

## **ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NIGERIAN CULTURAL SIGNS AND SYMBOLS IN THE LIGHT OF PRAGMATICS AND SEMIOTICS**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an investigation into the Nigerian cultural signs and symbols to see how meaning is derived from their context of use and also ascertain what each of the signs and symbols stands for. The researcher uses pragmatics and semiotics as tools for the analysis. Pragmatics is that aspect of linguistics analysis that captures meaning of words within the context of use. In other words, the meaning in pragmatics is not sentence tied. Pragmatics is the relation of signs to interpreters. Semiotics is the study of sign not in isolation but as part of semiotic ‘sign systems’ such as a medium or genre. It is the study of how meanings are made: as such, being concerned not only with communication and maintenance of reality. The study adopts the purposive sampling technique to select pragmatically used cultural signs from across the South East, South South and North Central Nigeria. Fifteen sign objects were drawn from four tribes spread across the four regions. They were analysed using three theoretical models: Eco’s (1976) theory of sign production, Mey’s (2001) pragmatic acts theory and Hymes’ (1964). From the critical observations and analysis of the selected signs and symbols of this research paper, the study observed that their use in Nigeria have pragmatics implication and their meanings can be derived from their context of use. It also observed that each of these signs and symbols used in Nigerian cultural context or situations stands for said or unsaid words to underscore a particular reality.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Semiotics, Context, Africa, Culture, Signs, Symbols

### **1.1 Introduction**

The concept Nigerian cultural signs and symbols refers to cultural artefacts, codes and communication practices that lend themselves to conventional interpretations within the sign systems of Nigerian societies. Posner (2004, p.14) avers that cultural artefacts and communication practices are regarded as ‘cultural texts’ within the study of cultural semiotics, because beyond functioning in a culture, they act as signs that carry encoded messages. It is pertinent to understand that Nigerian signs as cultural texts, beyond communicative representations, encode the messages of Nigerian cosmology and phenomenological thought.

The study of signs and signaling systems is the business of the linguistic discipline widely referred to as semiotics. Modern semiotic investigations are influenced by the works of two eminent scholars: Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Semiotics according to Peirce is the ‘doctrine of signs’, (Sebeok 2001, p.5). This implies the study of the system of principles of signs. According to Eco (1976, p.7), “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign”. The sign is anything (words, images, sounds, acts or objects, etc.) that stands for something else. According to Chandler, signs have no intrinsic meaning but become signs when we invest them with meaning. Hence, “anything can be a sign as long as someone interprets it as ‘signifying’

something – referring to or ‘standing for’ something other than itself” (Chandler 2007, p.13). Human beings from time immemorial consciously create signs and arbitrarily invest them with meanings. Thus, the production and use of signaling activities is a basic feature of every society for unique representations of meaning. Sebeok (2001) avers that representation is the deliberate use of signs to probe, classify, and hence know the world. Representations, therefore (‘as deliberate use of signs’), are situated in contexts and this gives rise to the concept of cultural signs.

Cultural signs are systems of representations that are common among a people which are also part and parcel of their cosmology. As a result, their entire socio-cultural activities are regulated or moderated by the prevailing sign systems. According to Saussure, language is a system of culture and not a system of nature. At the heart of any culture are a number of heavily used signs which lend themselves to particularly rich connotations, and accordingly convey stable meanings. A culture cannot exist without signs, whether in form of a natural language, rituals or symbols, signifying a specific meaning within a specific context. The meaning of cultural signs depends on the user’s cultural belief. Members of the same cultural group create their own signs and symbols in order to establish unity and conformity. However, insufficient attention has been paid so far to the linguistic study of the African sign systems, especially from the pragmatic standpoint. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to privilege pragmatic and semiotic methods in the examination of how meaning and belief system are constructed in Nigerian cultural signs and symbols

## **1.2 Statement of the research problem**

The fact has been established that signs and symbols constitute very useful component of the belief system in most societies of Nigeria. It is part of the socio-cultural formation around which most of the people’s actions and behaviours are understood and appreciated. In other words, the ‘whys’ of many events are explained in signs and symbols; thus, signs and symbols are part of the Nigerian heritage. A lot of scholarly works have been carried out in the study of Nigerian cultural signs and symbols, but to the knowledge of this researcher, much has not been done in the study of Nigerian cultural signs and symbols using pragmatics and semiotics principles. The researcher, therefore, embark on this study to fill this existing lacuna.

## **2.1 Review of related literature**

Researchers have broadly approached the issue of African cultural signs from anthropological and semiotic perspectives. The anthropological studies (Widding, 1992; Umeogu, 2012; Ojo 2013; Nwokoye & Eze, 2017, and so on) examine the African symbols and symbolisms for their aesthetic and cultural values. These studies focus on the interpretation of available cultural signs in Africa with the aim of describing their significance among the African people. Although the present study reveals the significance of the African cultural signs to the cosmology and phenomenological thought of Africans, it is specifically interested in the pragmatic study of the signs as communicative acts and demonstrates how their meanings are enhanced by pragmatic elements.

On the other hand, the semiotic studies on African cultural signs examine their communicative values; thus the present study falls within that category. Among the

available ones found are Agujiobi (1998) who studies traditional motifs and symbols as a means of mass communication in African societies. The study employs a survey method to collect an array of traditionally used motifs and symbols in Igboland, Nigeria, which were analysed descriptively. The findings show that the signs are more prominently used for aesthetic values than communication. The study thus recommends that motifs and symbols can be exploited for their communicative values, especially in the field of advertisement. The recommendations of the work are executed in Oladumiye (2018) who studies the use of African cultural symbols on product advertisement. The study employs survey and descriptive methods also, using 137 products randomly selected from Lagos State, Nigeria. The analysis demonstrates that cultural symbolic objects such as kola nuts, head crown, calabash, beads, and so on are heavily utilised in product advertisements in Nigeria. These objects are observed to prove effective because Nigerians can easily relate or make inference with them. The two studies above can be seen as studying African signs as both aesthetic and tactile arts; hence, they pursued their aesthetic and utilitarian values. Such foci are different from the preoccupation of the current study which seeks to demonstrate the reliance of the interpretation of African signs on pragmatic features.

Furthermore, Chilwa (2009) examines how African cultural practices and belief systems are constructed in 'Onunwa', an infancy-rites ritualistic lyrics of the people of the Southeast, Nigeria. The study adopted insights from discourse approach, ethnography and pragmatics as analytical tools to analyse 10 transcript texts (lyrics) gathered during a session of 'Onunwa' dance of the Ngwa tribe of Abia State, Nigeria. The results indicate that Onunwa, which is performed by women, rejects radical feminism and gayism and maintains the difference between a man and a woman. The study concludes that culture permeates our daily discourse and discourse is indeed a cultural practice. Onumajuru (2016) examines the semantic and pragmatic contents of Igbo names. The corpus of the study comprises both male and female Igbo names which were categorized into lexical, phrasal and sentential structures. The findings show that Igbo names are grouped into three structures: lexical, phrasal and sentential. For Ndigbo, a name is not just a tag of identity or personal label, "but a story and an expression of the event and circumstances surrounding the birth of the child as well as the parents' life expectancies and world view" (p. 307). In a similar study, Miruka (2018) studies the pragmatic meaning of African naming symbols in a Swahilinovel, *Maisha Kitendawili* by John Habwe. The study employs the descriptive method to analyse person and place names in the novel. It uncovers that the meaning of names is significant to the thematic foci of the novel but this can only be understood via the context in which the name has been used. Among others are Chilwa (2009), Onumajuru (2016) and Miruka (2018) who are closer to the focus of the current study in their objectives, but while their data reflect performance and naming systems, the attention of the present study is on sign objects and their pragmatic communication as 'sign acts'.

### **3.1 Methodology**

#### **3.1.1 The data**

The study adopts purposive sampling technique to select pragmatically used cultural from signs across four geographical regions Nigeria, namely South East, South-South and North Central Nigeri and South West. Widely used signs and symbols were drawn

from four tribes in the above four regions, namely, Igbo, Erei (Calabar) Idoma and Yoruba

### **3.1.2 Theoretical framework**

The data analysis is driven by a combination of three theories, namely Umberto Eco's (1976) theory of sign production, Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory and Dell Hymes' (1964) Ethnography of Communication.

#### **3.1.2.1 Theory of sign production**

Eco's theory of the sign is in agreement with Derrida's (1967) theory of conception, which states that there is no transcendental signified; instead, there is infinite chain from one signifier to another; a concept related to Pierce's 'unlimited semiosis'. He approaches semiotics as not concerned with a universal concept of sign, but interested in semiotic or sign functions. As against Pierce's view of the sign, Eco developed a semiotic theory that is non-referential; that is, expressions may be used to refer to the things or states of the world, but they are derived from culture and the content established by a culture. A sign is no longer perceived to contain a specific referential value but takes on several meanings, or designate various realities within a socio-cultural context. This theory, hence, supports the fact that a sign should be interpreted based on the specific culture it is used. It is, therefore, adopted in this study to interpret the selected signs not as universal concepts but as cultural symbols.

#### **3.1.2.2 Pragmatic acts theory**

Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory (PAT) is an adjustment of the earlier Speech Act Theory (SAT) by J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle in early 1960s. PAT sees the real pragmatic meaning as not just contained in 'speech acts' but in the entire situational contexts involving both speech and action. Mey argues that the context of the acting carries more weight than the spoken act itself. He refers to the entire situational context of communication as *Pragmeme* or Pragmatic Act. *Practs* and *Allopracts* constitute different realisations of a *pragmeme*. In our context in this study, each instantiation of the use of a sign is a *pract*, while the general use of the sign constitutes a *pragmeme*. The *pragmeme* is made up of the activity part, comprising the interactants, speech acts, dialogue acts, etc.) and the textual part (comprising, Inference (INF), Reference (REF) Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH), Voice (VCE) and Metapragmatic Joker (M).

Pragmatics according to Mey studies language as it is used by people for their own purposes and within their own limitations and affordances (Mey, 2001, p.207). In the present study, signs as linguistic elements, are studied in relation to their users' purposes, limitations and affordances. Hence, the study selects from the activity part of *pragmeme*, the use of signs or 'sign acts'; and from the textual part, INF, REF and SSK, to carry an in-depth pragmatic interpretation of the selected signs.

#### **3.1.2.3 Ethnography of communication**

Ethnography of communication (formally ethnography of speaking) focuses on situating communication practices in their cultural contexts. Communication practices are not looked upon as universal but as embodiment of meanings that are culturally based. Culture here refers to the affordances and peculiarities of the interactants in a communication practice. Ethnography of communication has a set of components in

its methodology for the analysis of any selected communication practice in line with its cultural context.

Hymes presents these components using the mnemonic “SPEAKING” as an acronym which denotes the following: Setting and Scene (place and scene to situate the practice in a specific context of social life); Participant (the people who participate in the communication practice); End (the goals participants may have in doing the practice and what they actually achieve); Act sequence (the practice’s message content and form; its organisational sequence); Key (how is the practice keyed or regarded emotionally?); Instrument (what is the channel of the practice: verbal or non-verbal?); Norms (what is normally done and what is appropriate to do in the practice) and Genre (the practice is analysed according to the genre of communication practice it belongs to). The present study analyses African cultural signs as pragmatic acts; however, the pragmatic analysis is based on the cultural contexts of the users, since these signs are cultural texts. Hence, it selects ‘setting’, ‘participants’, ‘end’ and ‘act sequence’ in the above mnemonic to situate the cultural signs under study within their cultural contexts.

#### 4.1 Discussion of findings

It was observed from the current study that in Nigeria, almost every material object is a sign in one context or the other. The communal life of Nigerian tribes and the norms of their traditional religion lend symbolic meaning to many items of use. The huge presence of myths which Nigerian employ to conceptualise their own universe also contributes to the signification attached to ordinary things. The selected sign and symbol objects which are examined as ‘sign acts’ for their pragma-semiotic interpretations are grouped as ‘plants or parts of plants’, ‘animals or animal parts’ and ‘ordinary objects’. These are presented according to where they are used in the table below:

##### Grouping of signs according to their sign acts, meanings and place used

Sign acts	Meaning in English	Place used
1. Ogirisi	Newbouldia laevis	Igboland
2. Aje	Mother earth	Idoma
3. Omunkwu/Itele utu	Palm frond	Igboland and Erei (Calabar)
4. Ekwu	Twisted grass on a peg	Idoma
5. Oji/Ibuu/Abi	Kola nut	Igboland; Erei (Calabar), Bakossi
6. Nkita/Ajo nnunu	Dog and Owl	Igboland
7. Nnekwu okuko	Hen	Igboland
8. Odu Ehi/Edank ebom	Cow’s tail	Erei (Calabar) and Igboland
9. Agwo ocha/ Nna ochie	Cobra	Igboland
10. Ofo na Ogu	Traditional staff	Igboland
11. Okpu-ozo/Ukpo ilak/Alah	Red cap	Erei, (Calabar), Igboland
12. Pako-ijebu	Chewing stick	Yoruba
13. Ayoshi and Ogbu-adana	Sword and whip	Igboland
14. Ichicha	Female relic of old age	Idoma
15. Ohebi	The last pack	Idoma

#### 4.1.1 Plants or parts of plants as signs

##### 1. Ogirisi (*Newbouldia laevis*)



Fig. 1: Image of Ogiri or *Newbouldia*

This sign act is carried out by farmers, aggrieved groups of rural dwellers and traditional rulers in Mmaku kingdom of Enugu and Anambra States and some other parts of Igboland in South East, Nigeria. The settings of the act are the farmland, when there is a case of treasonable offence, and coronation. The respective ends for these contexts are boundary demarcation, punitive measures and symbol of power. The inference of the meaning of *Ogirisi* is achieved through the act sequence; for land demarcation, the plant is situated serially on the chosen boundary between one land and the other, and grows there with no one tampering to uproot it. For punitive measures to one who has committed a treasonable offence, a group of women or youth bear the leaves of the plant while chanting retributive songs to the house of the offender; they spread the leaves before the entrance and disperse. The reference of the spread leaves in this manner is ostracism; people establish this reference once the act sequence is carried out. For coronation, the person to be crowned *Igwe* or traditional ruler can adopt *Ogirisi* as name to symbolise power and strength. Hence, some traditional rulers in Igboland today bear the symbol, ‘*Ogirisi-Igbo*’ as name.

##### 2. Aje (Mother earth)



This is found in every clan of Idoma land in North Central Nigeria where the plant is used as a cultural symbol. The setting of its use is normally near the village square where it can be seen growing alongside another plant called ‘*acheche*’. The end of this symbol among the people includes protection from enemies, preservation of truth and oath taking for arbitration.

Fig 2: Image of *Aje* or mother earth entrusting of criminals to its power. Meanwhile, *Aje* symbolise the presence of ancestral spirits who are in constant communion with the living. The practice of *Aje* in Idoma land involves a pragmatic act which thrives on SSK. Hence, serious disputes can be taken before *Aje* for hearing and resolution, and anything said by anyone there is taken by others as the truth, for no one is expected to lie before the ancestral spirits. *Aje* is also referred to as ‘mother earth’. Sacrifices made constantly before this plant are *practs* that communicate its sacredness and make the people to revere it.

3. Omunkwu/Itele utu (palm frond)

This sign act constitutes a huge and important cultural text in Igboland and Erei in Calabar, Nigeria. The setting of its use includes farmland, house, vehicle and venue of a masquerade performance. These settings yield different uses or *practs* of Omunkwu/Itele utu as a *pragmeme*. Meanwhile, the different ends of the symbol are arbitration, easy conveyance of corpse and harmless masquerade performance. In arbitration, different instantiations (or allopracts) of the use of this symbol exist. When it is used to circle a portion of land the reference is that the land is in dispute or that the owner bars people from going into it. Members of the rural communities infer this REF based on SSK and other context elements. If the land in question is located in the area where cultivation is shifted to and probably cleared, they know that it is in dispute – someone has gone into another’s portion of land to cultivate without permission. But if it is not, they know that the owner simply bars people from going into the land either to fetch firework or for excretion.

Similarly, when tied to the entrance of a house, community members discern that a masquerade is inside the house if an occasion is going on in that neighbourhood, else it means that a construction is going on in the house and authorities have ordered it to stop. Also, in masquerade performance, the performers use palmfrond to signal the coming out to stage of a masquerade (usually a major one); the sequence involves a member of the masquerade cult running into the arena of an event where the masquerade is expected to perform. With the palm frond in hand, he runs round the stage hastily and dashes out. The meaning is that the masquerade is about to emerge and the end is for people to clear from the stage and also take cover, especially women. This communicative act must be done to avoid any harm in masquerade performance. For conveyance of corpse, palm frond is tied to the vehicle bearing the corpse. The REF is that the vehicle has a corpse inside; no context is necessary to establish the INF of this sign, as it has become part of the people’s SSK or member’s resource. The purpose of this act is for anyone who encounters the vehicle including law enforcement agents to grant it easy passage.

4. Ekwu (knitted grass on a peg)



Fig. 3: Image of Ekwu or fold of grass

Farmers and rulers of clans are the users of this sign in Idoma land, Nigeria. The setting is the farmlands, while its end is dispute resolution. The *ekwu* sign act is similar to one of the *practs* of palm frond discussed above; its REF where it is placed in Fig. 3 is the discontinuation of work on a farmland. Here, whoever has been working on such farmland will seek out the clan rulers or any person known to have placed *ekwu* on the land to resolve issues pertaining to the ownership of the land. People can generally assign the INF of this sign based on SSK.

5. Oji/Ibuu/Abi (kola nut)



Fig. 4: Image of oji, ibuu, abi or kola nut

Users of kola nut in communicative acts in Igboland, Erei in Calabar, Nigeria, and Bakossi in Cameroon include male heads of households, elders of clans and chief priests or traditional medicine men, in settings such as welcoming of a visitor, traditional ceremonies (marriages, festivals, etc.), sacrifice and divination. In these settings, the purposes of kola nut are hospitality and acceptability, prayer, appeasement of the gods and seeking of information respectively. The REF of this sign act depends on its setting and participants. In the communal practice of *Igo-oji* or *Iwa-Oji* prayer (literally, ‘breaking of kola’) in Igboland, during ceremonies, *oji* is a symbol of life. The sequence involves making of prayer to the ancestors and gods by the eldest man among the participants with a piece of *oji* in his right hand and a cup of palm wine in the left; after the prayer, he breaks the kola nut into lobes, put them inside the cup of palm wine and pours all to the ground as libation. This practice is believed to be sustaining the life of the community, hence, *oji*, the key element of the practice, is a symbol of life. However, when this same kind of libation is poured in Bakossi by a man when a visitor comes to his house, it stands for divination – to know if the intention of the visitor is genuine. Also, kola nut is a symbol of peace when presented in any gathering in Erei clan in Calabar; hence all important gatherings are commenced with the sharing of *ibuu* without which people may begin to turn away from such gathering. All these instantiations of the use of kola nut are generally understood based on SSK. Kola nut is instrumental in the peace and communal living of African communities.

#### 4.1.2 Animals and animal parts as signs

6. Nkita/Ajo nnuu (Dog and Owl)

In Olo community and Mmaku kingdom in Enugu, South East, Nigeria, it is believed that dogs could see or smell death, and this is made manifest in its howling cry. In a similar vein, the owl is a nocturnal creature which the people believe that whenever it perches on a tree or roof of a house and starts hooting, someone in the neighbourhood is about to die. This belief system which has become part of the people’s member resource, engenders pragmatic communication using the howling of dogs and hooting of owls as sign acts. The time for this sign is the night and its REF is death. However, the end of the sign is the awareness of the movement of the ‘spirits of death’ and their repelling. The people, upon the perception of the sign, make specific prayers which are meant to cancel the evil mission of the spirits. The INF of the dog and owl signs are made by the people via shared situational knowledge or SSK.

7. Nnekwu okuko (hen)

In-laws are the users of this sign in Mmaku kingdom in Enugu, South East, Nigeria at a time when a married woman dies. The sequence involves a member of the husband of the late woman’s kindred taking a hen killed by strangling to the woman’s home of birth. The emissary delivers the hen to the woman’s people without words and leaves



immediately without the usual hospitality rite of presentation of kola nut. The late woman's people are aided by context elements such as the identity of the bearer of the dead fowl, the gender of fowl, and so on to make the INF of this sign which is death. They also rely on the SSK about this practice to make the appropriate INF. It should be understood that the end of this sign act is to euphemise the painful death of a people's married daughter based on the people's ancient tradition of respect for the demise of accomplished members of their community, both men and women.

8. Odu ehi/Edank ebom (Cow's tail)

Participants in the use of the cut tail of a cow as a sign in Igboland and Erei(Calabar), Nigeria include titled men and women. The settings are the households of titled men and women, as well as time of festivities. The REF of this sign is the possession of a traditional title while the end is honour and respect. The ancient traditions of African people accord great honour to men and women who have contributed positively to the development of the society by giving them some traditional titles. These titles are signalled with the possession of cow's tail among the Igbos and Erei people of Calabar. The communities infer the meaning of this sign via their SSK and act accordingly towards their bearers in public gatherings such as greeting them respectfully or rising for them from a seat.

9. Agwo ocha/Nna ochie (Cobra)

Rural dwellers in Olo community and Mmaku kingdom, Enugu, Nigeria are familiar with the communicative essence of this animal as a sign. The setting is the rural houses which the animal visits quite often. As a sign, the cobra represents the people's ancestral spirit. Among the natives of Umugwode of Amamdim Olo of Ezeagu Local Government of Enugu State, the cobra is a sign of fertility. When a woman is pregnant, the cobra could glide in and lies in-between the pregnant woman and her husband at night. This signifies that the baby in the woman's womb is a boy and this usually attracts huge celebration. The people decode each significant appearance of the cobra based on their SSK.

4.1.3 Other Objects

10. Ofo na Ogu (traditional staff)



Fig. 5: Images of Ofo na Ogu or traditional staff

These cultural symbols are highly revered among the Igbos of South East, Nigeria. *Ofo* is a short mental or wooden stick (or any other object that a cultural group decides to adopt) used by kings and traditional rulers, elders of clans and other important personalities. The setting where it is employed is the home of the eldest man in a clan and traditional proceedings especially one on conflict resolution; most powerful oath takings are performed by raising *Ofo*. This sign act refers to truth, honour, dignity and integrity. Its end includes respect for the laws of the land and preservation of truth. It must be understood that African societies pay enormous attention to truth in order to ensure sanctity and progress in the environment of oral traditions; hence, *Ofo* and *Ogu*,

*Aje* and many other signs are deployed for moral sanctity. Generally, *Ofo* is used to preserve the right attitude while *Ogu* is used for punishment. Anyone can resort to the use of *Ogu* when oppressed and denied justice. Such individual will raise his or her *Ogu* and make pronouncements to it with a heavy heart; such practice usually has serious effect on the offender. The different uses of *Ofo* and *Ogu* are parts of the people's cultural knowledge and SSK.

11. Okpu ozo/Ukpo Ilak/Alah (red cap)

Titled men are the users of this sign in Igboland and Erei community in Calabar. The sign is an act of communication in traditional ceremonies and festivities. When a man is adorned by a red cap in such events, he receives a special attention and respect as a chief. Men who are yet to receive a title cannot dare to use this sign; hence the people can easily infer from their SSK that any man on red cap is a chief. The end of this sign is honour and respect for accomplished men only, unlike cow's tail which can be used by men and women. This sign thus depicts the elevated position of men in patriarchal African societies.

Pako-ijeju (chewing stick)



Users of this sign are yet-to-be in-laws in Yoruba at the event of payment of dowry. To determine the bride price of a lady, the bride's family hands a particular number of sticks to the groom and his family. The number of sticks tied together represents the amount to be paid. It is also used for proposing to the one you want to marry. If a man gives a woman chewing stick and the woman gives him back, it means that she has accepted to marry the man. Otherwise, the opposite becomes the case.

12. Ashoyi and Ogbu-adana (sword and whip)

Family of one who is believed to have died by a hidden human cause employ the use of this sign in Olo community, Enugu, Nigeria. The setting is the grave of the deceased. Sword and whip are pinned to the grave as cultural signs within the people's semiotic universe that depict that the deceased was murdered by someone and the dead would rise and bring the person or people that committed this heinous crime to justice. So, the end of this sign is vengeance and justice. The people use this sign based on their shared knowledge on the handling of the issue of suspected murder.

13. Ichicha (female relic of old age)



Fig. 6: Image of ichicha or traditional relic

Adult women of Ingle clan, Idoma land, Nigeria use this object as a sign of blessing of old age and integrity. It can be found in the house of the oldest woman in the clan; disputing women go to the holder of *Ichicha* to swear an oath if need be. Upon the death of a current holder, the relic is passed on to the woman next in age to her. The people of Ingle understand the use of *Ichicha* based on SSK.

14. Ohebi (the last pack)



Fig. 7: Image of ohebi or the last luggage

Rural dwellers of Ingle-Otanufie community, Idoma land, Nigeria, communicate with this sign object on the transition rites of the dead. The setting is near the house of a deceased adult man or woman on the seventh day of the person's death. The pack in the picture above is supposed to belong to a departed member of Ingle-Otanufie community. It could be noticed that the box contains assorted properties of the deceased. However, the contents are symbolic and only represent a small fraction of the entire property of its owner. Items found in the box are those the deceased was known to have been most fond of while on earth. The box in its context refers to peaceful transition in Ingle, Idoma, and strengthens the people's belief in life hereafter. The deceased are believed to travel with them, and it is widely held among the people that, until this rite is performed, the deceased continue to live in their houses.

## 5.1 Conclusion

This study has concluded that pragmatics and semiotics can be effective in studying the meaning of symbol and sign systems. Since pragmatics and semiotics interpret meanings beyond object or sentence level, they are very relevant linguistic tools for the analysis of Nigerian symbols and signs. The use of them in this analysis has given more insight to the use and interpretation of the Nigerian cultural symbols and signs. The study has thrown more light on the deeper meanings of these symbols and signs. From the study, one can comfortably say that the meaning of these symbols and signs lies heavily on their context of use.

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