

# HUMAN-SPIRIT SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION IN THE IGBO CULTURE

BY

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## *Abstract*

In communicative practices, non-verbal forms can be interpersonal and symbolic, in which case non-verbal 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 from being interpersonal, that is between humans, it can also occur between humans and spirits. This paper examines the symbolic communication between individual humans and individual spirits in the Igbo culture. Data were drawn from oral interviews, participant observation, and, 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 is exclusively inter-personal can occur between individual humans and individual spirits. In the Igbo culture, individual humans communicate with individual spirits symbolically by using various instruments, while individual spirits communicate with individual humans 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 the instrument involved as a symbol. The study concludes that inter-human and spirit symbolic communicative practices could be used as tools in understanding more of the interesting and complex relationship between humans and spirits that constitute a basic component of the Igbo worldview.



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

## 1. Introduction.

In human society, the mutual sharing of information, ideas, thoughts and emotions between entities or groups, which is referred to as communication, is quite indispensable and can even be regarded as an essence of life. The human quest for media of communication started earlier before modern civilization. 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, thoughts and information. The term 'communication' can be classified in various ways. One major way of doing this is by focusing on verblivity and verblivity 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, Oculoseis, Prosemics and Silence.

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 societies and have not been dislocated by Western culture or any other external influence. These are the traditional media of communication.

## **2. 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 a qualitative study paradigm orientation, we also adopted, in the primary collection of data, the Key Informant Interview (KII) involving oral interview method of 20 informants who are Igbo natives, from various cultural areas of Igboland, and 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 sentence examples in Igbo are tone-marked using Green and Igwe's (1963) tone-marking convention, whereby low and downstep tones are overtly represented while high tone is not so represented.

## **3. Theoretical Background: An Overview of the Concept of Traditional Communication**

This study hinges on traditional communication, which as a concept, has been variously conceived. Our concern in this section, however, is to present an overview of the various definitions of traditional communication and subsequently discuss different persuasions in the conceptions of the term. Traditional communication is the practice and study of how different cultures communicate within their community by verbal and non-verbal means. It can also be referred to as intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication. These practices differ in traditional societies

Traditional communication is synonymous with Berrigan's (1979, p.8) *community media* or *community communications*. He states that:

Community media are media to which members of the community have access for information, education, and entertainment when they want access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners,



producers, performers. They are the means of expression of the community rather than for the community. Community communications describe an exchange of views and news, not a transmission from one source to another.

According to Okonkwo (1986), when we talk of traditional form of communication we mean the modes of communication that are aboriginal to a particular culture.

In his own discussion on traditional communication, Ebeze (2002, p. 28) cites Ugboaja (1985) as having defined traditional communication thus:

Traditional communication is regarded here as the products of the interplay between a traditional community's customs and conflicts, harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, culture specific tangibles, interpersonal relations, symbols and codes and moral traditions which mythology, oral literature (poetry, storytelling, proverbs), masquerades, witchcraft, rites, rituals music, dance, drama, costumes, and similar abstractions and artifacts which encompass a people's factual symbolic and cosmological existence from birth to death and even beyond death.

Ebeze (p.28) further states that traditional communication refers to "modes of communication which are still in use by the ruralites. They have been variously called folk media or... oramedia". In his own contribution, Samba (2005 p.12) define *traditional communication* thus:

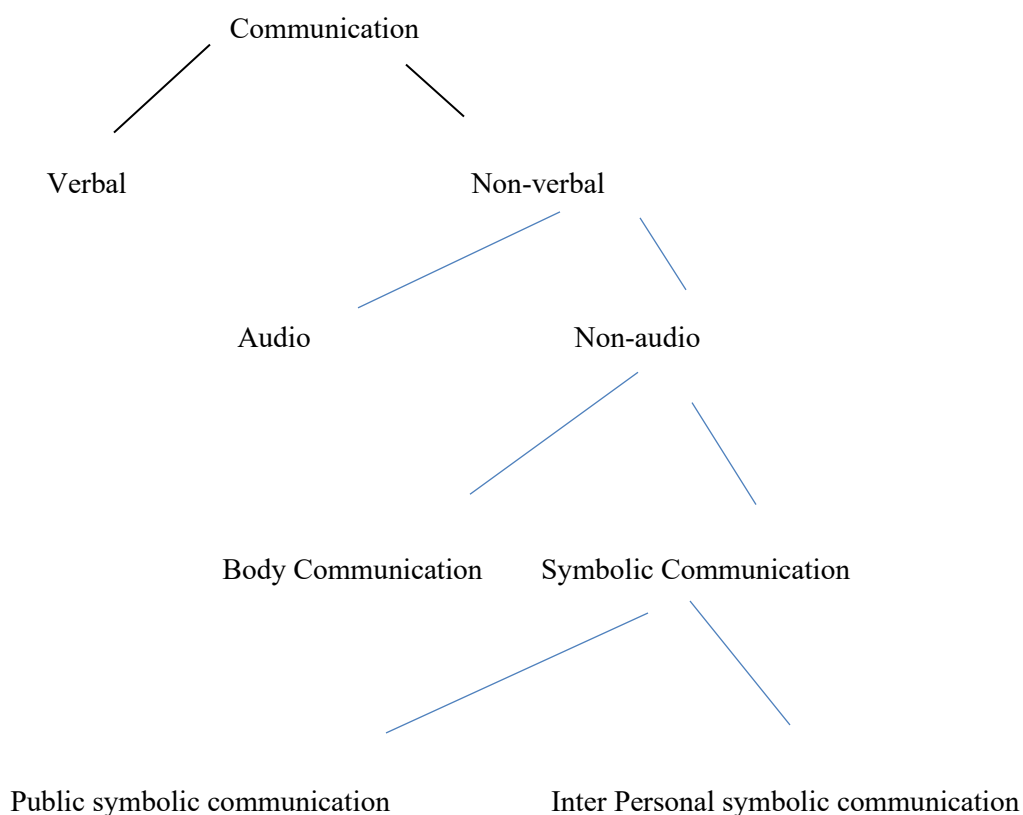
Traditional communication in its simple form may be described as an informal type of communication which starts from the traditional authority represented by the king or chief or council of elders. It is precipitated to other segments of society verbally, from one person to another or one community to another, or clans, villages, and scattered settlements.

### **Traditional Communication among the Igbo**

The Igbo, like other African societies, have various traditional media of communication and they rely heavily on them in their regular interactions. The media are classified into verbal and non-verbal. They involve speech. For example: songs, proverbs, riddles, narratives, and 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*), and the sound of the wooden drum (*ikoro*).

There are two types of non-audio communication media: body communication and symbolic communication (the use of instruments as symbols to communicate). Body communication includes having a handshake with someone, waving at someone, and beckoning at someone. From symbolic communication, we have yet another

two types, which are 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, the installation of palm tendrils 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 - information to the public that some palm wine is on sale there. Interpersonal 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. Items used in such communication often include kolanut, native kaoline (*nzu*), goat, fowl, palm tendrils, and stick. The traditional media of communication among the Igbo are presented schematically below:



(Culled from Onukawa, 2023)

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 inter-human and spirits symbolic communication, individual humans use various instruments to communicate with individual spirits, and individual spirits also use various instruments and channels to communicate with individual humans. This is the crux of this study, focusing 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 in the subsequent sections.

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

Earlier studies have discussed traditional communication in the Igbo culture from various perspectives. Among these scholars are Okonkwo (1986), Nwadike (1999), Unagha (2002), Okafor (2014), Onukawa (2020), Jidefor (2021) and Onukawa, (2023) who have done some substantive works on traditional communication among the Igbo.

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) dwell on the ominous as used in contemporary Igbo literature. The works which examine ominous signs and events from a literary perspective reveal that some actors in some works on Igbo drama use ominous signs and events to communicate warnings about something bad that is going to happen. Unagha (2002) discusses the Igbo experience in the traditional modes of communication in Nigeria. He 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, he says “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) discusses the efficacy of ominous as a medium of traditional non-verbal communication among the Igbo with a 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 reveals that the communicative role of ominous signs and events is significant and efficacious among the traditional Igbo. Jidefor (2021) explores

body communication in the Igbo culture. She believes that communication can also be effectively carried out using different human body parts (head, eye, nose, mouth, facial expressions, and hand). While Onukawa (2023) examines interpersonal symbolic communication as an aspect of non-verbal communication between humans in the Igbo culture. She opines 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.

We, however, observe that despite the extensive studies carried out by the aforementioned scholars, and others on different modes of traditional communication in the Igbo culture, no study, to the best of our knowledge, has been carried out based on inter-human and spirit-symbolic communicative practices, that is, between individual humans and individual spirits (the living dead and other spirits) in the traditional Igbo society. This study, therefore, intends to fill this gap.

### **Symbolic Communication between Individual Humans and Individual Spirits in the Igbo Culture.**

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 this 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 concerns the public. However, we are concerned in this study with the use of instruments as symbols by individual humans to communicate with individual spirits. We present below some of the inter-human and spirit symbolic communicative practices conveyed by individual humans to individual spirits,, and the ones conveyed by individual spirits to individual humans in the Igbo culture. We classify and discuss them in these



perspectives, and give the messages they convey, followed by examples and the specific meanings/interpretations of each example:

### **Symbolic Communication Conveyed by Individual Humans to Individual Spirits**

In the Igbo culture, individual humans communicate with individual spirits to request, honour, pacify, and 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. These practices are the old practices and the current practices:

#### **4. The Old Practice**

The symbol discussed in this section, as used by individual humans to convey messages to the individual spirits is no longer in practice in the Igbo society:

#### **Expression of Plea/ Request for a Favour/ Gratitude for a Favour,**

*Ijī mmadù gòrò agbàrà, kà onye ahù buru Osu,*

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

Among the Igbo, there exist the Osu. They are those who (or whose ancestors) were consecrated to deities/oracles for certain reasons and are invariably owned by those deities or oracles in accordance with the Igbo traditional religious system (Onukawa, 2001). In the past, if a man (head of a family) experienced danger in his family, and there was a demand for human consecration from a particular deity (as proclaimed by the diviner), he procured a human from the “slave market” and consecrated same to the deity or oracle. The consecrated human symbolically communicated a plea to the deity “to satisfy the just demand in order to avert impending calamity” (Onukawa, 2001). 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 the deity. As we pointed out earlier, this system is no longer in practice. All forms of plea, request, and gratitude to the deities are now communicated symbolically with goat, cock and some other animals.

#### **5. The Current Practices**

The symbols of communication between human individuals and the individual spirits presented below are currently in use in the Igbo culture.

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

*Itīnyere nwatakiri nwuru anwu mkpuru ugba n’ime igbe ozūū ya*

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

Among the Igbo (as in many other known societies) some people die at tender ages and their death is considered premature. If the premature death of a child still occurs after the parents have 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.

### **A Request for a Revenge on Murderer**

*Itīnyere onye nwuru anwu mmà aghā n’ime igbe ozū ya*

(Putting a sword for a dead person in the casket)

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. In the Igbo culture, if someone is murdered the family does all possible to get back at the murderer. One of this 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.

### **An Honour and Plea to A Late Matured/Full-Fledged Man in his Paternal Home**

*Nwa igbūnyere nnà ya nwūrū anwu ehi maòbù ewu n’ebe nnà ya*

(A child killing a cow or a goat for his late father in his paternal home)

Among the Igbo, people are honoured 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, and also a request for him to continue to ensure the prosperity of the family, even more than he was doing while alive in the human realm of existence. If the deceased has no child the honour must be bestowed on him by his brother or closest heir. It should be noted that all of the dead matured men in Igbo land expect to be so honoured, 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.



### **An Honour and Send Forth to A Late Matured Man at his Maternal Home**

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

(A child killing a cow or a goat for his late father at his 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. 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. This is evidenced by the fact that in some Igbo cultural areas (like Umuahia) 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. 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 !!

### **An Honour and Send Forth to A Late Married Woman at her Maiden Home**

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

(A child killing a cow or a goat for his late mother at the mother's 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. 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) following the Igbo belief system. The pattern of celebration is the 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).

### **Appeasing a Late Father before the Marital Rites of His daughter**

*Nwa igbūnyere nnà ya nwūrū anwu oke okukò tupu e mewe emume olulu nwa ya*

(A child killing a cock for his late father before the marriage rites of his (the father's) 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.

### **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 a palm tendril on a vehicle conveying a deceased person)

In the traditional Igbo society, 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 a plea to the deceased for cooperation, and, also an assurance that his/her will must be implemented. Aside from 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, an elder affixes a palm tendril on the vehicle to communicate a plea to the deceased for corporation.



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

## 6. Symbolic Communication Conveyed by Individual Spirits to Individual Humans

The messages that individual spirits convey to individual humans come in the form of ominous signs and events as discussed below.

**Ominous.** This refers to signs and events of warning about something bad that is going to happen or suggestions that something good is going to happen. Ominous occurs in the forms of dreams, nightmares, peculiar signs, and is executed through some mystical animate and inanimate objects. The traditional Igbo society recognises bad ominous signs and events and the good ones. Some of the ominous signs convey messages meant for the public. For instance, *Okuko ibe akwa n'etiti abali* “A cock crowing in the middle of the night”, *Eke na egwurugwu iputa n'ehihie ma mmiri anaghi ezo* “The appearance of rainbow in the afternoon when it is not raining”. We are concerned in this paper with the ominous signs with which individual spirits convey some messages to individual 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: ominous signs and events that convey negative and unfavourable messages and ominous signs and events that convey positive and favourable messages.

### **Ominous Signs and Events that Convey Negative Messages to Individual Igbo.**

.Most ominous signs and events portend negativity. In fact, the degree to 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 events. . 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, there are 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)<sup>1</sup>, and we have indicated the culture areas in such cases.

## Ominous Signs and Events that Communicate 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 channelled through dreams also portend death. The following are some of the ominous signs with which a spirit communicates impending death to a human individual: through an instrument, as a 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 arìrì (Nnukwu esū) ibàtàtà n'ụlō mmadù.* (The visit of a giant millipede in one's house).

iii. *Mmadù ìhū ewi n'oke ēhihiè* (Someone seeing a rabbit in broad daylight).

iv. *Ìjerè ìrì 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. *Nkìtā ìnòkọ na-ebe akwa n'ọnu ụzò ụlō mmadù, maọbụ n'ezì mmadù.* (Edda) (Congregation of dogs making awful lament in front of someone's house or in the compound)

vii. *Àchàrà (Ata) itō 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 ibàtà n'ụlò mmadù n'òbòdo na-asọ Ekē.* ( Python entering someone's house in places where it is not a totem).

ix. *Mmadù ìnāta ewu ahùrù n'ọkụ màòbù ewu a bòrò abò na nrọ.* (Amiyi, Onicha Uboma)

(Someone receiving roasted goat or dissected goat in the dream).

x. *Mmadù ìnāta ji a wàrà àwa na nrọ* (Amiyi, Onicha Uboma—Nke à sítèrè nà nkwenye ha nà ji bù mmadù). (Someone receiving sliced yam in the dream---This stems from the people's belief that yam is human). Mr



Chigozie Anokwuru<sup>2</sup> from Ihite Uboma Imo State gave me this and some other ominous signs peculiar to his area.

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

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

xiii. *. Añụ ìkwū n'ulō mmadù.* (The swarming of bees in someone's house)

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

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

### **Ominous Signs and Events that Communicate 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) ìkpō mmadù ih n'ebe ọ gàrà pùtàrà ihu ojōō* (Nkanu). Encountering a pygmy first in a place of sojourn portends ill-luck )

ii. *Mgbe ùfọdu ìkpō ukwụ aka èkpè n'ihe pùtàrà ihu ojōō.*(At times dashing of the left foot on an obstacle portends ill-luck).

iii. *Àlughùlụ udidē iwūchi mmadù anya n'ùtùtù nà-ègosi ihu ojōō* (Cobweb blocking someone's face in the morning portends ill-luck)

iv. *Èbèlè (màòbù ùdù) mmanya iwā mgbè a nà-àga ìlū nwaànyì pùtàrà nà alumdi nà nwunye ahù agāghì àga nkè oma.* (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 èkpè pùtàrà nà ihu ojōō gà-àkpọ onye ahù.* (The cuckoo cooing from someone's leftward direction portends ill-luck for that person).

vi. *Ojì enwēghi ibe, màòbù nke gbārā ibe ābūō (tùmàdì nkè a gòrò mà waa màkà emume) pùtàrà nà ihe e jì màkà ya waa ojì ahù agāghì 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) ìkpō mmadù ọtutu ogè pùàrà nà ihe ojoō 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 ìwūfūnàhù mmadù n'àlà nà-ègosi nà ihe ojoō 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 idābàtà n'ugbo miri (ugbo 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'ugbo* (May Mkpuru jump into your boat) is serious curse on the person.

x. *Mmadù ihū nte n'èhìhiè nà-ègosi nà ihu ojoō gà-àkpọ onye ahù* (Mbano, Imo state)

(Someone seeing the cricket in the afternoon, portends bad

### **Ominous Signs and Events that communicate positive messages to an individual 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 ufodu, ìkpō ukwu aka nrī n'ìhe-pùtàrà ihu oma.* ( At times dashing of the right foot on an obstacle means good luck)

ii. *Ùdarà idà n'ihu mmadù-pùtàrà ihu oma gà-àkpọ yā.* (Udara fruit falling in presence of someone means goodluck for the person).

iii. *Ugwùmàgàlà ìgāfè n'uzò mmadù sì na-àga pùtàrà nà mmirī gà-ezò* (Chameleon crossing somebody's pathway signifys that rain will fall).

iv . *Nwànyì ìtùtù ejù na nrọ pùtàrà nà O gà-àdì imē*(Oji River, Enugu State)..( A woman picking up snails in the dream means that she will expect pregnancy)

v. *Mmadù izòrò nsị na nrọ pùtàrà ihu oma.* (Someone stepping on feaces in the dream means goodluck).

vi. *Nnùnù ìnyū mmadù nsị n'isi pùtàrà ihu oma* (Oji River, Enugu State)(Bird defecating on someone's head means goodluck).

vii. *Mmadù ìwā oji gbārā ibe ìse màòbù àsaà, pùtàrà ihu oma.* (Someone breaking a kolanut with five or seven lobes means goodluck).



viii. *Mmadù ihū Ûgò pùtàrà ihu oma.* (Someone seeing the Eagle portends goodluck).

ix. *Añu ifē gbùrùgburù n'isi mmadù pùtàrà nà o nwèrè onye ga-ewè tara onye ahụ mmanya* (Nkanu). (Bee hovering around someone's head means that somebody will bring wine for him/her).

x *Onye arā ìkpō mmadù ihu n'ùtùtù nà-èbute ihu oma.* (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).

## 7. Summary and Conclusion

This study has attempted to show that in the Igbo culture (as in some other known cultures, such as the Yoruba) individual humans can use instruments, as symbols to communicate with individual spirits, also individual spirits do communicate with individual 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 those messages. We identified the messages usually conveyed by individual humans to individual spirits symbolically to include: a plea to avert impending calamity, a request for a favour, gratitude for a favour, a request for non-return to the family on reincarnation, a request for revenge on murderer, an honour and plea to a late matured/ full-fledged man in his paternal home, an honour and send forth to a late matured man at his maternal home, honour and send forth to a late married woman at her maiden home, appeasing a late 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 individual spirits to individual humans symbolically, come as ominous signs and events and they communicate death, ill luck/misfortune and positive issues. This study concludes that the inter-human and spirit symbolic communication constitutes a medium in which the Igbo frame their worldview. All of the items that are involved in the inter-human and spirit symbolic communication have a high significance in the Igbo culture, and are embodiments of spirits. They all are agents through which individual humans and individual 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 inter-human and symbolic communication

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