterances in which the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by hedging expressions ('I would like to ask you to give your presentation a week earlier than scheduled'.)

4. *Obligation statements*: utterances which state the obligation of the hearer to carry out the act ('You'll have to move that car'.)

5. *Want statements*: utterances which state the speaker's desire that the hearer carries out the act ('I really wish you'd stop bothering me').

6. *Suggestory formulae*: utterances which contain a suggestion to do x ('How about cleaning up?')

7. *Query preparatory*: utterances containing reference to preparatory conditions (e.g. ability, willingness) as conventionalized in any specific language ('Could you clear up the kitchen, please?' 'Would you mind moving your car?').

8. *Strong hints*: utterances containing partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act ('You have left the kitchen in a right mess').

9. *Mild hints*: utterances that make no reference to the request proper (or any of its elements) but are interpretable as requests by context ('I am a nun' in response to a persistent hassle).

(Blum-Kulka et al., 1989:18)

The above classification can be summarized as follows:

(a)   *Direct strategies* – strategies 1 to 5;

(b)   *Conventionally indirect strategies* – strategies 6 and 7;

(c)   *Nonconventionally indirect strategies* – strategies 8 and 9.

On the perspective of head acts, the speaker has a choice of four perspectives from which to make his/her request. Requests can emphasise the role of the agent and be *speaker-oriented* ('Can I have it?') or focus on the role of the recipient and be *hearer-oriented* ('Can you do it?'). Requests can also be phrased as *inclusive* ('Can we start cleaning now?') or as *impersonal* ('It needs to be cleaned') (Blum-Kulka, 1989:19).

The scale of directness used in the CCSARP was applied in the present study to compare the directness levels in the requests performed by both the native speakers of siSwati and the American English native speakers in their first language and in siSwati.

Some components that form part of the request sequence are not essential for realizing the request, for example **Alerters** and **Supporting Moves.** Their function is simply to get the attention of the person being addressed. An alerter is an opening element preceding the actual request, such as a term of address or an attention getter. For example, in utterance (2) below, *Sindi*, the address term, is an alerter, while *excuse me* in utterance (1) is an attention getter.

(2)   Sindi, would you mind closing that window?

A Supportive Move is a unit external to the request, which modifies its impact by either aggravating or mitigating it. In the utterance *Excuse me, I seem to have lost my way. Can you show me the post office?,* the underlined words serve as a supportive move. A supportive move

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can come either before or after a request. Requests can be multiple-headed, i.e. we may find at the same level of explicitness more than one minimal unit realizing the requestive goal. For example, the utterance in (3) contains two phrases, both of which are requests.

(3)   Clean up the kitchen. Get rid of this mess.

(Blum-Kulka, 1989:276)

Sometimes in one conversational turn, two or more speech acts can be realized, as in the following example where a greeting and a requestive goal are achieved at the same time.

(4)   Hi Jen. I'm having a party at my place for my birthday, you want to come?

3.4.2. The CCSARP Coding Strategies

According to the CCSARP, speakers always have at their disposal various devices that they can use to either aggravate or mitigate the force of the speech act they perform. Internal modifiers are those elements whose inclusion in the request utterance is not essential and whose absence would not in any way affect the illocutionary force of the request. See for example, the italicized words in utterance (5):

(5)   *Sindi, if you don't mind/please* close that window.

These modifiers can serve both as indicating devices, used to signal pragmatic force, and as sociopragmatic devices, meant to affect the social impact the utterance is likely to have. They may also act as **downgraders** and soften the act or as **upgraders** and emphasise the degree of coerciveness (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989:19). In sentence (6) is an example (in italics) of a downgrader and in (7) of an upgrader:

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(6)   Read the assignment now, *if possible.*

(7)   Stop what you are doing, *this minute!*

Downgraders can also take the form of purely syntactic elements which are named **syntactic downgraders**. The use of the modal verb *could* obviously softens the force of the request: *Could you fix it now*? as opposed to *Fix it now*. Syntactic downgraders are realized by means of specific categories of language such as the modal verbs in the English language. Some types of modifiers suggested by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989:281-286) in the CCSARP are listed below:

Syntactic downgraders

    (i)   **Interrogative** e.g. <u>*Can*</u> *I borrow your notes?*

    (ii)   **Negation of a preparatory condition**: The two most common conditions on request compliance are that the addressee can comply, and that he or she is willing to carry out the requested act. E.g. <u>*Shouldn't*</u> *you perhaps tidy up the kitchen*?

    (iii)   **Subjunctive**: Only optional subjunctive forms are coded as downgraders, e.g. *Might be better if you <u>were to leave now</u>.*

    (iv)   **Conditional:** Like the subjunctive, the conditional has to be optional to be coded as a downgrader, i.e. it has to be replaceable by an indicative form. For example: <u>*I would*</u> *suggest you leave now*.

    (v)   **Aspect**: The durative aspect marker (or other types of aspect) counts as mitigating only if it can be substituted by a simple form, e.g. <u>*I'm wondering*</u> *if I could get a lift home with you*.

    (vi)   **Tense**: Past tense forms are coded as downgrading only if they are used with present time reference, i.e. they can be substituted by present tense forms without changing

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the semantic meaning of the utterance. For example: *I wanted to ask you to present your paper a week earlier.*

Lexical and phrasal downgraders

(i) **Politeness marker:** an optional element added to a request to bid for cooperative behavior, e.g. *Clean the kitchen*, *please.*

A politeness marker can also be the means by which the speaker seeks the direct involvement of the hearer, e.g. *Do you think you could present your paper this week*?

(ii) **Understater:** Adverbial modifiers by means of which the speaker under-represents the state of affairs denoted in the proposition, e.g. *Could you tidy up a bit?*

(iii) **Hedge:** Adverbials used by the speaker when he or she wishes to avoid a precise propositional specification in order to avoid the potential provocation of such precision. For example: *It would fit much better somehow if you did your paper next week.*

(iv) **Subjectiviser:** an element in which the speaker explicitly expresses his or her subjective opinion vis-à-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, thus lowering the assertive force of his request. For example: *I'm afraid you're going to have to move your car.*

(v) **Downtoner:** sentential or propositional modifier used by a speaker in order to modulate the impact his or her request is likely to have on the hearer, e.g. *Could you possibly/perhaps lend me your notes*?

(vi) **Cajoler:** Conventionalized speech item whose semantic content is of little transparent relevance to their discourse meaning. Cajolers commonly do not enter into syntactic structures, but are interspersed to increase, establish, or restore

harmony between the interlocutors, which may be endangered through the request. For example: *You know*, *I would really like you to present your paper next week.*

(vii) Appealer: Elements used by a speaker whenever he or she wishes to appeal to his or her hearer's benevolent understanding. Appealers function to elicit a hearer signal, occur in a syntactically final position, and may signal turn-availability. Tags are a common realization, e.g. *Clean up the kitchen, dear*, *will you?*

Like syntactic downgraders, lexical and phrasal downgraders may co-occur in any one utterance.

Upgraders

The function of upgraders is to increase the impact of the request.

(i) Intensifier: Adverbial modifier used by speakers to intensify certain elements of the proposition of the utterance, e.g. *The kitchen is in a terrible/frightful mess.*

(ii) Commitment indicator: Sentence modifier by means of which a speaker indicates his or her heightened degree of commitment vis-à-vis the state of affairs referred to in the proposition, e.g. *I'm sure/certain/surely/certainly you won't mind giving me a lift.*

(iii) Expletive: e.g. *Why don't you clean that bloody /damn mess up?*

(iv) Time intensifier: e.g. *You'd better move your car right now/immediately.*

(v) Repetition of request: (literally or by paraphrase) e.g. *Get lost! Leave me alone!*

3.4.3. Greetings

The CCSARP coding strategies were used to a limited extent to analyse the greeting speech act. The greetings data were analysed mainly against the background of the speech act theory. The

researcher had a keen interest in finding out what actually constitutes a greeting in the two languages under investigation and whether the learners use the same strategies to perform the greetings in the target language.

Length of utterance was also considered in the analysis of greetings performed by native speakers and those performed by the learners. The attitudes that are often exhibited in the performance of greetings were also briefly examined. Attitudes involve, among other things, the sincerity principle. As noted earlier, some researchers found greetings to be seriously lacking in sincerity. The issue of social distance between the interlocutors was also investigated. Is greeting influenced by factors such as age, social position or status in the two languages?

Chapter 4

Results: Analysis and Discussion

This chapter provides the results of the data collected with both the English and siSwati questionnaire. As discussed in Chapter 3, the questionnaires were completed by 10 American Peace Corps volunteers and 10 native speakers of siSwati. In the following section, section 4.1, the results of the data collection from native speakers of siSwati will be presented, comparing this data to the American non-native speakers of siSwati's realisation of the same speech acts both in siSwati and English. In section 4.2, the results of the data collection from the non-native speakers of siSwati will be presented. This section will include an analysis and comparison of the speech acts of request and greeting produced in both English and siSwati.

4.1 Native Results

To start with, the Swazi responses were quite long when compared with those produced by the American subjects, especially in conversations between social unequals like between boss and company employee and between father and son in which the son requests his father to pay his school fees. This fact, I think, is very closely connected with the issue of indirectness in speech act realization. Swazis most of the time use indirect means to realize communicative goals such as requests. Even when they do attempt to be direct sometimes, they tend to use many words to arrive at their goal. For example, in the following exchange (8), a child has been sent away from school because his fees have not been paid, so he asks for the money from his father.

(8)   Son: *Sawubona babe* [Good morning/afternoon/evening, father]

Father: *Yebo ndvodzana, kunjani*? [Good morning, my son. How are you?]

Son: *Ngiyaphila babe. Bengifuna kukutjela kutsi esikolweni bangicoshile ngoba ngikweleda imali yesikolwa. Angati noma ungakhona yini kungibhadalela, Nkhosi*? [I am fine, father. I wanted to inform you that I have been sent away from school because I owe the fees. I was wondering if you would be able to pay for me, Nkhosi. (*Nkhosi* is an address term to show respect, particularly to people of the Dlamini clan)]

The son's request sequence makes use of a query preparatory strategy, specifically a conventionally indirect strategy, *angati noma ungakhona yini kungibhadalela* ("I was wondering if you would be able to pay for me"). The son uses such language because clearly he is asking for a favour, so he has to find the right words to help mitigate the force of the request, because it requires some action from his father. Also, the level of formality of the language used by the son, such as the formal address term *Nkhosi*, shows clearly that the distance between father and son is quite large. The American responses to the same situation were far more informal and straightforward owing to the different perspectives the two groups apparently have of the situation as well as the relationship between the interlocutors. For the Americans, paying school fees is purely the parents' responsibility and the issue is very rarely discussed with children, which is why in their case, it was discovered, the situation did not amount to a request but simply a passing on of information, as can be seen in two of the responses below, in (9) and (10):

(9)   Son: Dad, I talked to the school, and they say you have to pay. I can't go to school until you do.

Father: Oh, damn, I'm sorry kiddo, I must have forgotten. Here, I'll write a check now.

Son: Thanks padre. I'll see you after school. Love you.

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Father: Love you too.

(10)   Son: Hello, dad.

Father: Hey, son. Is everything OK?

Son: No, I was sent home from school today because my tuition has not been paid.

Father: I see. Let me find out what the problem is.

Son: Thanks, dad.

Even though the son thanks his father at the end of the dialogue in (10), he is not making a request per se but simply informing his father of an anomaly which he (the father) needs to straighten out. Also, the warmth and closeness between father and son is evident in both dialogues. The power distance between the interlocutors is very small.

Below is one example of a Swazi's response to a greeting between a company employee *Sabelo* and his boss who is just returning to work after being away for two months.

(11)   Sabelo: *Sawubona, babe Dlamini* [Good morning, Mr Dlamini]

Mr Dlamini: *Yebo Sabelo. Kunjani*? [Good morning, Sabelo. How is it?]

Sabelo: *Siyaphila, babe. Ingabe belunjani luhambo lwakho*? [We are fine, sir. How was your journey?]

Mr Dlamini: *Cha, sihambe kahle kakhulu. Nisele njani nine*? [Well, we had a good journey. How have you all been?]

Sabelo: *Besisele kahle impela. Siyajabula kutsi sewubuyile, babe*. [We have all been well. We are so happy to have you back, sir.]

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Compared with (20) below, this conversation is much more formal. It shows that though the relationship between the interlocutors is courteous and amiable, the social distance between them is quite large. For the Swazi people, one can never speak to their boss like they would with a social equal, regardless of whether the context of interaction is formal or not. One must always be respectful to one's superiors and that respect is shown mainly through language.

Another aspect worth noting is the use of plural forms when the interlocutor could have easily used the first person singular pronoun, realised in siSwati by the morpheme *ngi*. For example, when Sabelo responds to *Kunjani*? ("how are you?") from the boss, he says, *Siyaphila babe* ("**We** are fine, sir") instead of saying, *Ngiyaphila babe* ("**I** am fine, sir"). The boss also says, *Sihambe kahle* ("**We** had a good journey") (note that he is the only one who has been away). The use of the plural form here has nothing to do with whether he journeyed with other people or not. This is a very common phenomenon in the communication of Swazi people. It is very common for one person to greet another, *Ninjani?* ("How are you (pl)?") instead of *Unjani*? ("How are you (sg)?"), and for the other to respond by saying, *Siyaphila* ("**We** are fine") when he is referring to himself and no one else. This kind of behaviour could be due to the self-effacing quality prevalent in Swazi society in general, the attitude that it is not about me but all of us. In most instances, using the first person pronoun to refer to oneself, particularly when talking about one's accomplishments, is considered as a sign of arrogance. In such instances, native speakers are never confused or think that the speaker is talking about himself and other people. When a speaker uses the plural form to refer to himself and others, native speakers know; they can easily tell the difference between a "singular" we and a "plural" we.

Address terms are very important in greetings among the Swazi, for example, *Sawubona babe/make/sisi/bhuti* ("Good morning sir/ma'am/sister/brother"). *Sawubona* ("Good morning")

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alone is not enough and does not show enough respect to your interlocutor, especially if they are older. The terms *sisi* and *bhuti* do not carry the same meaning as "sister" or "brother" in English, but are used as friendly address terms. You also have to ask after the person's health, *Unjani*? ("How are you?") and maybe even go to the extent of making a comment or two about the weather. Some of the non-native speakers of siSwati, when interviewed, made comments to the effect that Swazis seemed to have a lot of time in their hands considering the amount of time they generally spend on greetings. They really take their time to greet and maximum attention is given to their interlocutor during the greeting exchange. Greetings by Swazis are by no means short, not even between friends. However, the Swazi greetings between friends are much less formal than those produced by the Americans in siSwati. In fact, 30% of the Swazi subjects used slang in their greetings of social equals like in the situation where they had to invite a friend of the same age and sex to their birthday party to be held at the weekend. The greeting went something like this:

(12)   Senzo; *Eita,mfana, Zithini?*

        Sanele: *Eitha, eitha, mfo. Zikhiphani?*

The weak social distance between friends allows them to express their greetings in a more direct and informal way.

Interestingly this type of greeting was used only by the young male subjects. This is because even in normal everyday conversation it is the young Swazi males who are fond of using such language.

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It is worth noting at this stage that, among the youth especially, the trend is fast moving towards the American and Western way of greeting. Unlike the older generation Swazis, the youth find it easier to perform the 'speedy greeting' or the 'greeting on the run' as explicated by Ebsworth et al. (1996:93). The young Swazi perform such greetings often among themselves but when they communicate with older citizens they know they have to slow down, stop and greet "properly" or risk being labelled disrespectful and rude. Even when communicating with social equals, the older Swazis, unlike the younger generation, tend to use indirect and formal ways to express their greetings and requests.

This point brings to attention the issue of social/power distance which is of utmost importance in Swazi communication. For Swazis, the general greeting behaviour is such that the one to initiate the greeting exchange is the interlocutor who assumes the lower status in the relationship, i.e. in terms of age or social status. Children are taught by their parents to always greet older people when they meet them. Children who fail to greet their elders are considered to have been brought up the wrong way by their parents. The identity of interlocutors and how they relate with each other in any exchange is therefore crucial. More than fifty percent of the American participants did point out that one's surname is highly regarded in Swaziland. It is normal that before a conversation can progress any further, the interlocutor (usually the older) will want to know 'who' they are talking to and it is usually not the first name but the surname they are interested in. Usually they even want to know who their interlocutor's father or mother is in order to establish whether the two of them are perhaps related. One reason for such behaviour is that in Swaziland, being a small country, everyone knows almost everyone. One can safely say that in Swazi communication, the relationship between interlocutors is just as important as the content of the interaction.

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When asked about any differences they had noticed in the American and Swazi communication style, eighty percent of the Swazi participants said that Americans speak too fast and they have to concentrate very hard to understand everything they say. Apart from being fast speakers, Americans also seem to not attach much importance to greeting in the same way that Swazi people do. As quoted earlier, one American subject said "in America people often hurry through greetings because they are in a hurry to get somewhere". Some Swazis take this as a sign of impoliteness or even arrogance, and of not caring much about other people, while on the other hand, some Americans feel that Swazis seem to enjoy wasting other people's time by being too wordy and not going straight to the point of what they want to say. It appears that time is of the essence to the Americans and that they do not appreciate having anyone waste it for them. One should bear in mind that these are mere differences and they should be treated as such and not negatively in order for unconditional acceptance to prevail. The 'slow' speech of the Swazi is in fact consistent with the slow pace of doing things in general in Swaziland; it is not uncommon to hear Swazi people say "There is no hurry in Swaziland" to explain why things (politically, economically, socially, etc.) are not happening as quickly as they should, according to the Swazi people in general. This cultural trait appears to affect, to a large extent, the linguistic behaviour of the Swazi people.

In the following section, I present the results from the completion of the questionnaire in English and siSwati by non-native speakers of siSwati.

4.2 Non-native results

In the majority of cases in the production of a request speech act, the American participants also included a greeting. Interlocutors would open the conversation with a greeting and then proceed

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to perform the request. The greetings produced in this way are the same as those produced from the situations intended to elicit greetings. The American English native speakers produced the two speech acts, requests and greetings, in both English and siSwati. The two were compared and analysed. In the main, siSwati greetings by the non-native speakers of siSwati were correctly done even though in some cases the greetings used were not quite appropriate for the situations. An example of such a greeting is given in (13), with the author's translation into English in square brackets.

(13)   A: *Sawubona, mngani wami* [Good morning, my friend]

        B: *Yebo mngani wami* [Good morning my friend. How are you?]

        A: *Ngiyaphila, unjani wena*? [I am fine, and you?]

        B: *Bewukuphi*? [Where have you been?]

        A: *Bengivakashele anti e South Africa* [been visiting my aunt in South Africa]

The above greeting was in response to the situation outlined in (2) (cf. Appendix A).

(14)   Two friends see each other after a month's separation. What do they say to each other?

I found that in most cases the greetings in siSwati were very formal, even in cases where an informal greeting would have been appropriate. For this same situation, the greetings by native speakers comprised of a light, informal greeting such as the one in (3) because an encounter between friends does not warrant a full greeting under normal circumstances.

(15)   *Sipho, kunjani vele?* [Sipho! So , how are you?]

As pointed out earlier, some of the Swazi subjects even used slang when greeting their friend.

However, when the American subjects wrote a dialogue on the same situation in English, it was appropriately done, as illustrated by the discourse fragment in (4).

(16)   A: Hey, Jen!

        B: Hey, Paul!

        A: How are you? So good to see you!

        B: I'm good, good to see you as well.

        A: What have you been up to?

        B: Nothing much. What about you?

The attention getter *hey* together with the first name used to open the greeting act sequence makes the exchange quite informal and relaxed, as it should be. It is a typical greeting between friends, filled with warmth and camaraderie. One possible reason for why the Americans did not make the greetings in siSwati informal enough could be because they are not aware of any equivalent for *hey* in siSwati. Another possible reason is that they may be aware of the importance of greetings in siSwati and thus "overlabour" them. It is worth noting here that the trend was such that the non-native speakers of siSwati tended to use one and the same greeting in all situations, formal and informal alike. Some of the Americans revealed to the author that they were aware of a few other greeting forms but they preferred to use *sawubona* (to one person) and *sanibonani* (to more than one) because it worked for them all the time. The reason for some exchanges being unnecessarily formal could therefore be the non-native speaker of siSwati's lack of knowledge of or lack of confidence in using other available greeting forms.

Another point of comparison has to do with the length of the utterances. The utterances that non-native speakers of siSwati produced in siSwati were shorter (apart from the greetings) than those

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in English, which could be due to the fact that they lacked the necessary vocabulary in siSwati to say all they would have liked to. They say only what is necessary and leave it at that.

The discourse segment in (5) was given in response to a situation in which the participants were instructed to request a friend of the same sex to attend their birthday party at the weekend.

(17) A: Hey man, I'm glad I ran into you. I'm having a birthday party and wanted to know if you could come, can you?

B: I would love to. Is it this weekend?

A: Yeah, it's Saturday, eight o'clock or whenever, we'll be up late.

B: All right dude, I'll see you there!

The request act above can be analysed in this way: *hey man* is an attention getter, which we could say doubles as a greeting since the conversation participants could be meeting for the first time that day. *I'm glad I ran into you* is a supportive move, while the rest of the sentence forms the head act (the actual request). The request perspective is hearer dominant, *…if **you** could come, can **you**?*, because action in the form of either a promise or refusal is expected from the addressee. The speaker makes use of an **appealer** (a lexical downgrader*), can you?* to elicit a response from the addressee. In this exchange, the threat to the addressee's face is very minimal because of the nature of the request; it is a simple invitation to a birthday party.

Consider now the exchange in (18) below (the greeting part has been removed). This discourse fragment differs from the discourse fragment in (17) in that the length of the request is much shorter. There is no attention getter or supportive move, and the head act contains only one politeness marker, *ngicela* ("please").

(18)   A: *Ngicela ute ephathini yekutalwa kwami ngeMgcibelo* [Please come to my birthday party at the weekend]

    B: *Ngiyabonga kakhulu mnganami. Ngitawufika* [Thanks for the invitation my friend, I'll be there]

In the situation where participants were instructed to present a possible conversation with the chief of the area (traditional authority), almost all the American respondents used an inappropriate address term, italicized in the utterance in (19).

(19)   Good morning, *chief.*

The respondents used this address term in both the siSwati and English dialogues. They obviously thought they were according the chief the respect due to him. Native speakers of siSwati know that it is not proper to use that address term when talking to the chief. *Chief* can only be used when talking about the chief or referring to his position. The American subjects can be excused for making this error since the system of chiefs does not exist in their society so they understandably do not know how to relate to them. However, generally, the conversation as a whole was presented appropriately; it was formal enough and acceptable by native standards. In fact, apart from the address term, this particular exchange was performed in the same way by both the native and non-native speakers of siSwati.

The following conversation was a response by an American participant, a 25 year old male, of a typical greeting between a company employee (Bob) and his boss who has just returned to work after a two month's absence.

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(20)   Bob: Dr Stevenson, it's great to have you back, how were the Maldives?

Boss: Great, Charlie. It's good to be back, although I can't say it was easy to leave paradise.

Bob: Ha, ha, ha, I can imagine, coming back to deal with all of us doesn't sound like a tropical getaway.

Boss: Oh no, I was glad to come back, I missed feeling busy.

Even though Bob in (20) above uses the address term, *Dr Stevenson*, thereby addressing his boss formally, the whole exchange is quite informal and relaxed. Actually, the conversation reveals that the distance between boss and employee is very small. When they are not discussing work related issues they can talk like equals.

When asked if she had noticed any differences in the American English and Swazi style of communication, one American responded:

(21)   Greetings are much more important in Swaziland. In America, strangers don't greet each other and people often hurry through greetings because they are in a hurry to get somewhere.

The above observation in a way sums up the findings of this research with regards to the interactional style of the two groups under study. Almost all the American subjects raised this point that they had discovered that Swazis attach (too) much importance to greetings. In Swaziland, and possibly in many other African countries, greetings are regarded as a significant unifying and bonding factor. Even strangers must be greeted and be afforded all the 'respect' due to them. In fact, strangers are supposed to be treated with more politeness and consideration than acquaintances. Not greeting someone when meeting them is considered rude and 'unSwazi'.

Swazi people pride themselves in being friendly and respectful, particularly towards strangers. The data for this study does show that indeed Americans do not greet strangers. For example, in response to the situation given in (22), none of the American subjects provided greetings.

(22)   You have lost your way to the post-office. You meet a stranger and ask for directions. How would you start such a conversation, and how would it proceed?

All the American subjects responded along the lines of the discourse fragments presented in (23) and (24) below:

(23)   A: Excuse me, where's the post-office? I seem to have lost my way.

B: Over there, down Wall Street on the right side of the street.

A: Thanks.

B: You're welcome.

(24)   A: Excuse me, sir, I was looking for the post-office, do you know where it is?

B: Um… I think it's only one more block down at the corner of Rosecrans and Lowell. Good luck.

A: Hey, thanks a bunch! Have a good one.

The request in (23) above is composed of an attention getter, *excuse me*; the head act, *where's the post-office*? and a supportive move, which serves to mitigate the illocutionary force of the utterance by giving a reason for approaching the addressee, *I seem to have lost my way*. This was supposed to be a request for information, and so for the Americans, *Excuse me* appears to be polite enough to open a conversation with a stranger. Not so for Swazis, all of whose responses to the same situation include a full greeting for the stranger before the request for information

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was made. Actually to the siSwati native speakers, the discourse fragments in (23) and (24) are unacceptable, a stranger must be greeted properly before he can be asked anything. When you look at the above example, you will realize that the degree of directness in speech act performance is quite high. The data reveals that the Americans do not waste any time in establishing a connection with the addressee; they simply go straight into the matter they want to talk about, using plain language.

A 27 year old male American subject responded this way, during the semi-structured interview with the researcher, concerning the Swazi communication style or behaviour:

(25)   SiSwati is too repetitive, more formal and respectful, more attentive to the guest. Swazis are also more indirect, passive and less confrontational. Communication is more time consuming, less hurried, more round about.

He could not have put it better. The siSwati language is repetitive. The American subjects were able to pick up the very vital pragmatic aspects of Swazi communication, namely that Swazi communication style is quite formal and round about. Respect and regard for others, particularly older people, people of high social status and strangers play a very important role in everyday conversation. This knowledge influenced to a very large extent the performance of greetings and requests in siSwati. However, as has already been pointed out, Swazis tend to go a bit too far with the formality aspect.

To show interest and politeness, Americans look their interlocutor in the eye but for Swazi people, that is very difficult to do. In fact, avoiding eye contact with one's interlocutor is part of their upbringing. Children are taught from a very young age that it is a sign of disobedience and impudence to look your interlocutor in the eye, especially if they are older than you are. The

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older of the two may look at the younger in any way they like, but the younger is expected to avert his eyes to lower his gaze a little to show respect. Children who unashamedly look their elders in the eye are called many names, such as *umlungu* ("white person") because such behaviour is normally associated with white people. To be called *umlungu* in this context is not a compliment, of course. Actually, this and other similar behaviours are normally labeled 'unSwazi'. This obvious clash of cultures is usually felt by children from families that still uphold such values, when they begin to go to school and are required to look teacher in the eye when they are being addressed. It is worth mentioning, however, that such values are being gradually eroded away because of Western or foreign influence. One American subject rightly pointed out that:

(26)   Swazis don't use eye contact the same way. Americans consider eye contact more respectful.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the sociolinguistic variations in the performance of the speech acts of greetings and requests by American English speakers and siSwati native speakers. The two groups under study had to respond in writing to situations that were meant to elicit greetings and requests. The questions I had set out to answer were: Do differences in cultural background affect the performance and understanding of speech acts in a different language, specifically siSwati? If so, what are these differences? What pragmatic knowledge is necessary for American English-speaking learners of siSwati to have in order to perform greetings and requests successfully in siSwati? To answer the above questions, I compared the greetings and requests by the Americans in their first language and in siSwati and those made in siSwati by the siSwati native speakers. The strategies used to achieve the two speech acts and the possible underlying values behind them were examined.

The findings reveal marked differences in the production and interpretation of the two speech acts under study. The American responses reveal that they had acquired some pragmatic knowledge of the target language, namely that siSwati is generally a 'slow' language and the importance of holding one's interlocutor with the highest regard and consideration. Also, the level of directness in the performance of these speech acts was significantly higher for the Americans than for the Swazis.

The results of this study have shown the importance attached to greetings by the Swazi people. It has also been shown that the non-native speakers of siSwati, for various reasons, stick to one

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form of greeting which they use in all their interactions in the target language. The data also revealed the fact that the same situation may not result in the same speech act for people from different cultural backgrounds. From their greeting responses, it is evident that the American subjects do understand the significant role that greetings play in everyday communication for the Swazi people. The non-native speakers of siSwati tended to follow some ritualized greeting routine and were almost always formal when speaking in siSwati even when the situation called for an informal exchange during greeting. As regards requests, the American participants phrased their requests in a more direct way than the siSwati native speakers did but the request sequences by the siSwati native speakers were shorter and less formal than those produced by the Americans in siSwati.

The data confirms that the American communication style is generally laid back, relaxed and largely informal. This is in contrast to the Swazi communication style which is more formal and repetitive in nature. Americans are very sensitive when it comes to time utilization which explains why 80% of the American subjects made the observation that Swazi communication was time-consuming and repetitive. It has been noted that the aspect of social and power distance between interlocutors is generally small for American English speakers and significantly high for the Swazi. It has been established also that the identity of the interlocutors and the relationship between them is much more important for the Swazi than it is for the American. Americans and Swazis evidently have different perceptions of the aspects of politeness and demonstrating respect for one's interlocutor. The former consider eye contact respectful while the latter regard it as a sign of disrespect and a result of parents' failure to bring up their children properly in the Swazi way. Native siSwati speakers easily tolerate such behaviour from foreigners but frown upon it when coming from fellow Swazis. The results have shown also that American speech is

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generally fast while on the other hand, siSwati is a 'slow' language and that such a difference might lead to misperceptions or misconceptions of each other. The author of this study is of the opinion that once people are made aware of some differences that exist between them, they are able to better understand and appreciate each other and thereby live in harmony.

I am aware that the data for this study were collected from a very small section of the two nationalities under study, and therefore may not accurately portray the speech behaviours of the larger society that the subjects in this study represent. I am aware also that the authenticity of results of a study whose data were collected by means of a questionnaire is always in question. One obvious limitation of written data is that the respondents are prone to write what they think should be spoken as opposed to what actually happens in everyday conversation. Also, for both sets of data, non-verbal expression, which is quite essential in the interpretation of such acts, could obviously not be captured. Capturing normally occurring conversation could have given the author something to compare the written data with; however, in this case observation might not have worked, for the non-native speakers of siSwati more especially. Rintell and Mitchell (1989) also made the observation from their study that there is some indication that the face-to-face encounter is even more different, perhaps more difficult, for non-native speakers than it is for native speakers.

The results of this study could help the designers of the siSwati language courses for the American Peace Corps volunteers to be aware of the salient aspects of culture that affect the communication of both groups of people and possibly incorporate some aspects of speech act theory in their teaching. If the siSwati language learners could be equipped with the rules of speech act realisation and interpretation as well as the strategies for realising speech acts in the target language, their learning of the language would be much more effective.

This study has been able to show that indeed the production and understanding of speech acts is both culture and language-specific. More research in cross-cultural pragmatics still needs to be done to determine the extent of the differences in interactional style and speech act realization between native speakers of African languages and non-native speakers of African languages from non-African cultural backgrounds.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire for the American English speakers

1. What is your age? (Please tick)

   20-30------   31-40------   41-50-------   51-60-------

2. Male------   Female---------

3. (a) What is your first language (mother tongue)?

   (b) How many languages do you speak? Please state them.

4. How often do you have informal conversations in siSwati with native speakers of siSwati?

   Often-----   Sometimes-------   Rarely----------

5. Have you noticed any (major) differences in the American English and Swazi style of communication? Please specify and provide examples if possible.

6. How many greetings do you know of and use in siSwati? Please list them.

   (a) When meeting someone

   (b) When taking leave of someone

7. For each of the situations below, write a short dialogue that represents typical language that people would use if they found themselves in such a situation. Please provide each dialogue

in siSwati and then in English. In each case provide at least one utterance from each of the participants in the conversation, but please feel free to provide more utterances.

(i)   You want to ask a friend of the same sex to be present at your birthday party at the weekend.

(ii)   You have lost your way to the post office. You meet a stranger and ask for directions. How would you start such a conversation and how would it proceed?

(iii)   You meet an acquaintance in town while you are hurrying to get to the bank before closing time. How do you greet each other?

(iv)   A child has been sent away from school because his fees have not been paid. He asks for the money from his father. How would he start such a conversation and how would his father respond?

(v)   Two friends see each other after a month's separation. What do they say to each other?

(vi)   You are at a community event and get the opportunity to talk with the chief of the area. How would you start such a conversation and how would the chief respond?

(vii)   Your boss has been away from work for two months. You are the first company employee to meet him on his return.

8. How long have you been in Swaziland?

Appendix B

Questionnaire for the siSwati native speakers

1. Mingaki iminyaka yakho? (Khombisa ngaloku)

   15-20-----   21-30-----   31-40------   41-50-------   51-60------

2. Umdvuna--------   Umsikati--------

3. Utiphilisa ngani?

4. Tingaki tilwimi lokwati kutikhuluma? Tibhale lapha.

5. Ukhona yini umehluko lowubonile endleleni yekukhuluma yemaSwati nemaMelika? Kusho bese unika tibonelo nawungakhona.

6. Bhala tonkhe tindlela tekubingelela ngesiSwati lotatiko.

   (a) Nawuhlangana nemuntfu

   (b) Nasenehlukana/ nivalelisana

7. (a) Ngutiphi kuletindlela tekubingelela lotibalile ngenhla lotisebentisa cishe onkhe malanga?

   (b) Ngutiphi lotisebentisa nawubingelela emavolontiya?

8. Umbingelela njani umngani wakho lenibonana cishe onkhe malanga?

9. Kungakunye kwaloku lokulandzelako, bhala inkhulumo lengakhulunywa bantfu labangatitfola bakuleso simo.

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(i)   Umntfwana ucoshwe esikolweni ngobe akabhadalelwa imali yesikolo. Uya kuyise kuyawucela lemali. Angacala ngekutsini lomntfwana, aphendvule atsini uyise?

(ii)   Usedolobheni ngalelinye lilanga. Ufuna kuya eposini mane awusati kutsi kungakuphi. Ucela lusito kumuntfu lohlangana naye longamati. Ucala utsini bese ichubeka njani lenkhulumo?

(iii)   Ucela umngani wakho kutsi ete emcimbini wekubonga lusuku lwakho lwekutalwa, ngemphelasontfo.

(iv)   Umphatsi wakho emsebentini usandza kubuya emhlanganweni ngesheya kwetilwandle. Wena uwekucala kumbona emva kwekubuya kwakhe.

(v)   Usemcimbini lotsite endzaweni yakini sewutfola litfuba lekukhulumisana nesikhulu sendzawo. Uyicala utsini inkhulumo yenu? Bese ichubeka kanjani?

(vi)   Bangani lababili babonana kwekucala emva kwekungabonani inyanga yonkhe.

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the first few weeks of your contact with your Swazi hosts/ volunteers.

2. How was the communication? Did any misunderstandings or miscommunication occur sometimes?

3. Did you experience any difficulty communicating certain things?

4. Would you say there are any differences in the way American and Swazi people

   (i)   Greet other people

   (ii)   Make and respond to requests?

5. What similarities or differences do you think are there in the way in which Swazi and American people communicate generally?

   (i)   Refer to firsthand experience

   (ii)   What do you think are the reasons for the similarities or differences?