

## **CULTURAL SYMBOLS AND SIGNS IN SOME SELECTED LANGUAGES IN NIGERIA: A PRAGMATICS READING**

**Sr. Dr. Adaoma Igwedibia**

Department of English Language and Literature  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
Email: ae.igwedibia@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to do a pragmatics reading of cultural signs in some selected Nigerian languages in South-South Nigeria (Urhobo), Northern Nigeria (Karimjo) and South-Eastern Nigerian, (Nsukka). Signs which are indicators of something else are products of culture and their interpretations and uses are culture specific as the meaning and use of a particular sign may vary from one culture to another. The paper adopts a pragmatics approach towards the analysis and interpretation of symbols and signs with the aim of identifying the pragmatics roles of them and of variables that underlie their use. Relevance pragmatics theory is applied with insights from the Piercean semiotic approach. From the analysis, the relevance of pragmatics to the interpretation of cultural symbols and signs and the communicative effect of them are observed through pragmatics interpretation. The paper concludes that a pragmatics approach to the study of them will not only show how their systems reflect the culture of their users but also the social-cultural beliefs and the world view of the people.

**Key words:** cultural signs, pragmatics, culture, semiotics, belief, world view.

### **Introduction**

The term “culture” has been given multifarious definitions. Edward Sapir (1956) states that culture is a system of behaviour and modes that depend on unconsciousness. To Rocher (1972, 2004), an anthropologist, “Culture is a connection of ideas and feelings accepted by the majority of people in a society” (cited in Mahadi and Jafar 2012:231). Culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them. It also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society (Cole, 2019). The relationship between language and culture has earlier been noted by the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Just like language, the sign system of a particular culture is invented to communicate and express the culture; it is a vital aspect of the communication code of the culture. Therefore, understanding a culture presupposes not only an understanding of the language of that culture but also its sign system. It is in this light that cultural semiotics investigates the symbol and sign system and modes of representation/signification used by humans to communicate feelings, ideas and thoughts in a culture. It may be misleading to make an attempt to state when humans or when a particular culture started to use signs and symbols. What is incontrovertible is the fact that signs and symbols are obvious aspects of a culture and can be said to be as old as the culture they reflect. Symbols and signs can be seen as products of a culture used for communicative purposes in place of oral/verbal communication. Eco (1972) notes that lack of cultural knowledge of the signs used in a signification system can lead to what he tagged “Aberrant decoding” which is a case of meaning-mismatch between the speaker (encoder) and the listener (decoder) of any kind of message. This could be occasioned by the following factors:

1. Out-group member of speech community
2. Out-group member of a generation
3. Out-group member of belief system
4. Out-group member of cultural system. (Hartley, 2002).

Therefore, against the backdrop of the above, a study of this kind is pertinent given the fact that humans are born with inherent detective capacities to encode or decode meanings from symbols and signs they see around them. The interpretations of these symbols and signs are susceptible to some pragmatics variables like context, age and status, etc.

### **Statement of Problem**

The study of signs has recorded attention from scholars in literary, linguistic, cultural, critical and functional studies as well as semiotics. Adopting a semiotic approach, Amoussou (2016) studies signs that delineate power and dictatorship in Ngugu wa Thiongo's novels. Ogunmola also adopts a semiotic approach in the study of road signs as a communicative strategy on Nigerian roads. Seeing road signs from a linguistic orientation, Jolayemi and Olayemi (2017) is also a semiotic study of road signs in Nigeria. Ibrahim (2007) takes a pragmatics-semiotic reading of Mythopoetic cultural symbols in Nigerian River-ritual chants. Nabofa (1994) is a study of symbolism in African traditional religion while Ofuafo (2013) studies symbols as a means of communicating religious concepts in the Urhobo traditional society. From all these studies, it is obvious that scholars have paid attention to the study of signs from different scholarly perspectives. It is also obvious that not much has been done in the area of application of pragmatics approach to the study of cultural symbols and signs in the Nigerian context. This gap is what this study intends to fill.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study will be beneficial to a lot of people such as the users of the symbols and signs, academics and the readers of the symbols and signs. It will benefit the users of the symbols and signs by bringing to their consciousness the cultural implications of the use of symbols and signs in context. This study will also add to the catalogue of scholarship in semiotics, bringing a new approach of a pragmatics study of symbols and signs. Finally, the readers of the symbols and signs will be exposed to cross-cultural symbols and signs and the various implications of their use in a socio-cultural milieu.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study identifies the cultural symbols and signs in selected languages in Nigeria with the aim of unraveling their different pragmatics interpretations or affordances in a culture. The symbols and signs will be collated from selected languages in Northern, Southern and South-eastern Nigeria, with the aim of examining their pragmatics roles and interpretations in different cultural areas.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The study of signs and sign systems, otherwise known as semiotics, has attracted the attention of scholars for a long time. The origin of the study of meanings can be traced to Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, who are known today as fathers

of the study of the meaning of signs – semiotics. To Saussure, semiotics is concerned with what signs mean. He has a dyadic view of a sign as he describes it from the angle of the signifier and the signified. He argues that the signifier is not necessarily the object and that the signifier and the signified are unrelated. He tries to deconstruct the sign by stating that there is no material representation for the signifier and the signified. To the Peircean view, semiotics involves not only what is ordinarily known as signs, but also anything that is used to stand for something else (Amoussou, 2016: 209). Other scholars who have further developed this branch of the study of meaning include Rowland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Thomas Sebeok, and Jonathan Culler.

Martin and Ringham (2000:117) define semiotics as the study of signification, that is, of the production and generation of meaning from sign. According to Eco (cited in Amoussou, 2016,p. 208), “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign”. Chandler (2005,p.2) is of the view that “semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as signs in everyday speech but of anything which stands for something else”. A sign in itself has been defined by Sebeok (2001:3) as any physical form that has been imagined or made externally to stand for an object, event, feelings, etc. To him, signs perform many functions in human life among which are helping to recognize patterns in things, predicting guides or plans for taking actions, and functioning as examples for specific types of phenomenon.

### **Previous Studies on Semiotics Studies of Cultural Signs**

The concept of sign as discussed above has been applied by scholars in different studies in the Nigerian socio-cultural environment. Applying a descriptive approach, Udechukwu ((2019) explores a study of the significance and the use of cultural signs and symbols in the contemporary African society with examples from the Igbo sign system. Abamwa (2015) studies the use of cultural symbolic forms in pottery objects to satisfy, sustain the cultural values and understanding of the cultural signs. From a pragmatics-semiotic perspective, Ibrahim (2007) does a study of the mythopoetic symbols in the Nigerian River-Ritual chants. The study argues that all human communication world-wide is made up of signs and it concludes that the signs, symbols and signals made by the River Niger chanters add to the meaningful communication of the fishermen. Ofuafo (2013) examines the usefulness of arts symbols as a means of communicating religious concepts in Urhobo society. Danesi (2010), in his work “Metaphorical connectivity of cultural sign systems”, studies the interconnectivity between cultural signs which he called “meta forms”. The paper submits that there are cognitive mechanisms connecting the signs and cultural systems in a network of distributed meanings within a culture. Seredkina (2014) provides a new methodological principle that integrates cultural-semiotic approach and social constructivism, in the understanding of the interpretation of art signs. The work reveals that art as a sign is (1) a cultural-semiotic construct that shapes the formation of social meanings and collective consciousness of the world by an individual (2) that this construct art provides a cognitive tool for meaning verifications and subconscious construction or painting of realities around an individual. Barley (1983) tries to identify the semiotic codes that enable members of a work place to construct and deconstruct meanings in the immediate environment of their work place, with specific interest in community-oriented funeral home. The study also tries to show how semiotics can be used to uncover how members of a work place acquire shared organizational or work

place culture. The study adopts Roland Barthes' theoretical model of semiotics in analyzing the connotative meanings associated with the organization of a funeral service. It concludes that semiotics reveals what characterizes an insider's interpretations of work world which is sensitive to culture. Etafia (2017) conducts a pragmatics-semiotic analysis of the Catholic Bishop Conference of Nigeria's communiqué on the Ebola epidemic, using Mey's (2011) Pragmatics Act Theory to identify the act and Saussure's semiotic model to provide semiotic interpretation of the visible signs. It also discusses its impact on the Catholic faithful of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The paper reveals that the communiqué is an information-driven discourse laced with the direct acts that make use of contextual features of shared situated knowledge, inference, relevance, shared cultural knowledge, and references. The paper also reveals an exhibition of pragmemes of cautioning, commanding, counseling, and threatening. Consequently, the paper observes a careful integration of selective pragmemes and semiotic signs to drive the information to the Catholic faithful. Makhlina (2016) carries out a study on the place of semiotics in humanities and cultural studies, with specific interest on the historical and modern situation in Russia. The study reveals that semiotics is a necessary knowledge for students, particularly culturologists. Krupa (2015) does a pragmatics-semiotics study of relations between signs and their uses with the aim of ascertaining the psychological effects and corresponding behaviours of their uses. It uses data set from video games centre of Gaité Lyrique, for its analyses, using a qualitative descriptive approach. The findings of the study reveals that video games centre can create a gender-neutral environment that transcends gender-bias. Lucia (2014) conducts a pragmatics-semiotics study of movies, in other to ascertain how it contributes to developing the multisensory acquisition of fine literacy skills of thinking, listening, speaking, writing and reading in a natural authentic discourse setting. The study reveals that, against the backdrop that students need two years to develop social language, audio-visual approach to literacy education expedites the second language acquisition. Jolayemi and Olayemi (2017) examine the communicative effectiveness of road signs in Nigeria, using Akure Metropolis, as a case study. The study adopts Gestalt Theory (Max Wertheimer, 1912) of visual perception in doing a semiotic analysis of the signs studied through a survey research method involving 260 respondents mostly road users. The finding of the study reveals that most road accidents are as a result of blatant disobedience of road signs by road users. Safari and Luckinger (2015) carry out a semiotic investigation of signs that portray violence in video game advertising posters. The study adopts a socio-semiotics theory of mass communication in analyzing the identified signs. The finding of the research reveals that an adult understanding of violence signs differs from the understanding of violence by children. The paper concludes that symbols connected with cultural festivals re-enact historical events and symbols of religious art helps in achieving mystical exercise and spiritual development. From the above, one can see the significance of the study of cultural signs. It is also obvious that not much has been done in the area of the application of pragmatics theories in the analysis and interpretation cultural symbols.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative close analysis of the selected cultural symbols is adopted for a rigorous and detailed study. The interview method is used to collate data from competent native speakers within the age range of 55 to 70 years old who dwell in the villages and who

are adjudged to have good knowledge of the selected languages and culture unadulterated by urbanization and current trends in modernity and social pressure that have often dislocated many from aspects of their culture. Identifying cultural symbols and signs from the above are based on Ortner's (1979) research formula which states that a particular possesses a key symbol if it is signaled by one of the following indicators:

- i. The natives tell us that X is culturally important
- ii. The natives seem positively or negatively aroused by X
- iii. X comes up in many different contexts, and the context may be behavioural, or systematic and in many different kinds of actions, situations or domains
- iiii. There is a regular cultural elaboration surrounding X, examples are elaborations of vocabulary or of details of X nature, compared with similar phenomenon in the culture (cited in Abamwa, 2015, p. 16).

The data is then presented and analysed one after the other to allow for a very close analysis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The methodology adopted for this study is a pragmatics approach with insights from Charles Peirce triadic semiotic approach. Pragmatics can simply be defined as the use of language in context. Its origin can be traced to Charles Morris (1938) who was interested in the study of science of sign or semiotics. He sees syntax, semantics and pragmatics as distinct branches of the study of semiotics and states that pragmatics is the study of sign in relation to interpreters (Levinson, 1983, p.1; Saeed, 2003, p.17). According to Leech and Short (1987, p.290), a pragmatics study is an "investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words and constructions, (but) from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are used". Yule (1991, p.6) states that pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by the speaker or writer and interpreted by the listener or reader. Yule (1996, p.3) further states the scope of pragmatics to include the study of speaker meaning, contextual meaning, how more gets communicated than is said and the study of the expression of relative distance.

From the views expressed above, this study applies pragmatics as a study and interpretation of cultural symbols and signs from the perspectives of the users in the cultural context to show how the cultural symbols and signs function in a pragmatics fashion. In fact, a pragmatics analysis of symbols and signs must take account of the context in which they are used. Also relevant to the pragmatics interpretation of cultural symbols and signs is the concept of Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) introduced by Bach and Harnish (1979). They state that in a speech event, the speaker has an intention and the hearer or listener will make some inference where both of them will base their role on certain facts shared by them. This is the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. The shared knowledge among the languages in sign usage enhances their decoding of the inherent messages encoded in a sign. Examples of the shared knowledge in the sign usage include the relation between a person and a sign, religious signs, and other socio-cultural sign whose meanings are perceived to be shared by the cultural group.

Inference is another pragmatics concept necessary for the interpretation of socio-cultural signs. Yule (1996,p.131) defines it as “any additional information used by the listener to connect what is said to what must be meant”. It is a deductive process and like MCB, it is based on shared social cultural values, beliefs and other conventions between the users of a sign. Closely related to this is a type of inference called pragmatics presupposition. These are assumptions or beliefs about the context or the presupposition whose truth a speaker takes for granted as part of the background of the conversation (Osisanwo, 2003,p. 86). In cultural sign usage, there are assumptions which a sign user makes with respect to the perceivers of the sign with respect to the subject matter on ground. Such pragmatic assumptions usually go unchallenged.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis** **Signs with Spiritual Roles**



Figure 1.1

This is a photograph of a goat skin. It is a sign of dignity as the eldest man in the village (Ihe Owerre, Nsukka) sits on it at the “Obuogwa” while worshipping “Aro diety”. The use of this artifact is age-sensitive and in most cases a proper inference or decoding of its signification is age-sensitive. Therefore, the shared knowledge and inference is age-restricted and status- sensitive.



Fig 1.2

This is a picture of a musical instrument called Abia Igede. It is a composition of Igbo musical instrument usually made of wood and animal skins. The Abia Igede are played at different traditional rites to appease the gods of the land. The shared knowledge and inference of its appropriate use is available to every member of the speech community irrespective of gender, age, status and other pragmatics factors. Interestingly, the use of this cultural artifact and the code of the musical rhythm known as “Oboinyi sound” are sensitive to the context or occasion for which it is used. The meaning of the tune of the musicals is exclusively within the reach of the in-group members that have attained some level of traditional rites and age.





Fig 1.3

It is a picture of a masquerade called Acharicha Mma. The masquerade is endowed with some shining metallic motifs as well as feathers on the head, hands and legs which are symbolic. This is a part of the Omaba Masquerade. Its function is for the commemoration of the gods. The signification system is not available to women nor is it available to people who have not been initiated into the masquerade cult.



Fig.1.4

Fig. 1.4 is a picture of Ekwe Musical Masquerade. The picture shows a big masquerade that has red fabric coverage with some objects of significance on its head. Another is a minor masquerade clothed in dark fabric. Beside them are two men and a goat that stands as a great sign to the group. It plays spiritual functions in funerals, coronations and other ceremonies in Ihe-Owerre Nsukka Community. The inference of the signification system is age-sensitive in the sense that the interpretation can be done appropriately by men within an age-clan and is also not available to women.



Fig. 1.5

This is a picture of Iyiegu shrine. It shows a set of clay pot of different sizes carefully arranged in front of the shrine. It is a female deity of life, fertility, prosperity and protection; it is worshipped by the Edeoga (the eldest in the village) in turns. The shrine is taken to his Obuogwa where he performs the aforementioned function. The signification and roles of the pot in the shrine is available to mostly the elders and people who have attained certain status in the community. The out-group members are likely not to offer an appropriate interpretation of this sign.



Fig.1.6

**“Oji” (Kolanut/Acuminat):** According to Nwokoye and Eze (2017) “Oji” permeates all aspects of life, in Igbo land-Political, social, economic and religious. A lot of respect is accorded to Kola nut due to its significance. It is a sign of hospitality, life, communion, reconciliation, unity and a way of sealing covenant between individuals and groups. Kola nut for the people from Northern Nigeria serve a medicinal purpose. People in the South-eastern Nigeria cannot rightly infer its significance because they do not possess the requisite shared knowledge or cultural knowledge to decode it as such. This epistemic lack could result to what Henley (2002) calls “Aberrant decoding”, indicating a case of meaning-mismatch. This implies that the appropriate interpretation of the signification of the kola nut requires knowledge of the context.



Fig 1.7

**“Omu” (tender palm fronds):** Wherever this is placed, it is a sign of danger or sacredness. For instance if there is any place it is used to create a barricade, it means certain people, especially the uninitiated, are not allowed to trespass (for instance, a piece of land). It also shows where a corpse is. Even in this modern time, any vehicle seen with the “Omu” tied to it shows that it has a corpse inside. The native doctors use it either round their head or in their mouth to show that there is danger or that they are momentarily communing with their ancestral spirits and no human being is allowed to greet or speak with them. Every member of the community across gender, age and status (in-group) does not need further explanation of the significance and information passed at the sight of the “Omu”. Such information is not readily available to members of an out-group. Only the in-group has the shared knowledge. The cultural practice of tender palm frond is applicable to the Urhobo, South-South community.

### **Drinking with Left Hand**

In the Urhobo culture, which is a culture representative of the South-south Nigeria, taking any type of drink (alcohol especially) with the left hand is considered taboo and often goes with a physical challenge or a spiritual challenge by way of instant poisoning of the drink (spiritually). However, it has a symbolic significance. It is a sign of someone who is either fetish or someone who belongs to a certain cult group (*ogbu*) and who protects the town secretly from external aggression and may have “cut a head”. Thus, for someone to take a drink with a left hand unchallenged



shows that the people of Urhobo have a shared knowledge of the background of that individual. This information is not within the reach of people outside the tribe.

### **Native Chalk (Kaolin)**



Fig. 1.8

This is a symbolic sign of purity and holiness in Urhobo culture. It is used in ancestral worship and in the *Igbe* religion and in this context it is a mark of faithfulness for all you need to become a devotee of *Igbe* is to appear before the shrine and you are given a mixture of native chalk from the shrine to drink. This is a symbolic form of initiation. The devotees of *Igbe* believe in the efficacy of the native chalk in the healing of all types of ailment. This belief arises from the general belief system of the Urhobos that each time an ancestor or a divinity visits the shrine set up for it, its spiritual power will infuse the native chalk and purify all the materials kept in the place and from this source the native chalk will acquire its healing powers.

### **Cultural Signs with Identification Roles**

#### **Red and White Cloth**

These are also symbolic signs of purity in Urhobo culture with pragmatic significance. Red and white clothes and beads infer purity. Thus, traditional juju priests are always clothed in red, white or in red and white before they appear in the presence of their shrines. To the Urhobos, it is a mark of holiness and purity. Red and white cloth is the symbolic attire for *Igbe* worshippers in Urhobo land. *Igbe* is an Urhobo religion most often referred to as a cult group or a dance group. *Igbe* devotees are often dressed in red and white cloths with native chalk or powder robbed round their neck. This mode of dressing is symbolic. Within the culture, it has a pragmatics implication of identifying members of the group.

#### **Shaved Hair and Black Cloth**

Shaved hair and black cloth are symbols of mourning in the Urhobo cultural context. A neatly shaved hair in Urhobo is a symbolic sign of bereavement. In the Urhobo traditional context of burial, when a man or a woman dies, all his or her children and other relatives who are younger than the diseased shave their hair and put on black clothes during the burial. It is a sign of identifying and mourning with the children of the bereaved and a sign of marking continuous and closer family lineage. Shaving one's hair and putting on a black will tell visitors that you are one of the mourners and that you are younger than the deceased. However one does not shave hair on the bereavement of someone who one is older than.

### Red/Brownish Beads:



Fig. 1.9

Red/brownish beads are special symbolic signs in the Urhobo culture. Such beads are symbols of royalty, majesty and dignity. The type of beads worn by an individual has a pragmatics function of identifying one's social status. For instance, the "Aghighon" is a string of round brownish bead presented to a chief during installation. Its presentation by the king denotes the peak of the ceremony and it has a pragmatic function of identifying the person as a chief. Thus, when seen around someone's neck in Urhobo land the people can infer that the wearer is a chief and he/she demands some level of recognition irrespective of his or her age. Beaded red caps also fall within this category of symbolic signs of majesty, royalty and dignity. Only royals and chiefs are expected to wear red beaded caps; but a king in Urhobo land wears a white beaded cap as a symbol of purity with the pragmatics implication of identifying him as first among equals. Beads are symbolic aspect of a chief's dressing and they create social awareness of identifying someone as a chief so much so that when a chief is seen in an Urhobo social-cultural setting without either the Aghighon or the beaded red cap he/she pays a fine at the king's palace. Another type of beads that falls within this category is the hand bead worn on the wrist. This is a thick round bead made to the size of the wrist of the wearer. Apart from its symbolic use by chiefs, wearing such beads by someone who is not a chief presupposes that one has made some remarkable achievements among his people. This is encoded in the Urhobo proverb which says that "it is what a hand has done that makes it to put on beads".



Fig.1.10

Aka Beads is an object of importance to the people of Ihe-Owerre Nsukka. It is used to identify an honorable personality in the community. It identifies the status of the wearer.

### Signs with Economic Roles



Fig. 1.11

This picture shows the portrait of a woman with an Ichi marks. The Ichi Marks are made on the forehead in vertical position and on the opposite sides on the eyes as shown in this picture. The wearer of these marks on the face is identified as a member of the rich business women folks and it is mostly correctly inferred by women who have reached certain age. It identifies the economic status of the wearer.

### Cultural Signs used for Community Policing



Fig. 1.12

This is a picture of Izu-Ideke Musical Masquerade dressed in shiny metallic costume on the upper part and some colorful fabrics and on the lower part. Also, there are 5 followers dressed with some symbolic objects on their hands, heads and mouths. This is an innovation from Aro Ndi Izuogu. Its name is coined from its origin to tell more of the masquerade. The musical masquerade is mainly for entertainment; its function is simply to sing to entertain the audience at wake keeps, funerals, coronations and so on. It also has a major function of acting as community police to punish erring members of the community.

### Signs with Information Roles



Fig. 1.13

This picture has a great significance to the people of Ihe-Owerre Nsukka community. From the planting, of cocoyam (Nkashi) to the harvest, the people prepare for a yearly ceremony (Onwa Essa) which they use cocoa yam (Nkashi) to perform. It provides precursory information on planting season.



Fig. 1.14

It is a picture of a man with the title “Attama Oha”. He is endowed with a red cap and a staff of office in his hand as objects of Symbolism. He is an Icon that represents the people in the village affairs. He is a Symbol of truth, authority and power.

### Cultural Signs with Information Roles



Fig. 1.15

This is a picture of a dried “Gamba grass” placed on the roof of a married woman’s roof, signifying that she is on her menstrual period and therefore, the husband is signaled to stay away from her and avoid eating from her pending the end her purification. The inference and interpretation of the signs are coded for the married people of the community.



Fig. 1.16

This is a picture of broken clay pot on the roof of a couple. It sends a signal to the community that the couples are related by blood and are therefore forbidden by culture to live as husband and wife. This signals that the couple, who by virtue of their strong will had gone against the norm forbidding blood relation from marrying. They are therefore susceptible to the impending wrath of the gods for marrying each other. The signification system is available to every member of the community in karimjo.



Fig. 1.17

It is a picture of a grave in the bush. A grave like this is farther away from the town/village. It is generally believed and inferred in Karimjo community that the person buried in this grave died a mysterious death resulting from snake bite, epidemics and evil machination from men. The reason for burying the person in the bush is to avert the reoccurrence of such mysterious death and to cleanse the evil that from family.



Fig. 1.18

It is a picture of a new Calabash filled with water placed at the centre of the compound with grains spread around. It is an indication that the head of the family (father of the house), who was also the chief priest has died and the entire household is mourning him. The water in the calabash would be renewed daily by the oldest male member of the family for the period of three months. At the expiration of three months, the family members shall converge early in the morning at the centre of the compound where the calabash was placed to perform the traditional rites.

### **Cultural Signs for Conflict Mitigation**



Fig 1.19

The straw tied to a tree on the farm signifies that the crops in the farm are ripe for harvest and a family member or blood relation of the farm owner who has the need came into the farm and harvested a little to meet his need. It signals to the farm owner not to take any negative or diabolic measure against his family member.

### **Conclusion**

Culture is an important and amazing aspect of the Nigerian society, a way of life of the people. It is laden with lots of symbols and signs which are a system of signification.

The study has explicated the cultural symbols and signs in some parts of Nigeria with pragmatics and semiotic theories as the thematic thrust. From the standpoint of pragmatics, the signs are codes which communicate a lot to the people. The study also revealed how signification systems in the various cultures interplay with inference and shared knowledge or belief in interpreting the symbols and signs. It also revealed the functions (from the point of pragmatics) of the symbols and signs to the people. The tools of pragmatics are important in understanding the signs and symbols of a cultural context because meaning depends both on what is communicated by the cultural symbols and how those in the cultural setting understand what is communicated. This explains why an in-group will interpret a cultural element or a symbol better than an out-group because they (in-group) share a common epistemic background in which the communicating symbol arises.

### References

- Abamwa, O.E. (2015). "Pottery: An Instrument of Cultural Sustenance". *Arts and design studies*,31,15-20. [www.iiste.org](http://www.iiste.org)
- Amoussou, Y.C. (2016) "Semiotics of power and dictatorship in Ngugi wa Thiong o's later novels" *Advances in linguistics and literary studies*,7, (5), 208-220.
- Bach, K. & Harnish (1979). *Linguistic communication and speech act*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- Bailey, S. (2013). A semiotic analyses of texts relevant to childhood bereavement. *School of nursing, midwifery, and social work*. University of Salford, Salford, Uk.
- Chandler, D. (2005) *Semiotics: the basics*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) London: RoutledgeCole, N.L. (2019). "So What is Culture Exactly?" *International journal of English language and linguistic research*.5, (5) 1-14 [www.eajournals.org](http://www.eajournals.org)
- Danesi, M. (2017). On the metaphorical connectivity of cultural sign systems. University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.
- Etafia, S.O. P. (2017). A pragmatic semiotics analyses of the catholic bishop's communiqué on the Ebola epidemic: impact on the University of Ibadan catholic faithful. *International journal of language studies*, 11(1), 119-142
- Hartley, J. (2002). *Communication, cultural and media studies: The key concepts* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Jolayemi, D & Olayemi M.M. (2017). "Road Signs as a Linguistic Landscape in Nigeria: A Krupa, F. (2015). Pragmatic semiotics in design research: La Gaitelyrique video game centre. 11<sup>th</sup> European academy of design conference. Paris Descartes University, Paris.
- Levinson, S.C. (1983) *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.
- Lucia, Y. L. (2014). Pragmatic and semiotics: Movies as aesthetic audio-visual device expedite second language acquisition. *International conference on education*. Valdosta state University, U.S.A.
- Mahadi, T.S.T. & Jafari, S.M. (2012) Language and culture. *International journal of humanities and social sciences*. 2,(10), 230-235
- Martin, B. R. F. (2000). *Dictionary of semiotics*. New York: Cassell
- Makhlina, S. T. (2016). Semiotics in academic training of culturologists. *Universal journal of educational research*, 4, 598-602
- Nabofa, M.Y. (1994). *Symbolism in African Traditional Religion*. Nigeria: Paper Back



- Ofuafo, P.U. (2013). "Arts Symbols as a Means of Communicating Religious Concepts In Urhobo Traditional Religion". *The journal of international social research*.6,(27), 392- 397
- Osisanwo, W. (2003). Introduction to Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics. Lagos: Femolus-Fetop
- Saeed, John, I. *Semantics* 2nd ed. Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Safari S. & Luckinger Y. (2015). Semiotic analyses of understanding violence signs in video game advertising posters. *International conference on communication, media, technology and design*. Dubai, UAE.
- Sapir, E. (1921) Language. New York: Harcourt Brace
- Sebeok, A.T. (2001) Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics. Toronto: University of Toronto
- Seredkina, N. N. (2014). Revisiting methodological principles of cultural-semiotic approach in studying art of indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the far East. *Journal of Siberian Federal University, humanities & social sciences*, 8 (7),1-16.
- Udechuku, G.I. (2019). "The Significance and use of cultural symbols in the contemporary African society: Igbo symbols as a paradigm". *Mgbakoigbo, Journal of african studies* 8,110-116.
- Yule, G. (1996). The Study of Language (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.