



## Analysis of selected Artifacts for communication in Jukun Language

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### Abstract

This study examined the use of artifacts in communication in the Jukun language. It is an assessment of how artifacts are used in different parlances on different occasions to encode meaning among the Jukun. The objectives of the paper are to: (i) examine how artifacts are used to communicate meaning in the Jukun language and (ii) examine what occasion(s) they are used for communication in the language. The paper adopts a qualitative design which studies the nature of the subject under study. Although the artifacts were selected randomly, the researcher used purposive sampling for selection of informants. The information got from the informants was through the oral interview. In order to achieve the aim of this exercise, the paper employs Pierce's Semiotic Theory which uses triangles to explain the three elements of sign – referent, object, and interpretant. The paper finds out that the selected artifacts encode peculiar meanings and have different ways of representation of these meanings: *Ahyuis* used for singing praises to a king or an important person in a community, and the celebration of a special event; *Asepanbyinis* used for eulogy and beckoning to a beloved one as well as motivation of farm workers; *Kyadwa* is a symbol for joy and sorrow, while *Adire* symbolizes calmness, stability, reliability, and spirituality, peace and unity. All of these are used on different occasions. It therefore recommends that more efforts should be made by both scholars and custodians of these cultural artifacts to preserve them – in spite of the modern means of communication, there is need for cultural preservation and sustainability. The paper indeed has deepened insight into the cultural aspect of semiotics in Jukun.

**Keywords:** Analysis, Artifacts, Communication, Jukun language

## Introduction

One important aspect of the human existence is communication. It is central to human social life. Humans interact in their day to day activity through communication. Like language which serves as a tool for communication and cannot be isolated from humans so is communication. Communication is language in practicality. The term has been defined by many as a means or process by which humans share ideas, thoughts, and experience, which actually depicts the whole gamut of communication. It is imperative to state that communication is done basically to provide information or seek information about a subject. All of this takes both linguistic and non-linguistic signs/signals. The linguistic signs include the use of oral or written words; non-linguistic signs include facial expressions, gestures, body contact, use of objects and other non-linguistic elements. Communication is therefore classified as verbal and non-verbal (a detailed discussion of this concept is seen in the review section).

This paper is concerned with the nonverbal form of communication. The paper explores the use of selected artifacts for communication in Jukun. These include *Adire*, *Kyadwa*, *asepanbyen*, and *Ahyu*. Artifacts are portraits and images of real things and are symbolic to particular people, groups or communities. The symbolic signification makes artifacts useful in communication. Therefore, as the paper is concerned with artifacts as forms of communication in Jukun, it examines the different significations of meaning in the language. Jukun is a language spoken by the Jukun people in Nigeria. The people live in areas along the upper Benue River and are believed to have descended from the people of Kwararafa, a Sudanic kingdom during the late European Middle Ages (Upah, 2019). According to Dangana and Ogechi (2024), the Jukun language is classified among the Niger-Congo family of the African languages and is spoken across Nigeria and beyond. The Jukun have a distinctive culture and complex religious beliefs and practices (Orga & Adahos, 2023). This is why this paper chooses one of the cultural aspects of the people (artifacts) as forms of communication.

## Aim and objectives

This study examined selected cultural artifacts use for communicational purposes in the Jukun language. Specifically, the study sought to examine:

- i. how artifacts are used to communicate meaning in the Jukun language,
- ii. what occasion(s) artifacts are used for communication in the Jukun language.

## Statement of the Problem

There is doubt that the Jukun language has had much literature or scholarly research at every level of linguistic analysis even in the area of semiotics. Nevertheless, it seems scholars have more interest in the study of the verbal aspect of communication than the nonverbal form as not enough studies can be found in the area, especially in relation to traditional objects or, as is used in this study, artifacts. The few works that draw attention to this aspect such as the use of traditional attires and other cultural objects focus more on the socio-cultural values of the objects than the communicational values. This is why the paper is set to investigate how these artifacts are used in transmitting message in Jukun.

## Review of Related Literature

This section is a review of some conceptual terms as well as the theory which the paper uses as the framework. It also includes the review of empirical studies. The concepts reviewed include: language, communication, and artifacts.

### **Language**

Language is defined as a system of arbitrary sound symbols, used to exchange thoughts and feelings between members of the language community group (Fedorenko & Thompson-Schill, 2014). This means that language has to do with the combination of sound symbols that are conventionally agreed by a speech group for use in communication. These arbitrary symbols are organized appropriately and orderly as agreed by a speech group to communicate ideas and their experiences (Baker, 2008). According to Isphording & Otten (2014), language is the most complete and effective means of communication to convey ideas, messages, intentions, feelings and opinions to others. Alyebo (2015) however sees language as not just a mere tool for communication but for the preservation of a people's culture. It can be stated therefore that language involves a conventional use of symbols (written or spoken) for the purpose of communication.

### **Communication**

West and Turner (2010) define communication as the social process in which symbols are employed to establish and interpret meaning. The definition supposes that communication is not the expression of thought through the use of words alone but rather involves other non-linguistic forms (Alagh, 2017). It includes wordless signals. Communication generally involves all signs signaling meaning. It is appropriate to state that communication is done basically to provide information or seek information about a subject. All of this, as expressed above, takes both linguistic and non-linguistic signs/signals. The linguistic signs include the use of oral or written words; non-linguistic signs include facial expressions, gestures, body contact, use of objects and other non-linguistic elements. Communication is therefore classified as verbal and non-verbal communications (Alachi & Doki, 2002; Waapela, 2014).

Verbal communication is concerned with all forms of expression of ideas, thoughts and feelings through the use of words. These could be uttered orally or expressed in written forms. In other words, verbal communication can be divided into oral and written forms. Nonverbal (or non-linguistic) communication involves the use of wordless signals, signs and symbols which interpret meaning. This means that nonverbal form of communication is concerned with the expression of ideas without the use of words. It includes the use of natural or artificial objects or facial expressions, gestures and other body language. Waapela (2014:2) avers that "the non-linguistic communication uses symbolic codes achieved through the ideas presented in order to fully express the meaning of the symbols." Symbols are impregnated with messages that are decoded through cultural and social contexts (Waapela, 2014).

### **Artifacts**

Artifacts are objects intentionally made by humans to serve specific purposes. Artifacts essentially have intended functions, bestowed on them by beings with beliefs, desires, and intentions. In broadly terms, "every result of a human action is an artefact. In a narrower sense, the term is used for material things resulting from human actions; in this sense, all artefacts together form the realm of material culture" (Siefkes, 2012:67). According to Alagh (2017), "artifacts are indeed portraits and images of real things and are symbolic to particular persons, groups or a community. It is the symbolic signification that makes artifacts useful in communication". It can be deduced from these definitions that: (i) artifacts are man-made designs or objects, (ii) the use of artifacts is dependent on the world-view of a people. By this,

artifacts can be defined as man-made designs used by a particular group of people for particular purposes.

### **Empirical Studies**

Ukaogo and Tanko (2010) studied the linguistic and cultural practices in Jukun land. The study was aimed at assessing the similarities and differences that bind the people together as a nation. The work provided a comparison of over 8 dialects of the Jukun language. They observed a lot of similarities between the dialects.

Akaan, Agbedo, and Onukawa (2013) undertook a study titled, “Nonverbal Communication: The Semiotics of Face Expression in Tiv.” The study was aimed at examining the linguistic representation of facial expressions in Tiv. By this they provided semantic descriptions of some facial expressions. The study revealed that, even though there are general universal recognitions of meaning of facial expressions, some are peculiar to the Tiv culture.

Rudrow (2014) carried out a study on “Artifactual Communication: A Modern Approach to Understanding Communication through Nonverbal Artifacts.” This was aimed at exploring phenomenology as a method used in explaining the usages of contemporary artifacts as a by-product of cultural materialism in modern approach to artifactual communication. Rudrow examined how materialism works with artifacts to play a role in nonverbal and interpersonal communication as well as physical attraction. Using phenomenological approach, the study revealed that communication through the use of artifacts is based on approximation of meaning. The study concluded that generalisation in decoding of artifacts is not a reliant ideology (not absolute) since decoding is based on approximations.

Okunna and Gausa (2014) studied the Jukun traditional symbols for textile design and production. The aim of the study was to project the cause of adapting the Jukun traditional symbols a global recognition like other societies. According to them, “this artistic approach in addressing Jukun symbols is not for aesthetic purpose, but also to serve as a means of communication, social interaction and cultural identification among the concerned group...” (p.123). This study sampled symbols like star (Atshi), spear (Atsoshi), sword (kahwa) bird (nanabi), among others. It concluded that, since people easily relate with what they are familiar with, there is need for adapting the Jukun cultural symbols and its intrinsic values to the Jukun community and the world at large.

This present work examines how artifacts are used for communicational purposes in Jukun. The study discusses how each of the selected artifacts is used in special ways in specific situations or occasions. The paper explores the aesthetic values of the selected artifacts as expressed in Jukun.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Peircean Semiotic Theory of sign is used as the theoretical framework for the paper. The proponent of the theory is Charles Sanders Peirce (1868). The tenet of the theory is that “sign” is encoded in three elements; the object, the referent, and the interpretant. Peirce therefore proposed what he referred to as semiotic triangle in which the sides can be represented as symbol, index and icon, and the angles serving as the referent, the object and the interpretant, respectively. Peirce sees that anything that somebody upholds as representing something in some degree or specific situation is a sign. In other words, “a sign...is something which stands to

somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Chandler, 2014). Peirce observed that the interpretant is central to the concept of sign in that it connects an object to its referent.

Inferentially, by virtue of being affected by the object to which it refers, the index has some qualities with that object, and it is to this effect that the index refers to the object itself. Peircean theory can be summarised as concerning the mental image of an object on one’s mind, not only the physical appearance or structure of the object. That is to say that, besides physical appearance, sign creates a mental picture on the mind of the viewer. All of what has been said implies that an object does not signify anything, unless certain values are attached to it. The relevance of this theory is that it has the basic features to explain the different ways in which the selected artifacts are used in communicating meaning in the Jukun language.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper has adopted a qualitative research design. The researcher selected some artifacts and described how each of them is used for message encoding and meaning decoding. These artifacts include, as earlier mentioned in the introduction, *Adire*, *Kyadwa*, *asepanbyen*, and *Ahyu*. The purposive sampling technique was used, which gave the researchers the room to choose specific participants as informants. The artifacts were chosen at random though. Therefore, the researchers consulted some elderly persons who had knowledge about these artifacts, among whom were custodians of the Jukun cultural artifacts. The instrument for the data collection was the interview. The researcher also used the audio recorder for recording. At least, 10 persons were consulted from different villages across major areas of the Jukun people in Taraba State. In the course of the interview and interaction with the informants, the researcher recorded the information through phone recorder. The researcher also used writing materials to jot down some information. The recorded text was then played back, transcribed and translated. The data were presented in pictorial forms; each image sampled as figures. For the discussion, the paper described each object based on how it is used in different instances for different communicational purposes.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section provides a detailed presentation and description of the selected artifacts. As mentioned above, the paper presents the data pictorially; that is, the images of the items for discourse are presented. Each of this is followed by its structural description as well as its uses and functions.

**Fig. 1: Ahyu**



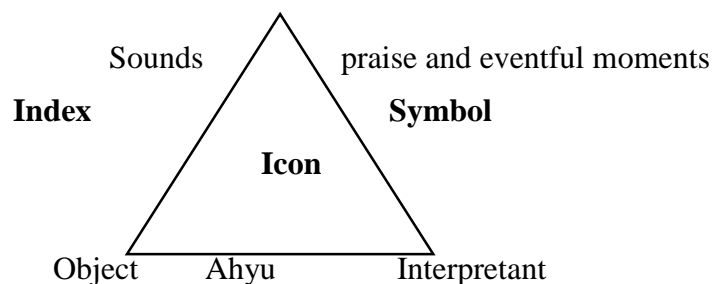
**Source: Field Research, 2024**

*Ahyu* is an object made of the buffalo horns or that of the hippopotamus. The horns are usually strung with some beautifully designed woods. These woods are craftily made to produce different sounds almost like those of the modern organs or pianos. It is usually used to sing praises to a king or an important person in a community. It is also used for the celebration of an important event, especially, in the palace.

Using the Peirce's Semiotic Triangle to explain the above description, the following can be noted. Reference to the theory interprets that sign consists of three elements – the object, the referent and the interpretant – referent being the mental image referring or pointing to the object, while the interpretant is the connecting sense. Moreover, these elements may also refer to icon (which is the real object), index (which is the referent), and symbol (the interpretant/ meaning) (Schneider, 2013; Chandler, 2014). Below is a representation of the triangle.

**Fig. 2: Peircean Semiotic Triangle “A” showing the referent, object and interpretant for *Ahyu***

Referent



From the triangle, it can be observed that the index is the sound produced from the instrument (*ahyu*), while the symbolic interpretation of the sounds is the praise to an important person and the celebration of important events; the icon is the object itself (*ahyu*). By implication, the sounds

which are the referent (mental image) signal the meanings of praises and eventful moments (which is the interpretant).

**Fig. 3: Asepanbyin**

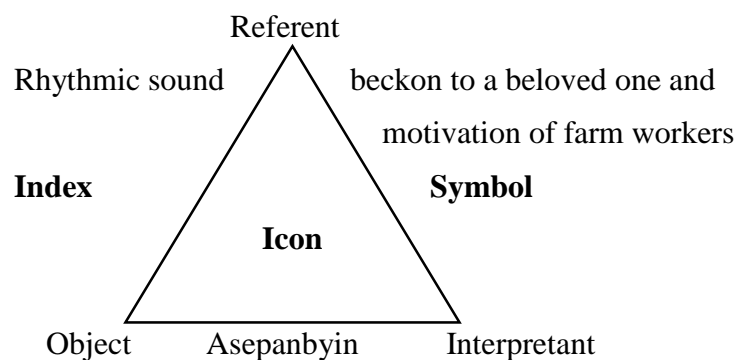


**Source: Field Research, 2024**

*Asepanbyin* is an instrument used for eulogy and beckoning to a beloved one. It is also played for enticement and motivation or encouragement of workers during communal farm work. When this is played the savoury musical rhythm gives the workers more zeal to work harder and faster. It is a flute designed in a basket-like structure. When this is played, the sound comes out like the bleating of a goat. Its rhythm is dependent on the purpose which is meant to serve, and it is only men that play it.

In relation to the theory used for this work, as explained earlier, sign encodes the object, the referent and the interpretant. Thus, as represented in the triangle below, the rhythmic sound can be said to be the index; the beckoning to a beloved one and the motivation of farm workers are the symbol (the signified), while the instrument itself is the icon. It can be further implied that the rhythmic sound of the instrument (which is the object) is the referent, while the symbolic meaning it encodes is the interpretant. A diagrammatic representation of the above can be seen below.

**Fig. 4: Peircean Semiotic Triangle “B” showing the referent, object and interpretant for Asepanbyin**



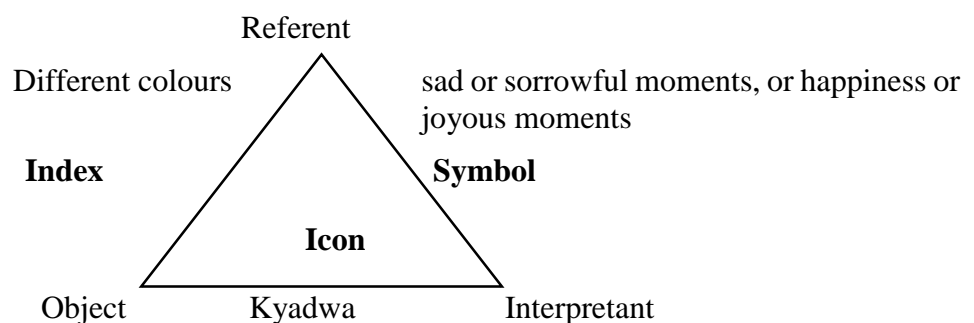
**Fig. 5: *Kyadwa***



**Source: Field Research, 2024**

*Kyadwa* is a traditional attire worn especially by very important people to depict their integrity. This is designed in faded black and white colours. The black colour indicates sorrowful moods, while the white colour indicates joyous moods. The significance of this is that all humans have moments of joy and sorrow; all are bound to experience situations of sorrow and happiness. One who wears this *kyadwa* in essence accepts or appreciates the nature of life. This can also be represented on the semiotic triangle below.

**Fig. 6: Triangle C showing the referent, object and interpretant for *kyadwa***



From the triangle, it can be observed that the different colours (black and white) are the referent, and the joyous or sorrowful moods are the interpretant, while *kyadwa* is the real object.

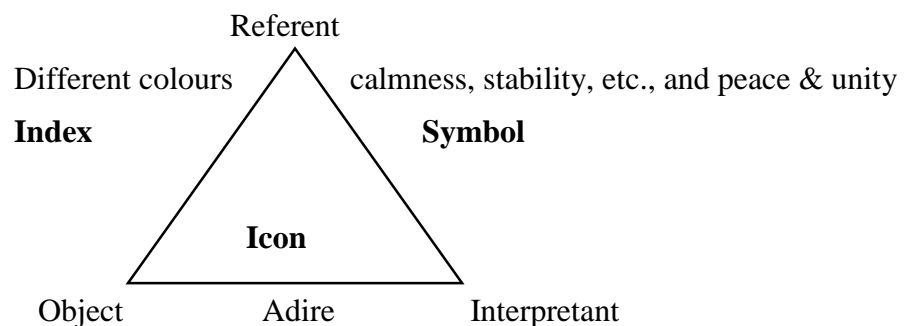
**Fig. 7: *Adire***



**Source: Field Research, 2024**

*Adire* is also a traditional attire adorned with faded blue and white colours. This is worn by any Jukun person including children. The blue colour is multifaceted; it signifies calmness, stability, reliability, and spirituality, while the white colour indicates peace and unity. The fact that this can be worn by every Jukun person shows first that the Jukun are a peace loving ethnic group, they welcome everybody. Secondly, the blue which represents the aforementioned qualities is an indication of the virtues that the Jukun person possesses. This can be represented on the triangle below.

**Fig. 8: Triangle D showing the referent, object and interpretant for Adire**



The triangle shows that the colours represent the referent while calmness, stability, reliability, and spirituality, peace and unity are the interpretant (meaning). The object thus refers to *Adire* itself. The use of *Adire* encodes the meaning (interpretant) of calmness, stability, reliability, spirituality, peace and unity through colour reflections.

### Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings in relation to the objectives of the paper. From the analysis of the data, the paper comes out with the following:

The first objectives of this paper seek to examine how artifacts are used to communicate meaning in the Jukun language. To this end, the findings reveal that all the selected artifacts have peculiar meanings they encode whenever they are used or displayed. *Ahyuis* is used to sing praises to a king or an important person in a community. The resounding rhythm of this object gives a resonating spirit of joy both to the person for whom it is played and the one who plays it. Other communicational purposes for which this object is used is for the celebration of an important event. *Asepanbyinis* is also played for eulogy (praise singing) and beckoning to a beloved one. When *Asepanbyin* is played, the fluting sound flows out like the bleating of a goat which captures

the attention of the person for whom is being played, making them to have a sense of belonging and affection.

*Kyadwa*, the symbolic significance of its use is to speak of human nature. Humans are naturally built with sense of joy and sorrow. The black and white colours therefore signify these joyous or happy and sorrowful and sad moments. For *Adire*, the blue colour signifies calmness, stability, reliability, and spirituality; while the white colour indicates peace and unity.

The second objective seeks to examine what occasion(s) they are used for communication in the Jukun language. In view of this and with reference to the first objective, it is understood that *Ahyu* is used during an organized occasion of appreciation of the worthwhileness of the Jukun king or an important personality in a community. It is also used during special events only. *Asepanbyin* is used at the instance of the event to honour or celebrate some important personality in the Jukun community. *Kyadwa* and *Adire* do not have any specific occasion in which they are worn because they depict human nature in general, particularly the Jukun, which is not something that is occasional.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has explored the use of selected artifacts in Jukun language. The paper described the features of each of these artifacts to show their beauty. More importantly as is the aim of the research, the paper examined the communicational values of each of these artifacts and on what specific occasions they are used. Thus, from the analysis and the findings, the paper concludes that artifact in Jukun play a great role in communication; they do not only have aesthetic beauty but carry a lot of meaning. Under the review of literature, the paper made justice by reviewing the valuable concepts like language, communication and artifacts alongside empirical studies, methodology and the theory adopted for the analysis of data.

The paper therefore recommends that since this particular area of study has to do with the culture of the Jukun people, both scholars and custodians of these cultural artifacts should engage in more efforts to preserve these important objects. In spite of the fact that there are modern means of communication, there is still need for cultural preservation and sustainability for use in future generation. More beneficially, if these are preserved in museums, it would attract tourism.

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