A Pragma-Semiotic Analysis of *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* (Knocking-on-the-Door) Traditional Marriage Ceremony of Awgbu in Igboland

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Abstract
Studies on the linguistic imports of the traditional ceremony *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* (Knocking-on-the-door) among the Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria are rare. This paper attempts a pragma-semiotic analysis of the ceremony among the Awgbu people of Orunba North Local Government Area of Anambra in Igboland. Data for the analysis was gathered through participant observation and informal questioning technique during one of such ceremony. Mey's pragmatic acts theory and Peirce symbolic sign in semiotic theory are employed for the analysis. The study reveals that *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* is performed in traditionally motivated contexts characterized by practs of questions, denials, reporting and responses that project issues of culture, humour, and pretence. These are indirect acts which exploit contextual features such as reference, voice, inference, shared situational and cultural knowledge, and relevance. The semiotic analysis reveals that the signage (i.e. kolanuts, palm wine, sheep and *agụụ* 'hunger') that feature in the ceremony are quite significant. Considering the real-life samples, the paper concludes that the significance of communication in the cultural context of the knocking-on-the-door ceremony based on its indirectness and symbolism is central to the overall understanding of this traditional practice among the Igbo.

Keywords: semiotics; pragmeme; culture; Igbo; marriage discourse.

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1. Introduction

In cultural discourse, marriage is seen as an institution which exists to fulfil certain needs of a given culture. In recent times, marriage is becoming more meaningful than it ever had evidently because it involves a long-term plan through which a family may gain power, prestige, wealth, and status in partnership between two persons based on love and commitment. Also, people appear to have more choices today than they ever had as contemporary marriages continue to show how pluralistic our societies have become; something which goes beyond gender, religion, and racial divides. This however has not been able to totally override African traditional marriage practices and attached ceremonies.

The focus of this paper is the first stage of traditional marriage rights in Igbo land. Traditional marriage in the Igbo context is the formal union of a man and a woman duly recognised by the community or groups to which they belong. The Igbo traditional marriage is fundamentally focused on family and kin-relationships. This ensures a communally driven marriage system that allows for deep and long-term celebration of marriage institution and attendant ceremonies. The ceremonies often help to establish strong sense of involvement, acceptance, connection, comfort, and protection between the families involved and their neighbours. This is because marriage is associated with life and society far beyond the individuals involved. The fact that traditional marriage ceremony varies from culture to culture and region to region suggests that it involves different patterns and practises. Going by the Igbo pattern, the first stage of the traditional marriage ceremony is the *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* (knocking-on-the-door) ceremony.

1.1. Igbo land and people

Given the fact that the Awgbu people of Igboland which traditionally reside in Orunba North (LGA) of Anambra State constitute the domain of this study, a brief discussion on them and Igboland in general is pertinent at this juncture. Igboland is the home of the Igbo people. The Igbo inhabit the whole of South-east and parts of South-south Nigeria. The main river in

the area, however, does not constitute a barrier to cultural unity but rather provides an easy means of communication in an area where many settlements claim different origins.

Igbo land and people are surrounded on all sides by other ethnic nationalities among which are the Bini, Warri, Ijaw, Ogoni, Igala, Tiv, Yako, and Ibibio. The Igbo homeland in South-east Nigeria consists of Abia, Anambra, Imo, Enugu and Ebonyi, and parts of Delta, Rivers and Edo States in the South south region. The Igbo in the afore-mentioned states speak different dialects of Igbo language, the vast majority of which are mutually intelligible. Linguistically, Igbo is classified as belonging to the West Benue-Congo family of African languages (Williamson 1968).

The Igbo have a very rich cultural heritage which reflects in their language use. They believe that it is the whole extended family that gives out a 'son' or a 'daughter' in marriage and not just the nuclear family. Thus, both extended families of the bride and groom become one after the marriage rites. In other words, they believe that both families should be fully involved and represented at every stage of the marriage ceremony. However, in *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* which is the introductory part of marriage, few members of the family, especially the men, are fully present.

1.2. Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ ceremony

This is the first ritual stage of the traditional marriage ceremony among the Awgbu people of Igboland. It begins after a man who is ripe and ready for marriage has seen a woman of his choice. This implies that marriage is usually initiated by 'serious-minded' adult male in Igboland. It is pertinent to know that parents are very elated when their children take decisions to marry. This makes them seriously involved both in the search of the would-be partners and the ceremonies involved. This aspect of the marriage rite is often done secretly in case of any eventuality that may work against the marriage. A few people from both families are usually present. The suitor may or may not be around depending on his schedule. A sample of the discourse involved in the knocking-on-the-door ceremony is

presented below. The sample translation is adapted from Okolo (2003:529).

Sample Scenario from *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ*
In this sample, BF = would-be bride's father; GF = would-be groom's father; and MG = marriage guide.

1. BF: (As he welcomes the visitors, talking as if he is unaware of the visit)
      Lekwa sọ ndị ọbịa!   Udoọdịkwa?
      'See many visitors!   Is all well?'
2. MG: Udo dị Ọ-ọ agụụ chụtaraanyi be gi.
      'There is peace. It is hunger that drove us to your place.'
   All: (Laughter)
3. BF: Ọbụrụ sọọsọ ya, aga-agwọtaụnụ. Ochedikwa.
      'If that is all, I can cure you. There are seats.'

As soon as the visitors are seated and pleasantries exchanged, the girl's father presents kola nuts and a keg of palm wine, and the visitors receive the presents with thanks. The ceremonial breaking of kola nuts is performed and the wine is served. Then, the girl's father asks again:

4. BF: Ụnụ sịkwanaudo dị?
      'Did you say there is peace?'
5. MG: Ọ-ọ (mentions suitor's father by name) sị m kpọtaya na begị.
      'It is....... that asked me to bring him to your place.'
6. GF: Udo dị Ọ-ọ nwa m nwoke, Obi, gwaraanyị nayahụrụ Nwaatụrụ dị ya mma na be gi. Maka yaka anyị jiri we bịa; ka anyị rịọ gị kaị kpụnye anyị ya.
      'There is peace. It is my son, Obi, who told us that he saw a sheep he likes in your house. That is why we have come; to plead with you to give it to us.'
7. BF: (feigning ignorance) Ọbụghị na be m. unụ legharịa anya ụnụ ahụ na anaghị m azụ atụrụ.

'Not in my house. If you look around you will see that
I don't rear sheep.'

8. GF: Nwa m ọ ga-asịrị m asị? Atụrụ anyị chọrọ bị abu Ada.
'Will my son lie to me? The sheep we've come to ask
for is Ada.'

9. BF: Oh-o-o, Ọ bụ atụrụ na-aza aha mmadụ? (Ọchi). Ọ bụrụ
Ada, obi na be m.
'Oh-o-o, Is it a sheep that bears a human name?'
(Laughter). 'If it is Ada, she lives in my house.'

10. GF: (presents kola nuts and a two-gallon keg of wine).
Anyị bịara ị ma ihe anyị ga-emeka Obi na Ada bụrụ di
na nwunye.
'We have come to know what we shall do so that Obi
and Ada will become husband and wife'.

11. BF: (Thanks the visitors for the items presented and they
replied)
Nke ahụ adịghị m n'aka. Ọ-ọ Ada ka a ga-akpọ ka o
kee okwu.
'That is not in my hands. It is Ada who will be called to
decide the matter'

(Source: Okolo 2003:529)

The scenario in the data is unpacked thus: In the scenario as
represented in the sample of interactive section between the two
families, the act of the ceremonial breaking of kola nuts is
accomplished, followed with incantation and prayer to the
ancestors for an achieved aim of the visit. At this stage of *Ịkụ
Aka n'ụzọ* ceremony, a list of items is given to the suitor and his
family to prepare for the next stage of the traditional marriage
ceremony known in Igboland as *Igba Nkwu* 'carrying of wine'
ceremony and it is at this point made public that the lady in
question is now *labelled* that is, someone has proposed to her.

In the ceremony, it is clear that the choice of interaction
depends on the special speakers, which include the GF, BF, and
MG as evident in the discourse. The discourse of this ceremony
is not only characterized by indirectness and symbolism but
equally context dependent.

1.3. Language, culture and context

Language and culture have symbolic relationships which are embedded in the traditional marriage. Culture determines the code, symbols, signs, context and meaning of language, while language is the 'life wire and social lubricant' of any society (Ademola and Okunola 2013). In this view, language and culture are inseparably interwoven. Since the society is made up language and culture, people cannot study the language of any society without touching on the culture of that society. This relationship is exhibited in terms of language being an integral part of culture, and seen as its vehicle. According to Bello (2008:17), the relationship between language and culture is such that one can describe the ways of life of a people simply by studying the language of the group in question, of which marriage discourses are integral. Leigh and Stanbridge (1991: 2) argues that culture is

> a mixture which incorporates behaviour (thoughts, actions and language), knowledge, belief, art morals, law, custom, and other qualities acquired by man as a social being.

Hoult (1969) cited in Odebunmi (2008) identified four key components of culture in sociological literature. These are values, norms, institutions, and artefacts. Values, which control other components of culture, deal with what a society attaches importance to; norms relate to patterns of behaviour designed for individual members of a society in particular situations; institutions relate to the divisions of a society where values and norms are applied; and artefacts are objects that are produced from the values and norms of a culture. All these components are largely relativistic in nature, as they illuminate a society's systems, beliefs, and worldviews (Odebunmi 2008:74)

The importance of context cannot be overlooked in this study. This is because marriage is cultural and embedded in language, which has its own socio-cultural context, also a part of the society. However, scholars from various fields have paid much attention to the issue of context over the years (see

Levinson 1983, Thomas 1995, Yule 1996, Palmer 1996, Mey 2001, 2009, etc.). Context refers to previous and subsequent linguistic material in a text, or extra-linguistic terms of continually changing surroundings in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact intelligibly (Mey 2001: 39). Context is a term considered as the totality of the environment in which a word is used (Mey 2001). That is, it is the makeup of the situations that give life to any text. Thus, context is an abstract category employed by language scholars to provide a link between linguistic items and the social and situational factors of communication (Adegbite 2000), providing the background from which the meaning of a word springs (Odebunmi 2006). Context in actual sense helps in the interpretation of meaning of words, hence Odebunmi's (2006) opines that context is a central feature of meaning. In this view, it is context that enables us understand various acts in marriage. The concept of the context of situation is largely associated with two scholars; Malinowski (1923) and Firth (1972), who were interested in stating meanings in terms of the context in which language is used.

Adegbite (2000) identifies two types of context namely, verbal context and the situational context. Verbal context is applied in the interpretation of linguistic items in terms of their linkage and relationship with one another. Adegbite argues that this reduces instances of syntactic or lexical ambiguity that may arise if words are considered in isolation. Odebunmi's (2006: 240) views of context manifests at two levels: language and the situation levels. At the language level, meaning is considered as having a possibility potential if the same language of communication is at the disposal of interactants. At the situation level, assumptions are held on the basis of the shared code (linguistic or non-linguistic) and experience of the communicators. Odebunmi (2006) concludes that three important features of context exist. These are shared knowledge of subject or topic shared knowledge of word choices, referents, and references and shared socio-cultural experiences. In the context of *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* ceremony, there is the use of culturally approved pattern of talking which is historical. For instance, the

old men are believed to be in charge of the negotiation on behalf of the people. In other words, women are not even expected to be in the gathering or talk except on request. The would-be groom who maybe or not be there is not expected to utter any word, which may be seen as an act of disrespect, if he does. Conclusively, this traditional setting is characterized by the turn-taking rules of talking which are strictly adhered to by all present; and all present are usually in a humorous and happy mood especially when the purpose of visit is achieved

2. Theoretical Framework

Mey's pragmatic acts theory and Peirce's model of symbolic semiotic signs are used to analyse the data employed in this study. The theory of pragmatic acts is adopted because it is a function-based theory of meaning. The semiotic theory is adopted because it is a sign-based theory of suitable for the interpretation of contextual/situational signs. We shall begin with the description of the pragmatic acts theory. In the pragmatic acts theory, a speaker may co-opt others, set them up, influence them through conversations, and deny certain claims without betraying such acts through lexical choices (Mey, 2001:216). The issue here is that in the theory, there is no word or lexical item to point out a particular act other than in a context. Mey (2001:224) argues that a pragmatic act is instantiated through an "ipra" or "a pract", which realises "a pragmeme" as "every pract is at the same time an allopract that is a concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme". In other words, in the pragmatic acts theory a pract is determined by participants' knowledge of the interactional situation and the effect of the pract in a particular context. Thus, Odebunmi (2006) opines that "practing resolves the problem of telling illocutionary force from perlocutionary force" (cf. Gu 1993 and Kurzon 1998). The interactional situation in which the speaker and hearer realise their aim is the focus of the theory. Hence in Mey's (2001:751) words,

> The explanatory movement is from the outside in,
> rather than from the inside out: Instead of starting
> with what is said, and looking for what the words
> could mean, the situation in which the words fit is
> invoked to explain what can be (and is actually
> being) said.

Also important in the pragmatic acts theory is the term "implied identification". This is because the focus is not on the "said" but on the "unsaid"; thus the hearers or readers are either set-up, co-opted or denied to achieve the speakers' or writers' acts. In this instance, the act is not explicit and there is no speech act to show a pragmatic act. The only identification of the act is to look out for it.

The two categories that interact in the pragmatic act theory to realise a pragmeme are the textual part and the activity part. The activity part comprises various options such as speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational acts (dialogue), psychological acts (emotions), prosody (intonation, stress), physical acts, etc. These are available to speakers to carry out any function of choice. Therefore, the realisations of pragmatic functions in a given communicative event are based on the activity part and the textual part referring to the (INF); inference (REF); reference (REL); relevance (VCE); voice, (SSK); shared situation (or dialogue) knowledge, which depend on the context for the meaning to be realized by the discourse of interactants.

2.1. Semiotic Theory
Semiotics is defined as the study of signs. The most important feature in semiotic study is the sign. Although this paper adopts Peirce's model of semiotic signs, some scholars have also contributed to semiotic studies. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics, is the founder of this theory. In his writing collection *Course in General Linguistics,* he laid down the guiding principles of semiotics. Saussure's model of semiotics is a dualistic presentation of signs as consisting of signifier; that is the form which the sign takes, and the signified which is the concept the sign represents. According to Saussure

(1983:67), "the sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier and the signified". He argues that a sign must have both a signifier and the signified with a particular context. For him, "a sign is more than the sum of its parts … .its value is determined by the relationship between the sign and other signs within the system as a whole" (Saussure 1983:112-113). Other scholars who have contributed to the development of semiotics are Leeds-Hurwtz 1993; Barthes, 1997; Morris 1938; Wales 1990, etc.

According to Leeds-Hurwtz (1993:1), 'the study of communication is the way any sign functions in the mind of an interpreter to convey specific meaning in a given situation". This approach to semiotics of texts focuses on the communication phenomenon as a whole, which includes verbal (language in speech and writing) and non-verbal communication (anything that stands for something else). Barthes (1997) argues that virtually everything in the society is meaningful and can be a significant sign to a speech community, e.g. fashion, music, dress, art works, etc. In this case, semiotics' interests are in the message of photographs, advertising, television, etc. as employed in written works (literatures) and their meaning production. Wales defines semiotics as the analysis of signs and sign systems and their meaning specifically those involved with communication between humans in different societies and culture. She further defines the scope of semiotics as

> verbal language in its entire different media of
> speech and writing and also non-verbal commu-
> nication systems; such as gesture, movements,
> dress and the mass media (Wales 1990: 416).

At the heart of semiotics is *semiosis,* "the study of ordinary objects is as far as they participate in semiosis" (Morris 1938:20). He opines that semiosis is the "process by which something functions as signs in a social context and situation and sign action in relation to the creation and interpretation of meaning. Morris' (1938:6-7) view of semiotics encompasses traditional branches of linguistics which entails semantics (the

relationship between the signifier and what it stands for), syntax (the formal structural relationship between signs) and pragmatics (the relationship of sign to the interpreter). Pierce (1931) describes semiosis as the process of sign interpretation. He deals with the signs as symbols. The symbolic signs are the form of that sign that is essentially arbitrary such that the relationship between signifier and the signified that comprised the sign has to be learnt in relation to the context of its use. Thus, Pierce view of sign is situated within social context (social semiotics).

3. The pragma-semiotics of *Ikụ Aka n'uzo* ceremony
Ikụ Aka n'uzo ceremony is a tradition-motivated discourse in which the pragmatic aspect exhibits indirect act. The indirect act interacts with the contextual features via reference (REF), inference (INF), shared situational knowledge (SSK), relevance (REL), and voice (VCE) to establish the pragmatic practs of questioning, reporting/responding and denying in *Ikụ Aka n' uzo* (Knocking-on-the-door) ceremony. The social semiotic signage that features in this ceremony whether visible or invisible are, for instance, kola nuts, palm wine, and the use of the referent sheep, which are mentioned in the sample above.

3.1. Data analysis and representation: Pragmatic practs in *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* ceremony
The findings revealed that the practs of questioning, reporting/responding and denying characterized *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* (Knocking-on-the-door) ceremony. These practs are largely performed in the traditional situation as the discourse entails through contextual features of sck, ssk, ref, inf, rel, and vce. The practs are examined in the following subsections.

3.1.1. Questioning
Questioning found in the *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* ceremony in a traditional context deals with the issues of culture, humour, and pretence reached through socio-cultural knowledge (SCK), socio-situational knowledge (SSK), reference (REF), inference

(INF), voice (VCE), and relevance (REL). The examples provided below explain this pract:

Extract 1: Lekwa sọ ndị ọbịa!   Udoọdịkwa?
        'See many visitors!   Is all well?'
                                         (Line 1 of sample)

To ensure a relaxed and friendly mood, the setting of this cultural ceremony is usually surrounded by different types of negotiation interactions as well as humorous exchanges. Here, the GF and his family pay a visit to the BF's house. The BF's in a pretentious and humorous manner questioned his visitor in (Extract 1) asking 'if all is well?'. Applying the SCK and SSK of traditional and cultural meaning within this context, the practs of questioning capturing humour and pretence need not be a surprise to the application of VCE is very important here in the sense that both family exchange views through speaking, which is accomplished by voicing out. Although BF is aware of the visit, but his show of surprise is highly expected, if not it will look as if he is in a haste to give out his daughter which is culturally abnormal and may alter the indirect act in the ceremony. However, the pretentious act is also captured in (line 2 in the sample) where the GF in humorous act pointed out that it was 'agụụ' (hunger) that brought him to BF's house. A repetition of the pract of questioning also occurs in (line 4) of the sample:

Extract 2: BF: Ụnụ sịkwanaudo dị?
           'Did you say there is peace?'

Here, still with the application of the SCK to the traditional and cultural meaning of this context, BF emphasized on the pract of questioning his visitor in Extract 2. This act of repetition is normal to project the fact that in Igbo culture, marriage is a 'serious business'. This second indirect act introduces the real business of the day. Another pract of questioning in this ceremony is presented below in Extract 3:

Extract 3: GF: Nwa m ọ ga-asịrị m asị? Atụrụ anyị
choro bị a bu Ada.
'Will my son lie to me? The sheep
we've come to ask for is Ada.'
BF: Oh-o-o, Ọ bụ atụrụ na-aza aha mmadụ?
(Ọchi). Ọ bụrụ Ada, Obi na be m.'
(Oh-o-o, Is it a sheep that bears a human name?
(Ọchi) "Laughter."
'If it is Ada, she lives in my house.'
(Line 8 & 9 of the sample)

The denial of BF in Extract 3 emanates from a pretentious mood which portrays indirectness showing that he does not know what the visitor had come for, since they did not go straight to the point but rather indirectly said they saw a sheep in BF's house which is a reference to the girl. The GF has to question the BF that he knew his son will not lie to him, and then mentioned the name of the said 'sheep', Ada, the girl, the bride. The BF in return in an indirect act of questioning pract replied that if the fellow they seek is not a sheep but Ada 'she lives in my house'. This is a confirmation that probably the referent Ada is the host's unmarried daughter who lives in her father's house. This is an inference of acceptability and availability. Thus the negotiations then commenced. This pract of questioning in Extract 3 is realised through the application of the SSK, SCK and VCE to the ceremony, otherwise it would be difficult to link the symbol 'sheep' to the would-be bride for whom the visitors came.

3.1.2. Reporting/Responding
The pract of reporting is also found in this traditional context to portray culture through SCK, SSK REF, INF, VCE and REL in the *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* ceremony. This came to play when the MG intervened into the unbearable and excessive questioning by the BF. The MG as a messenger in the occasion responds in line 5 to the BF by announcing the reason for the visit; making reference to how the GF ask him (the MG) to bring him (the GF) to the would-be bride's house **… sị m kpọtaya na be gị** '...

asked me to bring him to your house'. However, before the response in line 5, the MG had already in a humorous act in line 2 responded that it was **agụụ** 'hunger' that brought them to BF's house. These responses or reports of the MG often trigger off the needed discussions in this event; he is the major VCE of the ceremony. It is pertinent to know that with the application of the SSK and SCK of Igbo culture, the MG is very relevant, since he is the person that makes the references for required inferences of the ceremony. This is not because the GF does not know what to say at the ceremony or the way to the BF's. Extract 4 below captures this pract.

Extract 4: MG: Udo dị Ọ-ọ agụụ chụtara anyi be gi.
        'There is peace. It is hunger that drove us to your place.'
       MG: Ọ-ọ (mentions suitor's father by name)
       sị m kpọtaya be gị.
       'It is ... that asked me to bring him to your place.'
                           (Lines 2 & 5 of sample)

Another example of the pract of reporting and responding is found in line 6 where the GF responded to the BF by reporting that his son, Obi told him that he saw a 'sheep' (used as a reference to the girl) in his house; that is why they have come to his (BF's) house. The girl being referred to as 'sheep' is normal. In Igbo culture, the SCK and the SSK application infers that when suitors come for a bride they usually will not go straight to the point mentioning that they have come for a wife, especially at such initial stage of the ceremony. This indirect act of reporting and responding pract is inferential in this kind of traditional event. Extract 5 below shows the pract.

Extract 5: GF: Udo dị Ọ-ọ nwa m nwoke, Obi, gwara
             anyị na ya hụrụ nwa atụrụ dị ya mma na
             be gi. Makayakaanyị jiri we bịa; ka anyị
             rịọ gị kaị kpụnye anyị ya.
             'There is peace. It is my son, Obi, who
             told us that he saw a sheep he likes in

your house. That is why we have come to plead with you to give it to us.'
<div align="right">(Line 6 of the sample)</div>

3.1.3. Denying
Denying in this traditional context conveys pretence through SCK, SSK, REF, INF, VCE AND REL in *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* (Knocking-on-the-door) ceremony. At this juncture, the BF denies having the referent 'sheep' in his house, since he doesn't rear sheep in his house. The application of SCK, SSK and VCE of Igbo cultural belief is important for the understanding of this pract, in the sense that if BF agrees or admits to whatever the visitors say immediately they arrive, this could mean that he is in haste to give away his daughter which is not culturally expected. This indirect act introduces a second phase of this ceremony upon the mention of 'Ada' the would-be bride. The BF admits and says that if it is 'Ada' they came for she lives here. Extract 6 below captures that:

Extract 6:
BF: (feigning ignorance) Ọbụghị nabe m.
Ụnụ legharịa anya ụnụ ahụ na ana ghị m azụ atụrụ.
'Not in my house. If you look around you will see
that I don't rear sheep.'
BF: Oh-o-o, Ọ bụ atụrụ na-aza aha mmadụ?
(Ọchi) Ọ bụrụ Ada, Obi na be m.
'Oh-o-o, Is it a sheep that bears a human
name? (Laughter).
If it is Ada, she lives in my house.'
<div align="right">(Lines 8 & 9 of sample)</div>

4. Semiotic signage representation in *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* ceremony

Signification' exists in the customary practices and norms that make up *Ịkụ Aka n'ụzọ* traditional marriage ceremony of Awgbu community in Igboland. All the signs put together bring out the cultural aroma of the ceremony. A sign is something that stands for something or someone else in some capacity (Danesi 2004; Van 2005). In this regard, one can talk of objects as signs, specific language use as signs (for example, metaphors, irony and metonymy), visual signs, non-verbal signs such as facial expressions, gestures, and other body language. Narratives myths can as well operate as signs. As earlier mentioned, Peirce's symbolic semiotic sign, which assumes that the relationship between the signifier and signified that comprised the sign has to be learnt in relation to the context of its use, is utilized.

In this paper, the interest is on the visual signs and language use employed in the ceremony. The visual signs include palm wine, kola nuts or any other types of drinks depending on the people involved. Actually at this stage of the traditional marriage rites, much is not required. However in this modern time, some persons often make it elaborate forgetting that the real marriage will still come up. Some of the words used as signs are *atụrụ* 'sheep' and *agụụ* 'hunger'. These symbolic signs feature in the sample collected for the research. Kolanuts and palm wine are very important items which are compulsory in Igbo cultural traditional ceremonies though in recent time most people due to their Christian faith try to shy away from the ideal of presenting palm wine. However, kola nuts and palm wine are compulsory demands of the elders in this kind of ceremony in Igboland. Kola nut symbolizes peace as implied in the Igbo saying 'he who brings kola nut brings peace and life.' This item is used by the elders to invoke the blessings of God and the ancestors in the ceremony. It therefore signifies long life and fulfilment of purposeful tradition and culture in the life of the would-be bride and groom. The significance of kola nuts in Igbo culture makes its presentation and acceptance an expression of goodwill and unity.

Wine symbolizes power and nobility. It is used in libation prayers to the deities and ancestors. Thus, it signifies the approval of the 'gods' and their protection over the negotiated would-be bride and groom. The importance of the kola nuts and palm wine cannot be overlooked in any serious activity in Igbo culture. Hence the presentation by GF and the acceptance by the BF of these two items (kola nuts and palm wine) symbolize the assurance that the girl is available and that negotiations will go well.

The linguistic items used as signs: *atụrụ* 'sheep' and *agụụ* 'hunger' feature in the sample of this paper. The sheep is a symbol of obedience, faithfulness and humility which are supposed to be the quality of the would-be bride. Thus, the sheep is used to symbolize Ada the would-be bride signifying a good and humble would-be wife. *Agụụ* 'hunger' on its part symbolizes desire that the would-be-bride will not hunger for physical food.

5. Conclusion

This study is an examination of the pragma-semiotic analysis in *Ikụ Aka n'uzo* traditional marriage ceremony of Awgbu in Igboland. As a tradition-motivated discourse, it is rich in Igbo cultural norms and practices. Based on Mey's theory of pragmeme, the findings revealed the practs of questioning, reporting/responding and denying. These practs through interaction with the contextual features of shared-situational knowledge (SSK), socio-cultural knowledge (SCK), inference (INF), reference (REF) and voicing (VCE) address the issues of culture, humour and pretence. The semiotics signage that features in this ceremony which are 'verbal' as well as 'non-verbal' in form of kolanuts, wine, *atụrụ* 'sheep' and *agụụ* 'hunger' show much 'signification' that is unique to the Igbo culture. Utilizing Mey's theory of pragmeme and Peirce symbolic sign representation has helped in the understanding of traditional and cultural related issues as it occurs in Igboland in contrast to other trado-cultural settings.

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