

Means and Forms of Traditional Communication in Igbo Land in Contemporary Socio-Cultural Interactions

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Abstract: *Traditional communication in Igbo land is a continuous process of information dissemination, but in social contexts, conflicts often arise not necessarily because of one form of the traditional communication is old and the other is new, rather human beings often resist change of any kind. Traditional communication systems operate in urban and rural areas which have been accepted to manipulate western media system for a purpose of enhancing other socio-economic development of these areas. The paper therefore, viewed different forms of traditional communication, the nature and problems facing traditional communication in Igbo land and finally suggested that Igbos should have one acceptable dilate; Igbo need to go back to the cultural activities like the use of signs and gunges, and to sponsor industries where the instruments are produced and promote the use of them.*

Keywords: *Traditional Communication, Instruments, Igbos, Socio- Cultural, Interaction.*

I. Introduction

There is often a certain argument and conceptual confusion and misapprehension surrounding what constitutes traditional communication, arising from the use of traditional as a qualifier in discussing communication systems in Igbo land generally. The general notion or implication, also arising from the confusion and misapprehension, is often that of out-dated or perhaps primitive systems of communication which still have surviving relies in most third world countries, which Nigeria is one of the developing countries. No wonder the entire community of Umuofia in Mbaino noticed that terrible things has happened in their land, when Okonkwo threw Amalinze “the cat” down, a man that was unbeatable in wrestling. According to Achebe (1958); Alimi (2012), he said “The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath, Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water”. Communication is the only way such information can be disseminated to the people living in a particular geographical area.

Igbo land is in the south eastern Nigeria the Igbos are grouped into five sub-cultural areas and they share almost the same system of communication in the traditional era. The disparity in the communication system is the language or mother tongue that is the dilate (Onwuejeogwu, 1999). It is clear that old traditions are usually displaced by new changes yet traditional and modern forms of culture are always in conflict especially in terms of communication systems. This is so because the traditional systems of communication in Igbo land are still in existence. It will be very interesting to note that in social contexts, conflicts often arise not necessarily because one form is old and the other is new, rather human beings often resist change of any kind. The fact remains that traditional communication in Igbo land is a continuous process of information dissemination, entertainment and education used in societies which have not been seriously dislocated by Western culture or any other external influence as in the case of many parts of the world. These systems of communication in Igbo land even operates in urban centres which have accepted to manipulate western media system for a purpose of enhancing the socio-economic development of these areas. Thus methods of communication which hitherto belonged to the traditional system no longer operate because social and economic activities have made it possible to create the contexts of them. For example, communication with fire as a means of attracting attention or notifying a neighbouring community as an event does not seem to have a place today in any of our societies except perhaps among the societies living in the mountain areas and also among hunters and adventurers in some places.

II. Forms of Traditional Communication in Igbo Land

According to Wilson (1987) there are numerous forms of communication systems in Nigeria and in particular in Igbo land. Some of them are:- idiophones, membranophones, aerophones, symbology, signals, sign, among others.

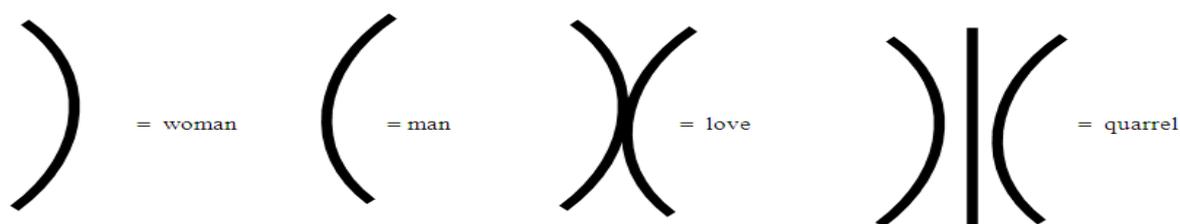
Idiophones: These according to Wilson are self sounding instruments or technical wares which produce sound without the addition or use of an intermediary medium. The sound or message emanates from the materials

from which the instruments are made and they could be shaken, scratched, struck, pricked (pulled) or pressed with the feet. They include the gong, woodblock, wooden drum, bell and rattle.

Membranophones: These are media on which sounds are produced through the vibration of membranes. They include all varieties of skin or leather drum,. These drums are beaten or struck with well-carved sticks. The Igbos use these drums, though it is a borrowed communication instrument because it is produced in Yoruba land. These skin drums of various sizes and shape abound in all Nigerian traditional societies especially in Igbo land, if not the most popular means of communication in our society today traditionally. This is because it is the most exposed and intricate in its craftsmanship. This drum is called the “talking drum” in Yoruba land and locally called ‘dundun’ in Igbo land.

Aerophones: These are media which produce sound as a result of the vibration of a column of air. They comprise media of the flute family, whistle reed pipes, hones and trumpets etc.

Symbology: This simply means symbolic writing or representation. Communication takes place when encoders use graphic representations to convey a message which is understood within the context of a known social event and an accompanying verbal message. This is a descriptive representational device for conveying meaning. There a lot of them but the well known one usually in Igbo land is ‘uri’ (Igbo) writings are examples which are used in wall painting as well on wall and even on human body.



Signals: These are the physical embodiments of a message. In some parts of our country, so many ancient signals are still in existence. To portray this point, in all the broadcasting stations in Nigeria there must be a sign of drum signals to draw the attention of its listeners, indicating that they are about to start or to begin transmission for the day. In this category, some of the signals include fire, gunshots, canon shots, drum (wooden or skin).

Signs: Signs are marks that are meaningful or objects or symbols used to present something. It can be said to be construct by which organisms affect the behaviour or state of another in a communication context. Sign language (ie system of communication by gestures) has been developed for the deaf in all the Nigerian communities and even across board. While signs are more associated with specific denotative meanings, while symbols usually carry along with them connective meaning as well, Ross (1992:164 – 165). He maintained that symbols require as interpreter who knows something of the system by venture of which the symbol has meaning, Natural signs require an interpreter who knows a theory or general law in terms of which the sign is an index of the existence of some other thing.

Despite the forms of communication mentioned above, traditional institutions, clubs or societies in Igbo land are used for the purpose of dissemination of information, passing on gossips, rumours, and at times highly confidential information. These institutions operate in both rural and urban areas, but mostly in the rural areas especially the following co-operative societies: esusu (Osusu),Clan/town/village/family unions, ethnic unions, drinking clubs, old students associations, market women’s association, age grade, secret societies, cults and so many others too numerous to mention in this work help a lot to disseminate information or communicate effectively in Igbo land.

III. Nature and Content of Traditional Communication

Communication processes in Igbo land are in various forms and are geared towards achieving different communication goals and objectives. They may be viewed under the followings: Directives, news, advertising, public relations, entertainment, and education.

(i) **Directives are given inform of:**

- a) Announcements concerning public or community works, duties or responsibilities of the collective citizenry which must be carried out or defaulters within the community automatically face certain sanctions.

- b) Instructions to groups or individuals to carry out certain decisions of the traditional authority.
- c) Announcements about forthcoming events. This directives – approach has today been adopted by past civilian administrations and military juntas in their approach to governance and information dissemination, an approach often derided by those who prefer the western democratic approach (Doob, 1966).

(ii) News is often inform of:

- (a) Information about events which have taken place.
- (b) Information about deaths, usually of very important people in the community, in which case some of the communication that can be available is the news.
- (c) News may be about impending events.

(iii) Advertisement can be done by:

- (a) The display of the products on a table, tree stump or flay pole.
- (b) Use of peripatetic hawkers, vendors
- (c) Singing and drumming of the name of the product to be sold etc.

(iv) Public relations can be done through:

- (a) Person – to-person or person – to- organization basis where the individual tries to promote the image of his organization through singing.
- (b) Performances and announcements are made to enhance communication to a greater level in a community.

(v) Entertainment: This can equally be the most pervasive in nature. This is done through music, dance, and drama performances that are put up to be received free or sometimes payed for in some localities in Igbo land.

(vi) Education: This can be derived through:

- (a) Informally but also formally through cultural groups.
- (b) Through membership of certain societies.
- (c) Learning through membership of other socio cultural groups in the community.

IV. Functions of Traditional Communication in Igbo Land

The fact remains that traditional system of communication is a complex one whose functions transcend the ordinary oracular postulations of western theorists. Gusfield (1973) identified that since the system function as part of the larger socio-political organization, reporting on and criticizing organs within the system issuing directives from the legitimate, or in some cases titular, head, and provide education in the areas of the norms and mores of the society. Stimulating the emotions and generally providing the light to innovations and helping their diffusions its functions are more diverse and far – reaching than is often admitted. The major functions of traditional communication among others are:

1. It mobilizes the people at the grassroots level towards community development and even creates awareness to national consciousness.
2. It serves as a cultural, political, health and other educational and enlightenment programmes for the community people, it leads them towards self – actualization development.
3. It is a source of entertainment through arts and cultural festivals, musical and dramatically performances by choral and masquerade groups and other music and drama – oriented groups.
4. It is used for intra – cultural, inter cultural and other communication purposes leading to group unity. The yam festivals in south-eastern zone of Nigeria (Igbo land) are good examples of large traditional communication set – ups which bring about inter cultural and even mass communication.
5. Traditional communication gives expression to cultural and other activities of different parts of other communities outside Igbo land. Through festivals, for example, wide aspects of cultural systems are exposed to other cultures and greater understanding and appreciation of differences takes place.

From these points raised above, we can say that the traditional system is not competitive in the sense that individuals or organizations do not scramble for custom through whatever means, ethical or unethical. This is not to say that the different performing groups do not have their tiffs but these are often on more matters more fundamental than the search for profit.

V. Problems Facing Traditional Communication in Igbo Land

- Presently many problems affect the traditional communication in Igbo land. One major problem affecting is the lack of a standard technical vocabulary in the prescription, analysis and even in the concepts of the media or channels and processes of the Traditional Communication System.
- There is the absence of an appropriate language which can be universally applied in this aspect of communication because Igbo's are influenced by their dialects that is the mother tongue.
- Scientific and technological problems are the major constraints encountered in traditional communication. This is so because the present level of development of modern media and channels of communication in society is limited because some of the technical hardware are not easily preserved even although they are liable for replication.
- In spite of the existence of modern communication systems, people still have control and flair for traditional communication but the major concern are the instruments that are used to produce the sounds are relatively scarce.
- The level of socio-economic activities in Igbo land no doubt influences the communication activity of the community, but this does not support the limited reach and effectiveness theses which are often brandied to discredit these potent sources and channels of communication in Igbo land (Mowlana, 1983).
- In terms of traditional communication in advertisement, it is not done to make profit therefore nothing as benefit comes out of it, just the same as the town criers, although Town criers are given some sort of reward for their work, those who use talking drums to communicate and entertain the audience are rewarded.

VI. Recommendation

- Igbos should come up with one acceptable dialect that will aid in traditional Communication.
- The government should promote the use of traditional communication since some of them have been modernized to be an acceptable language like the sign language used by the deaf and mute,
- The government should sponsor those industries where the local instruments are produced.
- The beneficiaries of the traditional Communication should appreciate those people that disseminate information to the people, like the Town criers.
- Igbos should go back to the cultural activities which was swallowed by foreign or western culture since some people cannot do without traditional communication in Igbo land because for them it is a source of entertainment, Public relation, directive and news spread.

VII. Conclusion

It has been observed in this paper that much work has not been done on "traditional communication in Igbo land. Not much is gained by the system if the pronouncements of the government officials are not attended by concrete action. For instance, it is a well come idea for the government information chiefs to make pronouncements in rural communities about the need to utilize the "town criers", who usually makes suggestions that he knows rural communities, on their own, cannot cry out. When the actual funding is called for, it is western mass media hardware that funds are usually provided for the improvement of traditional media. The writer therefore suggests that all efforts on modernization should be made with the custodians of the culture of the Igbo land fully involved in all the processes that may lead to some changes. This improvement can be made but the sense of the system that constitutes such a potent force in rural communities should not be destroyed in the process as such efforts in the past have destroyed many valuable aspects of our culture in Igbo land.

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