

Greetings in Host-Tourist Encounters

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This talk explores the idea that the speech act of the greeting (and the related speech act of welcoming) be recognised as central in constituting tourist–host encounters, and as a basis for much of ‘intercultural communication’ in tourism. Based on the data from tourist guidebooks, advertisements, postcards, public signs, and face-to-face encounters between tourists and hosts in The Gambia, Mexico, South Africa, Greece, and New Zealand, it is argued that hosts and tourists engage in greeting exchanges chiefly as performances of their respective roles as ‘hosts’ and ‘tourists’, the former being motivated commercially, while the latter playfully and fleetingly assuming the cultural identity of their host community. These interactions are also highly ideological. On the one hand, they reinforce the subservient role of the host vis-à-vis the tourist, while also allowing the former to subvert the privileged status of the latter by turning them from ‘spectator’ to ‘performer’. Some implications for the formulation of felicity conditions of greetings in tourism are also considered.