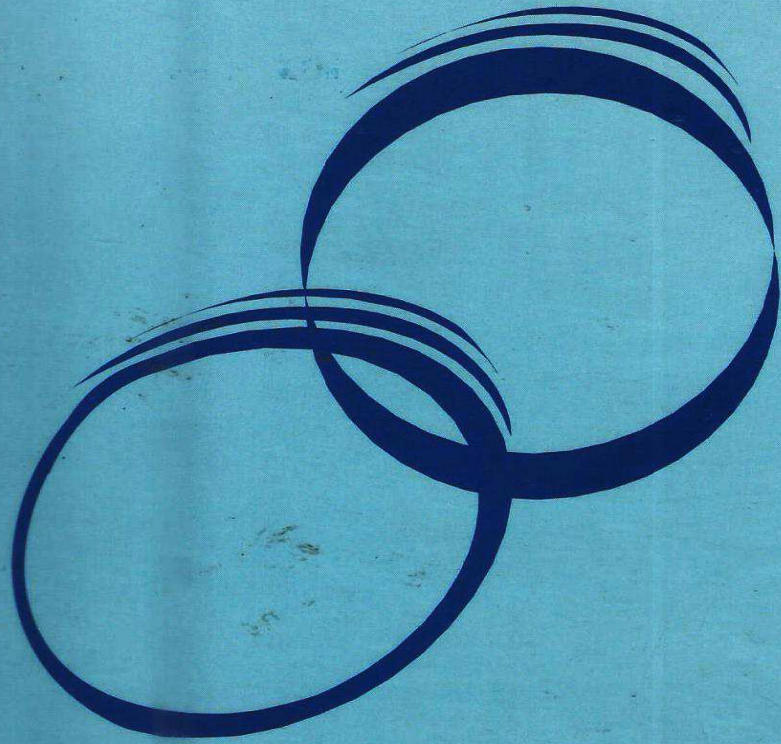


# Fundamentals of Human Communication



Edited by  
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## Basic African Communication Systems

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*“Ignore History and it Revolts”— Ekid Proverb*

### Objectives

At the end of this chapter, the reader should be able to:

- identify the key forms of early human communication;
- define the communication process;
- highlight the origins of communication in antiquity; and
- state the assumptions made about human communication.

### Visions of Communication

Several views have been expressed by communication scholars, communicologists and lay people alike on what constitutes communication and sometimes what it is not. Perhaps there are too many of such opinions to be recapped here, but let it suffice for us to just take a sprinkling of them here:

- The art of Mr. A talking to Mr. B.
- The exchange and sharing of meaning.
- The reduction of uncertainty.
- The act in which Mr. A affects the behaviour of Mr. B who in turn affects the behaviour of Mr. A.
- The human information processing activity which is linked with the mental processes which underlie language acquisition and use.

The above viewpoints have embedded in them explicit and implicit references to *behaviour* — the mode of action taken in response to a message or signal; *process* — the course of action which leads to the behaviour; and *purpose* — the aims or intentions of the communicator and the *communicatee*. This is why it is understandable when we

say that one cannot communicate about nothing even if he/she were mentally defective. Therefore, communication is a form of expression of human behaviour. It is processual in nature and has clearly defined purpose or purposes.

I presume that at this point we have accepted the view that communication is a behaviour-based activity. It is a behaviour which is exhibited usually more meaningfully by humans if we compare our understanding of human language with that of non-humans. It is an art and act which can lead to behaviour modification among participants. It is a behaviour which, if it turns out to be unfavourable, can be used against us in future communication contexts in which the earlier communicators are also participants.

This vision also explains why communication is said to be a process. When it takes place it is stored in our long term memory bank and remains there until when an occasion in the future necessitates its recall or retrieval. It is often said that the process has no clearly defined beginning and end. In human terms, it is often conceived as manifested when two or more humans are engaged in vocal and oral encounters.

Such a conceptualisation ignores the thought processes which occur in individual participants before the actual oral expression in a face-to-face communication. Its processual nature is also seen in the stages which communication goes through before it becomes reality or a living experience or behaviour. For example, the encoding process must take place before a message is sent through a channel to the receiver who also has the task of decoding it. We assume at this point that we also agree that communication is a purposeful behaviour. As we had said earlier, the communicator must have an intent as he cannot communicate about nothing in the *art-for-arts'sake* tradition. Even if his/her intent is to make noise, it is still a purposeful behaviour. We believe the purposes of communication are encapsulated in media functions which are usually, in the main, said to be to educate, inform and entertain although these have been expanded to include several other ancillary functions.

These brief vistas of communication represent a verbal snapshot of the numerous visions which continue to unfold in our daily encounters, musings and mystical revelations of what many see as

God's gracious gift to man. You may not be a servant of the Word but you must recognise the diversities of our visions in the exercise we are engaging in.

### At the Very Beginning

Perhaps communication in humans started in that instance when man was created by God in almost the same manner as intoned by the gosseller in St. John's gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself.

...And the Word became flesh...

John 1:1, 14 (*The Amplified Bible, 1987*)

Although in another twist in human history, the beginning of diverse languages of human communication is placed at a time when men decided among themselves:

Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth.

(Genesis 11: 4) *The African Bible, 1999.*

But this was not to be as 'the Lord scattered them from there' 'all over the earth' because the 'Lord confused the speech of all the world'. (Genesis 11: 8 - 9).

The search for the origin of communication has been a life long quest, for apart from the Judaeo-Christian tradition as enumerated above, other cultures have their traditions and history of how language and communication began.

The Eki of South-East Nigeria speak of a common heritage with the Anang and Ibibio but differences arose from dispersal. The Jewish civil and canon law code (Talmud) offers its own divine origin theory when it states, 'God created the world by a Word, instantaneously, without toil and pain.' There are indeed those who believe and think the contrary as reflected in the writings of some evolutionary theorists and anthropologists. In spite of these vast

differences in perspectives and epistemological explanations for the origins of a language, large majority of scholars however believe that language is God's gift to mankind.

In the history of the development of human societies, acquired or adopted languages have tended to have a position of dominance over indigenous languages. This is most prominent in cultures where religion has been the vehicle for cross-cultural communication. Such new religions usually have the languages of their scriptures imposed on other cultures and the new converts are made to believe that God indeed speaks and understands such scriptural languages.

Part of the reason for the development of Efik language in South-eastern Nigeria was because the translation of the Bible from English to this minority language gave Efik a pre-eminent position which assisted in its socio-cultural and political ascendancy in the region. Until recently, it was generally believed that for a faithful to communicate with the Almighty and be heard and understood he needed to do so in Efik. It was therefore not uncommon to find an Ibibio speaker who could not express himself or herself in intelligible Efik rattling away during prayer in Efik or reading the Bible or singing beautifully in the Efik language.

The same could be said of Arabic for the Koran, Vedic Sanskrit for the Hindu, Latin for the Roman Catholic mass and Hebrew in Orthodox Jewish worship.

This religion-language symbiosis created a certain superiority complex among the scriptural languages. Thus in the King James Version of the English Bible, a sense of language superiority developed leading to such incongruous averments as that made by Clarence Day in his book *Life With Father* when he boastfully declared:

Imagine the Lord talking French! Aside from a few odd words in Hebrew, I took it completely for granted that God had even spoken anything but the most dignified English.

This superior language theory led the 17th century Swedish scholar, Andreas Kemke, to assert that God spoke Swedish, Adam Danish and the serpent French; this in spite of the fact that the French Language had by that time acquired a certain image of being the preferred tongue of the educated after Latin.

But we are not concerned here with language origins and arguments over the superiority of one language over another. It is pretty clear that for a long time to come we shall continue to carry out disputations over the divine origin, or invention or evolutionary theories of language origin. Like all issues which men have agreed to disagree on, language origin theories will continue to engage our attention. On the issue of language superiority usually linked to racial superiority, this will continue to be at the focus of attention of racial supremacists.

Perhaps, the development of future languages might give us a clue as to origins and global dominance of one over others which accounts for why some speakers of the one have an air of superiority over others. For even today, there are linguistic purists who believe that the United States and Great Britain are two close countries divided by a common language. This situation arises because the American Language or English is said to be somewhat different from the English Language spoken in Britain.

What our interest really is in this chapter is to point to the religious, scientific and nationalistic opinions that speak of diverse origins for man's vehicle for communication. From all that we have said so far one thing is clear: we are yet to get to the end of the road in our sometimes self-opinionated postulations and speculations. There is as yet no definitive documentary evidence tracing language origin to any one civilisation or culture. At best, accounts from the Bible and other religious books to scientific (evolutionary) theories as well as historical and anthropological studies point to the fact that man is a communication animal (*homo communicatus*).

### Basic Systems of Communication

In our world, we have both human and animal systems, the solar system, ecosystem, political system, economic system, communication system and numerous other systems.

The human communication system is that in which the interdependent participants are engaged in information dissemination, reception and processing and meaning exchange in order to be able to transact with others and adapt to their environment. Through

communication these active participants create, acquire, transform, transact, re-order and make use of information in ways that enable them to achieve their goals.

The human communication system which is our major concern serves a number of basic functions from the biological to the intellectual. These functions range from the physiological, safety, belongingness to esteem needs satiation. And these can be broken down to courtship and mating, reproduction, sibship relations, socialisation, movement, information, self-defence, the establishment and maintenance of territories, acquisition of knowledge, self-actualisation, promotion, publicity and advertising, domination of others, development, liberation and education.

These functions are carried out through the use of sight (visual communication), touch (tactile communication), smell (olfactory communication), taste (gustatory communication), hearing (auditory/vocal communication) and motion (kinesics).

The human communication system can thus be seen as involving the process by which they adapt to, organise with, link themselves to, exchange and share meaning with, interact and transact with or strive to establish a commonness with their world and with one another under various social, political and economic structures and conditions. This is achieved through the employment of the expressive and receptive skills of communication which become the guiding principles of human behaviour. Thus communication can be said to be a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behaviour.

In spite of its diversities, in this section, we shall limit our discussion to the basic forms of speech, sign, signal, symbol, writing/ scribbling, and pictograms.

### **Speech**

Speech is generally regarded as the primary human communication skill and is said, by many sources, to mark the beginning of human communication. This assumption is derived from the 'cries of nature' theory of the origin of human language which indeed is reflected in the first cry of the newly born child.

Speech primarily distinguishes human beings from animals. It is conducted through a language system quite unique to man. It can be carried out by man alone, through intrapersonal communication or soliloquy. In speech, we express relationships, our culture, mood, attitude, emotions and knowledge of the world. This may be in the form of interpersonal, group or mass communication.

The beginning of speech lies in the psycholinguistic activities of thinking, knowing and using language to express our thought and knowledge. Speech is the primary communication or language activity which binds mankind in one cultural bond. Man has always depended on it in his cultural rituals – initiation, establishment and promotion of relationships and interpersonal communications. In conflict situations, speech has been used in promoting effective management of such situations as well as in reducing communication relationships. The failure of speech communication always leads to a state of tension and conflict as was the case in the 2003 Security Council and United States' disagreement over the acceptable approach to weapons inspection crisis in Iraq. This failure led the United States and Britain to arrogantly embark on a unilateral violation of the territorial integrity of Iraq and subsequently overthrowing the Saddam Hussein Government in the most sophisticated and destructive warfare of the 21st century.

The absence of speech (silence) may be an indication of a denial of relationship. Even so, such a denial conveys its own messages which can form the basis for a new communication relationship. Speech is employed in a variety of disparate roles, for as Fromkin and Rodman (1978:185) have observed 'You can make promises, lay bets, issue warnings, christen boats, place names in nomination, offer congratulations, swear, give testimony' as manifestations of speech. Rosenfield, Hayes and Frenz (1976) classify these various speech forms into two broad areas namely, the rhetoric of the forum and the rhetoric of the soul where speech becomes a mere rhetorical game.

Rhetoric of the forum refers to messages employed in the conduct of public affairs as in public communication /speech. The rhetoric of the soul is the employment of messages in the conduct of the various healing arts, for example in spiritual communication (exorcism, libation, incantation, prayer etc) and televangelism.

## Sign

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure regarded language as a 'deposit of signs'. And sign is used in communication to represent a transmission, construct, or phenomenon which possesses an 'acoustic image' and also a concept through which one organisation or individual affects the behaviour or state of another.

Semiotics, a branch of communication, is concerned with the study of signs, codes and culture. But a sign is one concept sometimes confused with *signal* and *symbol*. Ashley Montagu, an anthropologist has offered a useful definition of sign. He says that a sign is a 'concrete denoter' possessing an inherent specific meaning, roughly analogous to the sentence: "This is it; do something about it".

Tim O'Sullivan *et al* (1983) give the defining properties of a sign as follows:

It must have a physical form, it must refer to something (that is, have a referent) other than itself, and it must be used and recognised by people as a sign.

The ways in which signs are organised into codes or languages form the basis for the study of communication. A sign necessarily consists of a signifier and a signified. It is a mark with a meaning and an object, or symbol used to represent something as we have in sign languages.

In many societies, various signs are used to communicate specific meanings or messages. As we have already noted, signs are like *denotative* meanings of words while symbols are *connotative* meanings of the same words. Sign language is a common feature of all cultures and has developed out of a sign. It is a mode of human communication developed principally for deaf and dumb as well. Human beings sometimes communicate with pet animals through the use of sign language.

Some signs are natural while others are man made. Some previous culture-specific signs have become universal because of the extension of cultural influence through the mass media, religion, warfare, international trade and travel.

In Christendom, the cross (+) is a sign that represents Christianity or the Christian church; on a hospital vehicle it would signify an ambulance. The swastika (卐) represents Hitler's Nazism while the crescent (☾) represents Islam.

*The African Bible* in its glossary identifies sign as 'a distinguishing mark, token, banner, omen, warning, ensign, proof' and also 'that which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and is known'. In the Bible, there are many instances when both the faithful and non-believers demanded for signs as proof of divinity of Christ as when the Scribes and Pharisees asked to see a sign from Jesus Christ (Matt. 12:38.). Still in the Acts of the Apostles 4:8 – 12, there is an affinity shown between the sign (the crippled man restored to health i.e., saved) and what is signified (all men who are saved in the name of Jesus). A sign is therefore a very important language and has great spiritual significance in the scriptures.

A trained car driver should understand the international driving *codes* which are represented on the highways by road signs. These signs usually mean the same thing in all countries except for a few local variants which nonetheless have universal application within national boundaries.

One important area where signs are used is in the mathematical sciences, mathematics, physics, chemistry etc. Mathematics uses signs and known rules which are restricted within its language system. Mathematics uses international codes which exhibit cross-cultural values and is easily understood by its closed circle of users for their restricted purposes.



## Signal

A signal has been defined as the 'physical embodiment of a message' (Jacobson) which could be in the form of an utterance, a transmission, and an exhibition of sign events. This definition is shared by Watson and Hill (2000) who see it as the 'physical manifestation of a message which allows it to be conveyed'.

Signal, along with signs and symbols, is a concept that has attracted considerable scholarly attention from linguists and communicologists. Signals have a great potential in communicating messages in all cultures. Unlike signs they may not necessarily communicate the same meanings to every culture.

As it is well known, most animals possess some kind of 'signalling' communication. My hybrid Alsatian is able to know when I drive back home and informs other members of the household through some signalling. This is done so that our gate can be opened for me. It does this whenever anyone else drives the car. Among spiders and honeybees, there is a complex system of signal communication too.

It is important to note that signals are usually classified as non-verbal significations which are frequently employed in group communication as well as in mass communication. In traditional communication settings, the gongman or traditional newsman employs the drum signal first as an attention – inviting device and second as a message carrier. The drum signal invites the attention of the community residents to his message. It signifies the call to attention, the coming together of all minds and hearts for the purpose of sharing and sometimes exchanging meaning.

The booming of cannon or gun shots in certain communities may signify the passing away of an important person in such communities, the celebration of a birth or marriage, or the arrival of an important visitor. The signal provided by the booming sounds merely directs the attention of hearers to the event which they have to find out, or which they might be informed about through signs or messages using other traditional media or channels.

Using a flag or firing a gun at the beginning of a race, screaming while in danger, crying when in pain, hooting a horn on a crowded street or switching on your car trafficator to indicate the direction of your movement or your next action on a stretch of road, all these are universally understood signals which have become standard. But many signals are best understood within the context of their application (the signalling). Some can be confusing. For example, a motorist who flashes his light repeatedly at a road junction against an on-coming vehicle may be warning it to stop if the former presumed

he had a right of way; or he may be simply asking it to move on quickly or it may sometimes be a way of saying: 'Hi, so you are on the road too'. The safest clue to this kind of paradox is to wait awhile or try to reinforce your interpretation with some hand signals or body language.

However, signals are employed in interpersonal, group or mass communication with the medium acting as channels for their transmission.

### **Symbols (Greek symbolon, symbollein)**

A symbol represents something other than itself. It could be an object, person or event whose meaning or code of abstraction is generally shared among people in a community. It is not a natural phenomenon but an arbitrary, social abstraction which may be verbal or non-verbal that is made to represent something other than the thing itself. It is a device by which an abstraction can be made about a person or thing. As a metaphor or 'language', it is used to express an idea that may not be easy to articulate in ordinary speech. It represents a consensus of meaning which is determined by the culture using it.

A symbol is said to have no semblance with the thing it represents. For example, a national flag represents feelings of patriotism, national unity and pride in one's own country. There is almost an idolatrous relationship between Americans and their national flag.

Furthermore, ♂ represents the male sex and ♀ represents the female, but Freudian view sees some semblance between a symbol and what it stands for even though sometimes the semblance, or the natural link may be indirect. For example, a peeled banana is a phallic symbol of the penis.

Human qualities are sometimes symbolised in animals where a lamb, depending on the context, may be a symbol of Jesus Christ (the lamb of God) who also symbolises meekness.

Colours symbolise different things even though some colours have universal application. For example, among the peoples of south eastern Nigeria, red is a symbol of danger. Turner (1967:59 –62)

writing about western culture speaks of white symbolising milk, purity, health, goodluck, while black represents faeces and other grim things. This archetypal racist notion is derived from the Middle Ages where black was said to be suggestive of material darkness and was symbolic of the spiritual darkness of the soul.

Among the people of Old Calabar, in particular, red expresses danger and spirituality. It is a favourite colour of the secret societies namely, *ekpe* and *idiong*. It also symbolises fire and blood.

White also expresses spirituality and purity. At times it is used as a symbol of mourning in memorial rites pertaining to dead elderly persons or in similar rites within Christian religious contexts. It is a colour used in shrines and other religious contexts and institutions.

Black is a favourite colour of the *Ekpo* society as well as *Ekong* and other masquerade groups used ostensibly to depict the fact that these are spirits or ghosts. It is also used to represent the dead as well as mourning.

Brown is the colour of the earth. Green is the colour of nature and represents the umbilical link with other things of nature.

Yellow is a dreadful colour and is associated with the deadly disease, yellow fever.

With symbolism we enter a terrain which has to be ascertained through acculturation. Different cultures employ different forms of symbolisation. Raymond Firth (1973) in his highly authoritative book on symbols describes private and public symbols of different human communities from food symbolism to the symbolism of flags. As an anthropologist, Firth was more interested in the physical observation of man, his cultural development and social conditions rather than be overtly concerned with intrinsic and extrinsic communicative elements of human symbolisms. As Firth (1973:15) has put it:

The essence of symbolism lies in the recognition of one thing as standing for (representing) another, the relation between them normally being that of concrete to abstract, particular to general. The relation is such that the symbol by itself appears capable of generating and receiving effects otherwise reserved for the object to which it refers – and such effects are often of high emotional charge.

These effects perhaps occur in the same way many a Catholic faithful is affected by the statues of Jesus Christ or the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Symbolism pervades much of man's activities from the words he uses to the institutions he creates. Almost all of his acts represent in one symbolic form or another meanings that may not always be apparent. But one must be wary of the excessive ascription of symbolism to every act because in some instances there may be no symbolism in the 'symbol'.

There are numerous forms of symbolism used in various parts of the world, some of which are culture-specific while others have universal applicability. Some of the more notable ones are:

- **Kiss:** It is used as an expression of love, fondness among friends, couples. It could also be used to express hatred or betrayal as in Judas' kiss.
- **Hug(embrace):** This is used to express love, a welcome to a friend or a loved one who has just returned from a journey, work or from a long period of absence.
- **Handshake:** It may take the form of a big slap of the palm or a quiet slip-in as used by friends or acquaintances. Most often exercised once but when repeated it often reflects a state of excitement except in the ritualistic backhand slap by Igbo royalty. It may even take the form of having a visitor 'shake' the walking stick of a traditional overlord.
- **Hairdo:** It could reflect love, rebellion, social class, occupation, happiness, culture, age and fashion.
- **The Flag:** It declares that the state, organisation or institution has a certain level of autonomy and reflects its independence and identity from similar or other organisations.
- **Genuflection/Prostration:** It shows respect for elders, kings or the supernatural as it is the case in churches and mosques. Japanese and Chinese use the kowtowing in the same way.
- **The Clenched Fist:** This is a symbol of solidarity with members of a group and a defiance of another. It is also an acknowledgement of the symbolist's inferior position to the

person being so revered. For example, the raising of the right arm with a clenched fist usually accompanied by the exclamation *rankadede* by the Hausa-speaking person is a kind of black power salute and statement. Right On. Go on with your beautiful self or with what you are doing.

- **Pat on the Shoulder:** This is a sign of encouragement and appreciation usually from an elder to a minor or junior person, or members of peer groups. It is similar to the pat on the back.
- **Running Finger through the Hair:** It shows fondness, usually displayed by an elder towards a younger one, or by loved ones.
- **Nod:** This is an expression of agreement or a greeting which shows an acknowledgement of a person's presence or arrival at an event. It sometimes may represent a tongue-in-cheek declaration: 'I agree with you; but won't you stop boring me?' In this symbolism, there are also compulsive noddors who do not necessarily agree with speakers.
- **Headshake:** It is usually an expression of disagreement or rejection of a proposition in interpersonal communication.
- **Wink:** It is used at moments aural forms of communication could disrupt proceedings in formal contexts, or in conspiratorial circumstances where it may express agreement or disagreement depending on the communication context.
- **Frown:** It may symbolise displeasure or anger in interpersonal relations. It is a body language with sometimes dubious meanings when communicators try to mislead those they are in communication with as in masking.
- **Smile:** It expresses pleasure, acceptance and happiness. Like the frown, it can also be faked in order to mislead.
- **Bowing:** This act of bending the neck or sometimes the whole body is a symbol of respect especially in acknowledgement of a compliment. At times it is a momentary act and at others the head could be lowered for a longer period when the person receiving the verbal message is ashamed when rebuked. In western culture this is a symbol of defiance when it involves

the avoidance of eye contact and may create problems in cross cultural communication contexts if the correct message is not decoded.

- **Raising the Eyebrow:** This is a greeting symbolism from friends and other acquaintances. It may also indicate a surprise if accompanied by a slight tilting of the head and dilation or rolling of the eyes.

These and many more are forms of symbolism used in human communication with accompanying gestures and body language calculated to have significance in chronemics (our use of time), proxemics (our use of space), haptics (our use of touch) and kinesics (our use of movement).

In summary, a symbol, as the *African Bible* (1999:2170) observes can represent the following:

- an authoritative summary of faith or doctrine, creed;
- something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance, especially a visible sign of something invisible e.g. the lion is a symbol of courage;
- an arbitrary or conventional sign used in writing or printing relating to a particular field to represent operations, quantities, elements, relations, or qualities; and
- an object or act representing something in the unconscious mind that has been repressed.

### Scribbling/Writing

'Scribbling' gave birth to writing as it was usually ascribed to bad writing of the scribes or secretaries and hence 'scribbling'. Writing, which transcends time and space, has been described as the wheel of our thoughts. Perhaps the importance of writing is captured in the Chinese proverb: 'The palest ink is better than the sharpest memory'. It is said to have been invented between 8000 and 3000 BC.



The Roman poet (probably) Horace gave the reason for this piece of Chinese wisdom when he wrote: 'Once a word has been allowed to escape, it cannot be recalled.'

Writing permits society to permanently record its culture—history, poetry, science and technology. Writing is therefore man's deliberate intellectual and conscious effort at expressive communication. Along with speech, it forms the expressive communication skills.

It may have begun from the ancient cave drawings and scribbles, and then gradually developed into the more deliberate and intellectual art and science that it is today. In Africa, there were various forms of 'writing' which developed out of the cave and other drawings as well as from the secret societies and cults.

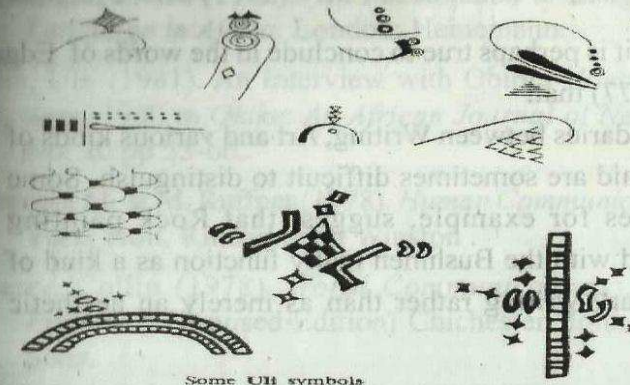
These included the pseudo-writing of the *Ekpe* society commonly used among the peoples of the border lands of Nigeria and the Camerouns known in Nigeria as *nsibidi* writing and in the Camerouns as *Mom* ('Bamoun'). The *Bamoun* was developed by their king, the Fon of Fouraban, Njoya, the Great (1880 – 1933). These forms of writing also developed among the Vai, Basa, Prende and Kpele of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The Vai alphabet, a syllabic alphabet system was invented around 1830 by one Momodu Duwalu Bukele (Alexandre, 1972:110). \*The Yoruba, Ewe and Fon in Nigeria and Togo are also reported to have a form of proto-writing, geomantic signs which represent forms of divination. But most importantly there were the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt and Mexico. These had some similarities with the pictographic 'writings' (ideograms) of China, Japan, India and Korea.

These early forms later developed into the alphabet systems which many world languages except Japanese, Chinese, Hindi, Korean have today. Writing is man's way of linking the past with the present and creating the future, and it enforces the concept of historic time upon humanity. It is man's reliable way of keeping records, establishing intellectual questionings, and raising controversies and sometimes resolving them, and communicating with other human beings in massive numbers.

\* Fromkin and Rodman (1978) dispute this possibility when they argue that it is unlikely that a particularly gifted ancestor awoke one morning and decided that on a specific day he would invent a writing system.

In Nigeria, the early symbolographic representations or pseudo-writings still exist in the mural writings and paintings of the Igbo (*Uli* writing), and the Yoruba, as well as the fabric writings and designs of traditional artistes with high calligraphic skills.



Thus today, writing may be done on paper, wood, plastic, clay and stone and its forms include alphabets, ideograms, pictures, signs or symbols.

Writing imposes on mankind the responsibility of literacy. Through books, newspapers, magazines, billboards, (written media or visual media) mankind has been able to maintain a sense of historic time.

The importance of writing is seen in the fact that in spite of the availability of recording facilities, it is highly improbable that it can be replaced by them. As Cherry (1978) has argued in his book, no new media can replace an older one even though they can replace some of the functions of the older media.

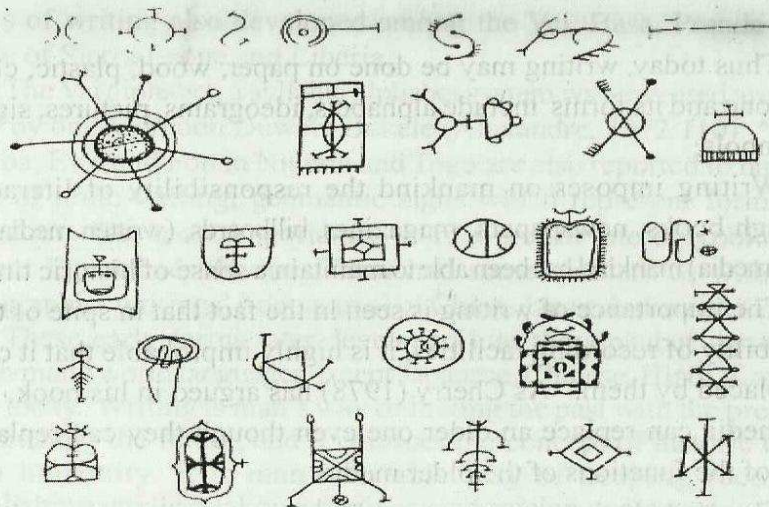
The *Nsibidi* signs (writing) used by secret societies in various language groups in South-eastern Nigeria e.g. Igbo, Efik-Ibibio-Ekid, and Ekoi have been considered by some to be of a similar pictographic nature, but others have maintained it is true writing, based on either a logographic or syllabry system. They were first exposed to the Western

World by T. D. Maxwell in 1904. R. F. G. Adams (1947) maintains that:

The Arochukwu people... sent messages between villages by painting them on the bodies of the messengers themselves.

Taken in sum, it is perhaps true to conclude in the words of Edgar A. Gregersen (1977) that:

The boundaries between Writing, Art and various kinds of memory aid are sometimes difficult to distinguish. Some authorities for example, suggest that Rock painting associated with the Bushmen really function as a kind of rudimentary writing rather than as merely an aesthetic exercise.



### Some Nsibidi Writing

Adapted from *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing* No.20 Dec, 1981.

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