

HUMAN AND SPIRIT SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION IN THE IGBO CULTURE

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Abstract

In communicative practices non-verbal forms can be interpersonal and symbolic, in which case the nonverbal communication is between individuals and exclusively by the use of instruments as symbols, and the relationship between the symbol and the information passed is arbitrary. Aside being interpersonal, that is between humans, it can also occur between human and spirit. This paper examines the symbolic communication between human and spirit in the Igbo culture. Data were drawn from oral interviews and participant observation, and also, introspection (the author being a native Igbo and trained in the culture) as primary sources, while secondary sources were library materials and the internet. Findings indicate that the form of non-verbal communication that involves symbols and exclusively inter personal can occur between human and spirit. In the Igbo culture, human communicate with spirit symbolically by using various instruments, while spirit communicate with human through ominous signs and events, using animate and inanimate objects as agents that operate through various channels. In each case, we state the information communicated and also the instrument involved as symbol. The study concludes that human and spirit symbolic communicative practices could be used as tools in understanding more of the interesting and complex relationship between human and spirit that constitute a basic component of the Igbo worldview.

Keywords: Human, Spirit, symbolic, communication, Igbo society.

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Introduction.

In human society, the mutual sharing of information, ideas, thought and emotion between entities or groups, which is referred to as communication, is quite indispensable and can even be regarded as an essence of life. Human quest for media of communication started earlier before modern civilization (Onukawa 2020: p 1). As the early man began to live community life, there was room for exchange of ideas, thought and information. There was thus the need for the evolution of various media through which individuals or groups could exchange the said ideas, thought and information. The term 'communication' can be classified in various ways. One major way of doing this is by focusing on verballity and verballity hinges on words and human language. Emenanjo (2006) classifies communication into two major ways: Verbal and non-verbal. He further states that:

Classified in terms of participant and/or functions, communication divides into some eight types: intrapersonal, interpersonal, dyadic, group, mass, organizational, public, (community) development, and intercultural/international. Verbal communication uses essential human languages as found in speech: human sounds and words, the building blocks of language. It utilizes verbal or vocal codes and symbols-further divides into two sub-forms: verbal/vocal and verbal/nonvocal. Nonverbal communication categories include: Chromatics, Chronemics, Environmetics, Haptics, Kinesics, Objectics, Oculseis, Prosemics and Silence (p 96-98).

Cherry (2021) opines that non-verbal communication occupies a substantial portion of our communication. He further explains that:

Experts have found that every day we respond to thousands of nonverbal cues and behaviors including postures, facial expressions, eye gaze, gestures, and tone of voice. From our handshakes to our hairstyles, nonverbal details reveal who we are and impact how we relate to other people. Nonverbal communication types include facial expressions, gestures, paralinguistic: such as loudness or tone of voice, body language, proxemics or personal space, eye gaze, haptic (touch), appearance, and artifacts.

Communication is a natural phenomenon through which human beings relate with one another. Different cultures communicate in various ways within their communities and this has been of interest in traditional communication studies. Through some permutations and social interactions, the traditional societies were able to develop some media of communication (for example the town crier). Today most of those processes and media of information dissemination, entertainment, and education are still in use in the societies and have not been dislocated by

western culture or any other external influence. These are the traditional media of communication. Human and spirit communication among the Igbo are forms of traditional media of communication. What necessitated this study is due to a dearth in existing literature on humans and spirits communication. To the best of our knowledge, there has not been any study on this human and spirit communication among the Igbo and this is a specific contribution and gap in literature the study makes to knowledge. This study, therefore, offers new perspective to the discussions on traditional communication in Igbo.

The structure of the paper begins with the study objectives and methodology. This is followed by theoretical background which harbors a brief review on traditional communication among the Igbo. Next is earlier views on non-verbal traditional communication among the Igbo. Then, followed by symbolic communication between humans and spirits among the Igbo.

1.1 Study Objectives and Methodology.

The study has the following objective, to:

- i examine the symbolic means through which individual humans communicate with individual spirits in the traditional Igbo society.
- ii. examine the symbolic means through which individual spirits communicate with individual humans in the traditional Igbo society.
- iii. analyze the messages so conveyed, their meanings/interpretations and the purposes they serve in the traditional Igbo society

In order to achieve these objectives, as an ethnographic study, we adopted the qualitative, descriptive and analytical approaches. As a study with qualitative study paradigm orientation, we also adopted Key Informant Interview (KII) involving oral interview method of purposive sampling technique from 20 informants aged from 60 years and above comprising of both male and female who are Igbo natives, from various culture areas of Igbo land as classified by Qnwiejeogwu (1975) and speakers of the eight groups of dialects of Igbo language as classified by Nwaozuzu (2008) are believed to be relevant enough as to elicit appropriate responses on this aspect of the Igbo culture. Also, introspection featured as a primary source of data collection as the researcher is an Igbo naïve born and bred in the Igbo culture. Library and internet were secondary sources of data collection. Some of the examples here are pan-Igbo while some are not, therefore, we specify the Igbo culture areas where applicable. The

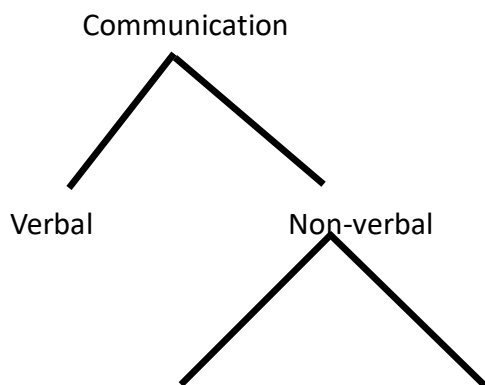
examples in Igbo are tone-marked using Green and Igwe (1963) tone-marking convention, whereby low and down step tones are overtly represented while high tone is not so represented.

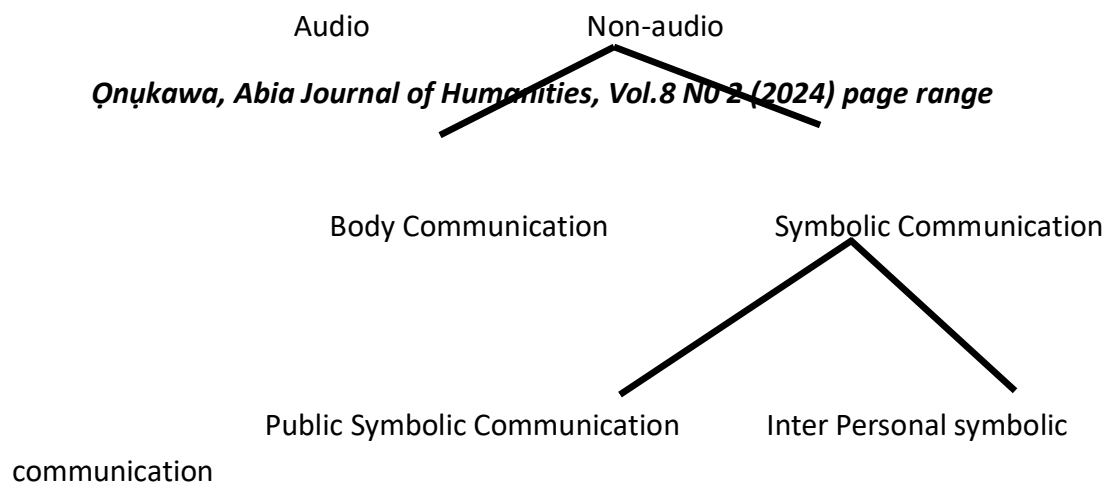
2. Theoretical Background

Traditional Communication among the Igbo

The Igbo, like other Africans, have various traditional media of communication and they rely on them in their regular interactions. The media are classified into verbal and non-verbal. The involve speech. For example: songs, proverbs, riddles, narratives, messages from the town crier. The non-verbal has two types: audio and non-audio. The audio includes, a cannon shot, the sound of a flute (oja), the sound of a wooden gong (ekwe), the sound of the wooden drum (ikoro). There are two types of the non-audio communication media: body communication and symbolic communication (the use of instruments as symbols to communicate). Body communication include, having a hand shake with someone, waving at someone, beckoning on someone. From symbolic communication we have yet another two types-public symbolic communication and interpersonal symbolic communication. In public symbolic communication an individual/an individual on behalf of a community uses symbols to communicate with the public: for example, installation of palm tendril on a disputed property (land—information to everybody to stay off the property until the dispute is resolved), installation of leaves in the front of a palm wine tapper's residence which serves as an information to the public that some palm wine is on sale there.

Inter personal symbolic communication is exclusively between two individuals with pieces of instrument. It is a type of communication whereby an individual uses some instruments as symbols to communicate with another individual. Item used in such communication often include, kolanut, native kaolin (nzu), goat, fowl, palm tendril, stick. The traditional media of communication among the Igbo are presented schematically below:





(Culled from Onukawa, 2023: p.69)

An issue that is exclusive to symbolic communication, among the types of non-audio communication is that the communication can be between human and human; and it can as well be between human and spirit. In the human and spirit symbolic communication, humans use various instruments to communicate with spirits; and spirits also use various instruments and channels to communicate with individual humans. This is the crux of this study, and it focuses on the Igbo traditional society. We present and discuss examples of the messages conveyed, the instruments used as symbols to convey the messages, and the interpretation of the messages conveyed in the inter human and spirit communication.

3 Earlier Views on the Non-Verbal Traditional Communication among the Igbo.

Earlier studies, as available to us have discussed traditional communication in the Igbo culture from various perspectives. We have here Okonkwo (1986), Nwadike, (1999), Unagha, (2002), Okafor, (2014), Onukawa, (2020), Jideofor (2021) and Onukawa, (2023).

Okonkwo (1986) examines some traditional forms of communication in Anambra Igbo. He gives the following forms of traditional communication: town crier, traditional market square, storytelling (Akuko ifo), singing, music and dancing, plays (egwu onwa), traditional attire or costume, games like ekere mgba, religious feasts, meetings and ceremonies including divination, mythology, witchcraft, cults, age groups, chief and elders squares and courts including the umunna or kindred meetings and crafts. He further says that “all these reflect the richness of a cultural heritage. Through these the organization of the traditional society can be examined. These traditional communication forms help in controlling the socio-cultural diameters especially in the transmission or communication of the cultural heritage”.

Nwadike (1999) and Okafor (2014) examined the ominous as used in contemporary Igbo literature. The works which examine ominous signs and events from literary perspective reveal that some actors in some works on Igbo drama use ominous signs and events to communicate warning about something bad that is going to happen.

Unagha (2002) discusses the Igbo experience in the traditional modes of communication in Nigeria. The study divides the Igbo traditional modes of communication into two, namely, non-human and human modes. He further states that "As the name implies, non-human modes of communication are those instruments developed in helping human beings communicate with one another". They include: ikoro (the gong), nkwa (talking drum), opi (flute), ogele (metal gong), ekwe (slit drum), and njirimara (signs and symbols). On the human modes of communication, the study observed thus, "these are modes of communication where the human person is actually the instrument of communication". They include the following: oma okwa (the town crier), oga ozi (the messenger), igu na igba egwu (singing and dancing).

In her own case, Onukawa (2020) investigated the efficacy of ominous as a medium of traditional non-verbal communication among the Igbo with peculiarity of being mystical. The study opines that messages of ominous signs and portentous events are transmitted through animate and inanimate elements and convey information on both inauspicious and auspicious incidents. The study also revealed that the communicative role of ominous signs and events is significant and efficacious among the traditional Igbo. Jideofor (2021) examined body communication in the Igbo culture. The study observed that communication can also be effectively carried out through the use of different human body parts (head, eye, nose, mouth, facial expressions, hand, etc.). Onukawa (2023) investigated interpersonal symbolic communication as an aspect of non-verbal communication between humans in the Igbo culture. The study held that this medium can be effectively used to communicate the following: proposal of marriage, affirmation of marriage, wish of fecundity, establishment of comradeship, wishing a sick person speedy recovery, erasure of fright and assurance of safety and peace, hospitality, respect, warning/caution, conviction, divorce, disclaimer/repudiation, quit notice.

The study observe that despite the extensive studies carried out by the aforementioned scholars, to the best of our knowledge, no study has focused on human and spirit symbolic communicative practices, that is, between human and spirit (the living dead and other spirits) in the traditional Igbo society. This is therefore, the context and focus of the present study.

In his discussion on “the nature of the universe”, Nwala, (1985) presents the spiritual or supernatural realm as one of the realms of existence, and mentions its relationship with the human realm. He states:

The spiritual realm (Ala mmuo) is the realm inhabited by spirits--- deities, ancestral spirits and the spirits of all the dead. It is socially structured like the human societies. Communities maintain their spiritual counterparts---with their dead members and all the kinship attachment there. He cites Major Leonard as having observed that the traditional Igbo have neither a heaven nor a hell, spirit

land being merely a continuance of this life on exactly the same conditions, each country or community having its allotted position and each individual resuming the exact position that was occupied when in this existence (p32)

The above is premised on the traditional Igbo belief that life is cyclical. A person lives and passes on to another realm of existence at death. While in that other realm his/her spirit lives on and later returns to the human realm through reincarnation (the Igbo refer to it as Ilo Uwa, lit. “to return to existence”). The Igbo belief, therefore, is that one does not die in the spirit realm; a reason for which the spirits are referred to as “the living dead”.

The Igbo communicate with the spirit of their dead relations, and other types of spirits (Deities). The public in Igbo communities can communicate symbolically with the spirits; and the spirits can also convey information that concern the public.

4. Symbolic Communication between Humans and Spirits.

In this section, we focus on two forms of symbolic communication, first, (a) human to spirit symbolic communication, and (b) spirit to human symbolic communication.

4.1 Human to spirit symbolic communication in the Igbo culture

In the Igbo culture, human communicate with spirit to:

- i. request,
- ii. honour ,
- iii. pacify,
- iv. plead

We exemplify as follows. Our examples here are in two parts based on the fact that some of the practices are now out of place. We have the old practice and the current practices.

The symbol discussed in this section, as used by the humans to convey messages to the spirits is no longer in practice in the Igbo society. This is due to the fact that Christian religion has taken upper hand over traditional religion.

4.1.1. Expression of Plea/ Request for a Favour/ Gratitude for a Favour,

Ijī mmadù goṣṣòrò agbàrà, kà onye ahù buru Osu,

(To consecrate a human to a spirit (deity) and the person becomes an outcast)

Among the Igbo there exist the Osu. According to one of my informants, Maazị Onyemaṣuwa Ụkaegbu, a native of Ọhiya, in the past, if a man (head of a family) experienced danger in his family, and there was a demand of human consecration from a particular deity, for instance Ala “Earth Deity” (as proclaimed by the diviner), he procured a human from the “slave market” and consecrated same to the deity or oracle. The consecration of humans to a deity then could also communicate a request for a favour from the deity or gratitude for a favour already obtained from a deity. This follows from Professor Onukawa’s further information to us, that a community leader (Chief) could consecrate a human to a deity to grant his community success in a war or to express gratitude for granting his community a success in a war.

Onukawa (2001) observes that those so consecrated were the Osu (Outcasts). The article points out that among the Igbo, there exists the Osu. They are those who (or whose ancestors) were consecrated to deities for certain reasons, and are invariably owned by those deities or oracles in accordance with Igbo traditional religious system. We observe that this system is no longer in practice. It has been abolished alongside slave trade through the advent of Christianity in Igbo land. All forms of plea, request, and gratitude to the deities are now communicated symbolically with goat, cock and some other animals.

4.1.1.2 A Request for “Non-Return” to one’s family at Reincarnation

The Igbo believe that at death, a soul or personality passes into a realm of discarnate being, which is a joyless limbo from which the discarnate soul is eager to return to terrestrial life (Stevenson, 1985). This is driven by the desire to resume their strivings for higher social status in the next incarnation. When this happens often with the birth of a child, such person is said to have reincarnated.

There is a sub-specie of reincarnating people who live only a few months or years and then die. Some die suddenly without any premonitory illness, others are frail and sickly for months before dying. Some may be born, die, reborn to the same family only to die again (Stevenson, 1985).

Stevenson, (1985) discussions on reincarnation corresponds with the view of this study on reincarnation whereby the dead who passes on already is aware of coming back, therefore requests not to return to the family in order not to cause the family another painful and heartbreaking experience. The following expression further confirms our claim.

Itīnyere nwatakiri nwuru anwu mkpuru ugba n'ime igbe ozū ya

(Putting an oil bean seed in the casket for a dead child)

Among the Igbo (as in many other known societies) some people die at tender ages and their death is considered as premature. If the premature death of a child still occurs after the parents had exhausted all they had to keep him/her alive, the father may, out of gross annoyance, put in an oil bean seed in the casket that contains his/her corps. This symbolically requests the child not to return to him again on reincarnation, but rather strike far away like the oil bean seed.

4.1.1.3 A Request to avenge death

Itīnyere onye nwuru anwu mmà aghā n'ime igbe ozū ya

(Putting a sword in a casket of a dead person)

Some known facts of death are that some people die naturally (as a result of ill health, old age, etc.), some people commit suicide, while others are murdered either coldblooded or poisoned. According to Chief Ukanwolu Akomas, one of our informants from Ossah Ibeku Umuhia, in the Igbo culture, if someone is murdered, the family does all possible to get back at the murderer. One of this is that the head of the family puts a sword in the casket of his murdered relation. This communicates to the deceased to avenge his murderer.

4.1.2. Honour

(a) Dead mature man in one's paternal home

Nwa igbūnyere nnà ya nwūrū anwu ehi maòbù ewu n'ebe nnà ya

(Slaughtering a cow or goat in honour of a dead father in one's paternal home)

Among the Igbo, people are honored in various ways when they are alive by their relations. The same honour continues for a matured man when he dies. In this case his child (his first son, in most cases) kills a cow or a goat (depending on his economic capacity) for him and it is celebrated by the kinsmen. The goat symbolically communicates an honour to the deceased father, as Onwukwe (personal communication) reported that in his Ibeme Igbo community, such practice could also serve as a request for the prosperity of the family. According to Maazi Robinson Onwere,¹ one of our informants, in his Ụmụabalị, Ụmụọpara Ụmụahịa, If the deceased has no child the honour must be bestowed on him by his brother or closest heir. According to Chief Ụkanwolu Akomas of Ọssah Ibeku Ụmụahịa, it should be noted that all of the dead matured men in Igbo land expect to be so honored, and therefore attack and kill their sons, brothers or closest heirs who have not honoured them but go to eat and drink where others are honouring their dead relations.

(b) Dead mature man in one's maternal home

Nwa igbūnyere nnà ya nwūrū anwu ehi maòbù ewu n'ebe ikwunne ya

(Slaughtering a cow or goat in honour of a dead father in one's maternal home)

As a child kills a goat for his late father in his paternal home, he also sends a cow or goat to the maternal home of the late father, to be killed for a celebration there. In this case, the cow or goat symbolically communicates an honour to the deceased and also a send forth gift to him, as it is believed that he has returned to his original base of maternal home. One of our informants Chief Ụkanwolu Akomas from Ossah Ibeku Ụmụahịa reported that among the Igbo, a man has three tiers of kinship relationship: his maternal kinsmen, paternal kinsmen and kinsmen of in-laws, and it is believed that he is primarily owned by his maternal kinsmen. He further reported that in his Umuahia Igbo community, if a man dies, his maternal kinsmen take preeminence at his funeral---they determine/approve the very spot where he will be interred, among other issues. The same informant reported that on the very day the deceased will be honoured and sent forth with the cow or goat, his maternal kinsmen will be chorusing: Nwa m alotalaoo !, nwa m alotalaoo !! (My child has returned ooo !, my child has returned ooo !!)

(c) Dead married woman at her maiden home

Nwa igbūnyere nne ya nwūrū anwu ehi maòbù ewu n'ebe nnà nne ya

(Slaughtering a cow or goat in honour of a dead mother at her maiden home)

Whereas a matured man is owned by his maternal relations, paternal relations and in-laws; a married woman is traditionally, primarily owned by her maiden kinsmen, and this is most evident at death. This is Pan-Igbo, meaning it is a common practice in Igbo land that is why a dead married woman cannot be buried anywhere in Igbo land without first of all consulting her kinsmen just as her kinsmen were consulted while seeking for her hand in marriage. If a married woman dies, her child sends (in some circumstances the husband or closest heir to the husband can do this) a cow or a goat to her maiden kinsmen for some celebrations. The cow or goat communicates an honour to her and also a spiritual send forth gift to her, as she leaves her husband's home and returns to her maiden home (where she belongs aboriginally and only went elsewhere else on marriage). The pattern of celebration is same as that of a man in his maternal home, even the chorusing. This honour is exclusive to married women, unmarried women are not so honoured anywhere probably because the Igbo consider non-marriage as an aberration. This is premised on the usual Igbo saying: A jugide nwaanyi onye muru ya, a juwazie ya onye luru ya (After a period of asking a woman who the father is, it gets to a period of asking her who the husband is).

4.1.3. Appeasing a dead father before the marital rites of his daughter

Nwa igbūnyere nnà ya nwūrū anwu oke ọkukò tupu e mewe emume ọlulu nwa ya

(Slaughtering a cock for a dead father before the marriage rites of his daughter)

In the traditional Igbo society, a father is usually preeminent at the marriage of his daughter. He usually takes most of the crucial decisions, including decisions on items that are due to him. A father receives his marital entitlements on his daughter first before any other person. If the father of a bride is deceased these functions and benefits therefrom are traditionally transferred to his first son (or any other son or the closest heir depending on the circumstance). Based on this, therefore the Igbo believe that the deceased will not be happy for having lost out on this in death. The son, therefore, kills a cock for him before the commencement of the marriage rites. The cock symbolically communicates an appeasement to the late father before anyone else collects the entitlements.

4.1.4. A Plea and assurance to a deceased person being conveyed to a destination

Onye okenyè ikwūnye omu nkwū n'ugboàla bu onye nwūrū anwu

(An elderly person affixing palm tendril on a vehicle conveying a deceased person)

In some parts of traditional Igbo society like in Ikeduru Igbo community, some people make oral wills on certain issues that must be implemented when they die. Some of such wills include where (community) they will be buried and even where their corpses will first be presented, before the last destination. For instance, some men who reside outside their native homes/towns do insist that they must be buried in their homes/towns. Some state that their corpses must first be presented to their maternal kinsmen before getting to their paternal homes. Some women assert that when they die, they must be buried at their maiden homes. Some of these wills are strengthened by the fact that (especially in the past) marriages are usually contracted within proximal communities. Some people even insist that when they die their remains must not be deposited in a morgue. If any of such people dies and his/her family attempts to counter such a will (or is seemingly doing so) based on certain circumstances, ominous signs usually set in; one of which is that the vehicle conveying the deceased begins to have serious hitches. When this happens, an elderly man (usually from the deceased's family) who is aware of the will of the deceased, reminds others of the will, and affixes palm tendril on the vehicle. This instrument (palm tendril) symbolically communicates plea to the deceased for cooperation, and, also an assurance that his/her will must be implemented. Aside those that made oral wills, in some cases those whose lives were snuffed out through accidents or murder do protest, resulting in the

vehicles conveying their corpses to have serious snags. In this case, also an elder affixes palm tendril on the vehicle to communicate plea to the deceased for corporation.

We should point out that in recent times people do affix palm tendril on vehicles conveying human corpses, even where it is not called for as discussed above. This is probably to send a plea and solicit for the cooperation of the deceased ahead of time (before any ominous sign of his/her displeasure, if any, begins to occur).

4.2 Spirit to Human symbolic communication

The messages that spirit convey to human come in the form of ominous signs and events. Under this ominous signs and evens, we focus on the messages to discuss whether they portend good or bad events.

4.2.1 Ominous.

We are concerned in this paper with the ominous signs with which spirits convey some messages to humans, using some agents and channels. By agents, here, we mean those animate and inanimate mystical objects that transmit ominous messages or information to the individual

Igbo through some forms of unusual behaviour; while channels are methods or systems through which ominous messages get to the individual people. We exemplify below in two groups: (a) ominous signs and events that convey negative and unfavourable messages and (b) ominous signs and events that convey positive and favourable messages.

4.2.1.1 (a) Events and practices that convey negative messages.

.Most ominous signs and events portend negativity. In fact the degree at which negative ominous signs and events surpass the positive ones has apparently compelled some people to see the word ominous as simply suggestive of threatening, menacing, or inauspicious future event. . It is the overshadowing of the negative ominous events that has compelled us to discuss them first (notwithstanding the order of the dual expression “Good and bad”). Among the bad ominous signs and events, we have those that communicate death, ill-luck and other misfortunes. Some of the ominous signs and events are specific to some Igbo culture areas, as we recorded from our informants (interviewees)¹, and we have indicated the culture areas in such cases.

1. Events that portend Death.

Most of the ominous signs and events in the negative class portend death. The appearances of many ominous agents in families suggest that death is lurking around the family. It may be the death of the very person who first experienced the ominous sign or event, or the death of

someone else. Most of the ominous signs that are channeled through dreams also portend death. The following are some of the ominous signs with which a spirit communicates impending death to a human: through an instrument, as symbol (an agent):

- i. Ìkwìghìkwìghì ibē akwa n’elu ụlō mmadù mà ò bù n’agìgà ụlō mmadù. (The hooting of an owl on top of someone’s roof or around his compound).
- ii. Oke arịrị (Nnukwu esū) ịbàtàtà n’ụlō mmadù.(The visit of a giant millipede in one’s house).
- iii Mmadù ịhū ewi n’oke ēhihiè (Someone seeing a rabbit in broad daylight).
- iv. Ịjerè ịrī elu ụlō mmadù. (Black ants (Soldier ants) climbing on top of the roof of someone’s house)
- v. Nwa ologbō ibàtà n’ụlō mmadù nà mbèrède. (Oji River, Enugu State).A cat entering someone’s house unexpectedly)

vi Nkịtā ịnòkọ na-ebe akwa n'ọnyụ ụzò ụlò mmadù, maọbụ n'ezi mmadù. (Edda) (Congregation of dogs making awful lament in front of someone's house or in the compound)

vii Àchàrà (Ata) itò n'èzi mmadù (Udi, Enugu State) (The growth of elephant grass in someone's compound). Mr Michael Agu from Nkanu Enugu State informed me that in Umuneke community in Udi LGA, (their neighbour community), there is no elephant grass. A sudden growth of elephant grass means loss of life in the family.

viii Eke ịbàtà n'ụlò mmadù n'òbòdo na-asọ Ekē. (Python entering someone's house in places where it is not a totem).

ix. Mmadù ịnāta ewu ahùrù n'ọkụ màòbù ewu a bórò abò na nrọ. (Amiyi, Onicha Uboma)
(Someone receiving roasted goat or dissected goat in the dream).

x . Mmadù ịnāta ji a wàrà àwa na nrọ (Amiyi, Onicha Uboma—Nke à sìtèrè nà nkwenye ha nà ji bụ mmadù). (Someone receiving sliced yam in the dream---This stems from the people's belief that yam is human). Mr Chigozie Anokwuru² from Ihite Uboma Imo State gave me this and some other ominous signs peculiar to his area.

xi Mmadù nà onye nwūrū anwụ irikọ nri na nrọ. (Someone eating with a dead person in dream).

xii. Mmadù ịhū Àzigwò. (Someone seeing Azigwo (a type of snake.)).

xiii. . Añụ ịkwū n'ụlò mmadù. (The swarming of bees in someone's house

xiv. Ùdèlè ibèrè n'elu ụlò mmadù n'enweghi anụ ọbụlà e gbùrù n'ebe ahù.(The vulture perching on someone's roof without noticing any slaughtered animal).

xv. Òkụkò iyī àkwa n'elu ụlò mmadù. (A hen laying egg on the roof of someone's house)

2. Events that portend Ill-luck and other Misfortunes.

Some bad ominous signs and events do not communicate loss of life of the individual concerned, but rather signal to someone of other non-favorable that would happen to him/her by chance.

Such ominous signs and events include the following:

i. Akanshi (Nwa òhà nde nde) ịkpò mmadù ịh n'ebe ọ gàrà pùtara ihu ọjọ (Nkanu).
Encountering a pygmy first in a place of sojourn portends ill-luck)

ii. Mgbe ùfọdụ ịkpọ ụkwụ aka ẹkpè n'ìhe pùtara ihu ọjọ. (At times dashing of the left foot on an obstacle portends ill-luck).

iii. Àlughùlụ udidè iwūchị mmadù anya n'ùtùtù nà-ègosi ihu ọjọ (Cobweb blocking someone's face in the morning portends ill-luck)

iv. Èbèlè (màòbù ùdù) mmanya ịwā mgbè a nà-àga ịlū nwaànyị pùtara nà alumdi nà nwunye ahù agāghị àga nkè ọma. (Breaking of keg of palm wine on the way for a marriage ceremony indicates that the marriage would not be a successful one).

v. Òvù ikù mmadù n'aka ẹkpè pùtara nà ihu ọjọ gà-àkpọ onye ahù. (The cuckoo cooing from someone's leftward direction portends ill-luck for that person).

vi. Ọjị enwēghi ibe, màòbù nke gbārā ibe ābụ (tùmàdì nkè a gòrò mà waa màkà emume) pùtara nà ihe e jì màkà ya waa ọjị ahù agāghị àgazi (Kolanut that has no lobe or two lobes (especially the one blessed and broken for a ceremony) means that the purpose for which the kolanut is served will not prosper)).

vii. Etuketu (Utùturū) ịkpọ mmadù ọtùtù ogè pùtara nà ihe ọjọ gà-ème onye ahù. (Oji River, Enugu State) (If someone experiences persistent hiccup, it a sign that a negative event would occur to him/her).

viii. Mmanụ ịwūfùnhù mmadù n'àlā nà-ègosi nà ihe ọjọ emeela nwa onye ahù (Ugwuoba, Oji River). (The spilling of palm oil from someone's hand means that something has happened to the person's child)

ix. Azù mkpùrù ịdābàtā n'ụgbọ miri (ụgbọ epeepe) mmadù gòsiri nà .nsògbu gà-àbịara onye ahù mgbè n'adīghị anya. (Egbema, Imo/Rivers State). (Mkpuru (a type of fish) jumping into someone's boat portends trouble for that person soon). According to Prof. Nwaugo (my interviewee), to tell someone "Mkpùrù gbabàkwara gī n'ụgbọ (May Mkpuru jump into your boat) is serious curse on the person.

x. Mmadù ịhū nte n'èhihiè nà-ègosị nà ihu ọjọ gà-àkpọ onye ahù (Mbano, Imo state)

(Someone seeing the cricket in the afternoon, portends bad

4.2.1.2 (b) Events and practices that convey positive messages to Human.

Some of the ominous signs and events communicate favourable and acceptable issues-that is issues of good fortune. They include the following:

- i. Mgbē ụfọdụ, ịkpō ụkwụ aka nrī n'ihe-pùtàrà ihu ọma. (At times dashing of the right foot on an obstacle means good luck)
- ii. Ùdarà ịdà n'ihu mmadù-pùtàrà ihu ọma gà-akpọ yā. (Udara fruit falling in presence of someone means good luck for the person).
- iii. Ugwùmàgàlà ịgāfè n'ụzò mmadụ sì na-àga pùtàrà nà mmirī gà-ezò (Chameleon crossing somebody's pathway signifies that rain will fall).
- iv . Nwaànyị ịtùtù ejù na nrọ pùtàrà nà Ọ gà-àdị imē (Oji River, Enugu State). (A woman picking up snails in the dream means that she will expect pregnancy)
- v. Mmadù ịzòrò nsị na nrọ pùtàrà ihu ọma. (Someone stepping on feces in the dream means good luck).
- vi. Nnùnù ịnyū mmadù nsị n'isi pùtàrà ihu ọma (Oji River, Enugu State)(Bird defecating on someone's head means good luck).
- vii. Mmadù ịwā ọjị gbārā ibe ịse màòbù àsaà, pùtàrà ihu ọma. (Someone breaking a kolanut with five or seven lobes means good luck).
- viii. Mmadù ịhū Ùgò pùtàrà ihu ọma. (Someone seeing the Eagle portends good luck).
- ix. Añu ifē gbùrùgburù n'isi mmadù pùtàrà nà o nwèrè onye ga-ewètara onye ahụ mmanya (Nkanu). (Bee hovering around someone's head means that somebody will bring wine for him/her).
- x Onye arā ịkpō mmadù ihu n'ùtùtù nà-èbute ihu ọma. (Asaba/Igbouzo). Mr Umunna and Mr Anya Onye gave me this example. (Someone having first contact in the morning with a mad person portends good luck).

5. Summary and Conclusion

We have attempted in this study to show that in the Igbo culture (as in some other known cultures) humans can use instruments, as symbols to communicate with spirits, also spirits do communicate with humans using some animate and inanimate objects as symbols, and conveying the information through various channels. This interpersonal symbolic communication constitutes an aspect of the non-verbal communication system in the people's culture. We have classified the examples in this perspective, with the messages they convey and the specific meaning/interpretation of the messages. We identified the messages usually conveyed by human to spirits symbolically to include: plea to avert impending calamity, request

for a favour, gratitude for a favour, request for non-return to family on reincarnation , a request to avenge death, an honour and plea to a dead matured/full-fledged man in his paternal home, an honour and send forth to a dead matured man at his maternal home, an honour and send forth to a dead married woman at her maiden home, appeasing a dead father before the marital rites of his daughter, a plea and assurance to a deceased person being conveyed to a destination. The messages conveyed by spirits to humans symbolically, come as ominous signs and events and they communicate death, ill luck/misfortune and also positive issues. This paper concludes that the human and spirit symbolic communication constitutes a medium in which the Igbo frame their worldview. All of the items that are involved in the human and spirit symbolic communication have high significance in the Igbo culture; and are embodiments of spirits. They all are agents through which the humans and spirits communicate. An aspect of the traditional Igbo belief is that “spirits dwell in woods, bush, forests, seas, rivers, mountains, and around the villages, and compounds, including the shrines, oracles and even the grave-yard...the spirits are in the same geographic region as men” (Nwala 1985, p.33). In fact, the Igbo believe that spirits habit everywhere, and are involved in all the processes of the human and symbolic communication.

Note: 1. I am very grateful to all the informants for their willingness in supplying most of the data for this paper. Before I concluded this article, I received the sad news of the demise of two of my informants, Chief Ukanwolu Akomas, and Maazi Robinson Onwere. May their humble souls rest in peace.

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