

The Semiotic Resource System (SRS): A 21st Century Guide for Immigrants in Nigeria

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Abstract

Semiotics is the study of signs and sign-using behavior, and has been adopted by semioticians under multidisciplinary settings. Linguistic competence foregrounds the diversity of human development, interactions, commerce, tourism and politics. It is a precursor to every meaningful interaction in human activities. Although the internationalization of the English language has been effected and embraced with intentionality to elevate linguistic competence across borders, linguistic barriers remain topical in language discourses. Therefore, the linguistic conundrum appears to validate semiotics as an emerging bridge for the linguistic gap. Within the domain of linguistic gaps and queries, semiotics provides the much-needed interface and platform for the unification of communicative discourses and linguistic diversities. The present study seeks to evaluate and highlight a Semiotic Resource System (SRS) which will provide a coordinated and integrated approach in the communication of indigenous icons, indices and symbols to the non-English speaking immigrants in a manner depictive of the Nigerian social construct, as well as ascertain the applicability of these signs within a heterogenous and multilinguistic Nigeria. The cross-sectional survey design was adopted using structured questionnaires (online and hard copies) for data collection. Data were analyzed using the Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure. The findings of the study will go a long way in contributing to the ongoing discourses on the subject of SRS.

Keywords: Semiotic Resource System, 21st Century, Immigrants, Nigeria.

Introduction

Communication plays a significant part in mortal development and relations. Language appreciation determines the extent of mortal conditioning in commerce, tourism and politics. Despite the pivotal position of language in different engagements, language barrier remains a major reversal defying the globalization of veritably crucial mortal enterprises. The resolution of the language crises appears to hold the future of globalization as a *sine-qua-none* of human development. Semiotics is the study of signs and sign-using behavior, and has been adopted by semioticians under multidisciplinary settings. Within the milieu of linguistic gaps and queries, semiotics provides the much-needed interface and platform for the unification of communicative discourses and linguistic diversities.

The mastery of the unspoken rules of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria by foreigners is very crucial. A good perception of non-verbal cues of others that relay danger, warnings or emotions, will enable foreigners to stay safe and alive in Nigeria. In the recent past, Nigeria has witnessed several security infractions against foreign immigrants. One of such incidences was on 13th October, 2017, when four British citizens working in a

Christian medical charity organization in Enekorogha, a rural community in Delta State were kidnapped. One of the hostages, Ian Squire was killed while the other three were later released after negotiations and returned to the United Kingdom. According to Wikipedia, since 2006, more than 200 foreigners have been kidnapped and some killed. The Canadian Government in a gazette of 4th November, 2019; had warned their citizens of the regional risk in the Nigerian system.

Immigrants are very apprehensive about the level of insecurity in Nigeria and this, undoubtedly, affects her trade and tourism potentials. In addition, travel-related risks are often associated with health concerns, terrorism, crime or natural disasters at tourist destinations (Akujobi, 2005).

Nigeria is a country with multifarious languages, most of which are used in active discourses for communicative interactions which are either verbal or nonverbal. There are three major ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria namely: Igbo (Igbo language), Yoruba (Yoruba language) and Hausa (Hausa language). Nigeria is a country that houses a lot of immigrants and tourists that do not understand the native languages of Nigerians, and in many cases, do not understand the

English language. These people need to rely heavily on nonverbal communications which, at times, are culture-specific. So, there is need for them to learn the nonverbal cues of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, which at present have not been adequately documented as a Semiotic Resource System. Humans are sign-creators, who blend semiotic resources to reflect their interests. Semiotic resources are the actions, materials and artifacts, we use for communicative purposes, whether produced physiologically—for example with our vocal apparatus, the muscles we use to make facial expressions and gestures—or technologically for example, with pen and ink or computer hardware and software—together with the ways in which these resources can be organized. Semiotic resources have a meaningful potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts, where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime (Van Leeuwen 2004:285).

Therefore, there are no nonverbal communication charts of the languages of the three major ethnic groups in Nigerian Embassies all over the world, to empower immigrants and tourists with the meanings of these symbols that are communicative of more than 70% of the language in-order to

keep them safe while in Nigeria. This study therefore seeks to proffer solutions to the aforementioned gaps.

Semiotic resources are required to interact with the world around us (Kress, 2010). They are resources that we use to organize our understanding of the world and to make meaning in communication with others, or to make meaning for ourselves (Danielsson, 2016). These resources are important because they constitute the bulk of the socio-economic activities at the individual, national and international levels. Across all strata of human endeavor, semiotic resources are gaining relevance, especially against the background of internalization of languages for global commerce.

When these semiotic resources are used in systematic ways, they form semiotic modes. Examples of semiotic modes are color (when color is used in more or less conventionalized ways), spoken or written verbal language, images, or gestures. A semiotic mode in itself can actually be viewed as multimodal, for example, an image where color is used as one meaning-making resource. Semiotic modes can also be combined differently in different media—such as paper-based or digital media. In all social communications, we combine

semiotic modes. Thus, social communication is always multimodal (Jewitt *et al.*, 2016).

The choice of mode for semiotic communication may be approached from either the aesthetical or philosophical perspective. In interrogating a semiotic resource from the philosophical perspective, a more philosophical question of whether it is actually possible to separate content from form arises. If we imply that all knowledge must be formulated somehow, and that all knowledge is represented through some kind of system for meaning-making, form is crucial for deciding what aspects of the content are given precedence. For an expert of a field, the ways in which content is presented are of minor importance. For the novice entering new knowledge areas, however, the ways in which content is presented can be crucial for the learning process (Jewitt, 2008; Selander and Kress, 2012; Danielsson, 2016).

Even in schools, teachers are grappling with the challenge of managing multilingual immigrant students without compromising the content delivery. In many of these schools, semiotic resources have become handy in supporting the conceptual understanding of the emergent bilingual

students in the areas of science and mathematics.

According to a study by Martinez (2019) who used an analysis of online and offline communicative practices of ten Japanese and non-Japanese residents of Niigata City, the semiotic resource commonly used by the participants in online chats was the sticker. This re-emphasizes the surging transition towards semiotic resources in everyday communication. It further depicts the future dependency of this paralinguistic mode of communication in diverse fields and among diverse peoples.

The present study seeks to determine and develop a Semiotic Resource System (SRS) which will provide a coordinated and integrated approach in the communication of indigenous icons, indices and symbols to the non-English speaking immigrants in a manner depictive of the Nigerian social construct, as well as ascertain the applicability of these signs within a heterogenous and multilinguistic Nigeria.

Methodology

Study design

The study was designed as a cross-sectional prospective and observational study. The 3 major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Igbo, Hausa

and Yoruba) were sampled due to their diversity and geographical spread.

Description of study areas

The Igbos make up around 18% of Nigeria's population. They are primarily found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States of Nigeria. Their traditional homeland straddles the Niger River in the south-east and is one of the most densely populated areas of the African continent. Igbos are predominantly Christians and subsistence farmers of yams and cassava. They have been identified as one of the largest single ethnic groups in Africa. The estimated population of the Igbos stands at about 35,088,096. The climate in Igboland is tropical. Most months of the year are marked by significant rainfall. The short dry season has little impact. The average temperature in Igboland is 26.7 °C | 80.1 °F. The annual rainfall is usually estimated at about 1783 mm | 70.2 inch.

The Hausas are found in Northwestern Nigeria, in eight states: Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Niger. They are adjacent to Southern Niger and they make up 25% of Nigeria's population. They constitute the largest ethnic group in the area, which also contains another large group, the Fulani, perhaps one-half of whom are settled among the Hausas as a

ruling class, having adopted the Hausa language and culture. They are predominantly Moslems. The estimated population of the people is about 69,200,000 people. They have a tropical savannah climate. It is warm every month with both a wet and dry season. The average annual temperature fluctuates between 30⁰ to 36°, with an estimated annual rainfall of 1416mm.

The Yorubas are a diverse set of various tribes that share a common language and culture, who make up about 21% of Nigeria's population. The Yorubas are found in Southwest Nigeria, in six states: Ekiti, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Lagos. Large populations of Yoruba people are also in the Kwara and Kogi states in north-central Nigeria. The estimated population of the people is about 55,000,000 people. It's an area characterized by tropical climate with annual rainfall of about 130 to 180 cm and relatively high humidity round the year of over 60-80%. The mean temperature is usually more than 25°C.

Sample and sampling technique

The study adopted the convenience sampling technique and a sample size of 383 participants was derived for each ethnic group using the Taro Yamane's formular for the determination of sample size.

Procedure for data collection

Structured questionnaires were distributed online and physically to consenting participants. The questionnaires were structured to elicit responses relevant to the study objectives. Anambra (192) and Imo (191) States were representative of the Igbo ethnic group, Sokoto (192) and Kano (191)

States were representative of the Hausas, while Lagos (192) and Oyo (191) States represented the Yoruba ethnic group.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed with the Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure using the Signifier and Signified models of vocal paralinguage and gestures.

Results

Table 1: Distribution and analysis of Igbo paralinguage using the semiotic theory

S/N	Signifier	Signified (Igbo)
1.	Shaa!/Taa!	Used to hush a child.
2.	Ohoo!	Used to indicate that 'I told you'
3.	Kum	Sound made with the tongue and the upper palate, to indicate displeasure over something.
4.	Hiss	Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, used to stop people from making a noise.
5.	M..m..m..m..!	Sound made in the glottis, used to indicate 'danger'
6.	Mm!	Assent indicator
7.	Mm..m!	Negative indicator
8.	Ah!	Surprise
9.	Scream	A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement.
10.	Ehh!	Expressing surprise
11.	Tsk tsk with shaking the head sideways.	Indicating disapproval
12.	Gasp	Used to indicate when somebody is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens.
13.	Cry	A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise.
14.	Laugh	To express amusement.
15.	Rhythm	Moderately fast. The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect of the ethnic group.

	GESTURES	
16	Wagging the forefinger before somebody.	Be careful.
17	Calling someone with the forefingers.	Derogatory, for animals.
18	Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers.	Polite way of calling someone.
19	When a woman rejects a man's handshake.	She is angry at the man.
16	Wagging the forefinger before somebody.	Be careful.
20	Opening One's lower eyelids with One's hands.	Used to Indicate 'Serves you right'
21.	Slanting one's mouth to one side.	Used to indicate 'Surprise'
22.	Turning ones back, opening the under garments, holding the buttocks in both hands, bending down and showing the other person the bare buttocks.	Used to indicate that the other person is despicable.
23.	Nodding	Yes
24.	Shaking the head sideways	No
25.	Holding and pulling both ears while talking with somebody.	Used to warn somebody.
26.	Spreading one's palm at the other person, when one is angry.	Used to indicate displeasure at ones action. (Waka)
27.	A man shakes a lady and scratches her palm softly.	Used to indicate a proposal of love.
28	Snapping with the third finger and the thumb at somebody.	Used to indicate being disgusted at someone.
29.	Waving gently	Goodbye
30.	Waving one's palm backwards	Go
31.	Wrinkling your nose at someone.	Mocking someone or betrayal.
32.	Clenching both fists and raising them to the stomach level and scowling at someone.	Not Applicable
33.	If the person being challenged, clenches his right fist and raises it towards the person,	Not Applicable

	while spreading his left palm.	
34.	If the person being challenged hits the back of one palm on the other palm facing up.	Not Applicable
35.	During a marriage ceremony, when the bride wears a short sleeved dress and looks up boldly greeting guests.	Polite bride
36.	When a man clenches his fist and raises the arm to shoulder level after greeting someone.	Not Applicable
37	Using the left palm to hold on the lower right arm when greeting someone.	It is an acknowledgement of esteem.
38.	When a man after greeting one, touches his chest.	Not Applicable
39.	Raising two hands beside the ears.	Not Applicable
40	Joining the two hands together, closing the eyes and bending the head.	Prayer mood.
41.	When a bride shies away from her guests and does not look at them boldly.	Impolite bride
42	When a woman shakes someone with both hands and bows slightly.	To indicate respect
43	When a woman rejects a man's handshake.	She is angry at the man.
44	Hitting the two laps while listening to a story.	To indicate a strange story.
45	Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position.	Stop

Table 2: Distribution and analysis of Yoruba paralanguage using the semiotic theory

S/N	Signifier	Signified (Hausa)
1.	Ehh!	Expressing surprise
2.	Mm!	Used to indicate doubt
3.	Kum	Sound made with the tongue and the upper palate, to indicate displeasure over something.
4.	Hiss	Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, used to

		stop people from making a noise.
5.	Whistle	Make shrilled or musical sound through pursed lips.
6.	Mm!	Assent indicator
7.	Mm..m!	Negative indicator
8.	Ah!	Surprise
9.	Scream	A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement.
10.	Ehh!	Not Applicable
11.	Tsk tsk with shaking the head sideways.	Indicating disapproval
12.	Gasp	Used to indicate when somebody is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens.
13.	Cry	A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise.
14.	Laugh	To express amusement.
15.	Rhythm	Slow rhythm. The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect of the ethnic group.
	GESTURES	
16.	Wagging the forefinger before somebody.	Be careful.
17.	Calling someone with the forefingers.	Derogatory, for animals.
18.	Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers.	Polite way of calling someone.
19.	Spreading one's palm at the other person when one is angry. (Obaa iya e)	Used to indicate displeasure at one's action.
20.	Opening One's lower eyelids with One's hands.	Used to Indicate 'Serves you right'
21.	Slanting ones mouth to one side.	Disrespect/snubbing
22.	Turning ones back, opening the under garments, holding the buttocks in both hands, bending down and showing the other person the bare buttocks.	Not Applicable
23.	Nodding	Yes
24.	Shaking the head sideways	No
25.	Holding and pulling both ears while talking with somebody.	Used to warn somebody.
26.	Spreading one's palm at the other person,	Used to indicate displeasure at ones action.(Waka)

	when one is angry.	
27.	A man shakes a lady and scratches her palm softly.	Used to indicate a proposal of love.
28.	Snapping with the third finger and the thumb at somebody.	Used to indicate being disgusted at someone.
29.	Waving gently	Goodbye
30.	Waving one's palm backwards	Go
31.	Wrinkling your nose at someone.	Indicates disgust
32.	Intertwining the fingers on the head with a frown on the face.	Indicating trouble or confusion.
33.	Intertwining one's two hands at the chest and heaving one's shoulders.	Indicating that one has witnessed something unbelievable.
34.		
35.	During a marriage ceremony, when the bride wears a short-sleeved dress and looks up boldly greeting guests.	Non-virgin bride.
36.	When a man clenches his fist and raises the arm to shoulder level after greeting someone.	It is an acknowledgement of esteem.
37.	Using the left palm to hold on the lower right arm when greeting someone.	Not Applicable.
38.	When a man after greeting one, touches his chest.	It means peace.
39.	Raising two hands beside the ears.	Prayer mood.
40.	Joining the two hands together, closing the eyes and bending the head.	Not applicable
41.	When a bride shies away from her guests and does not look at them boldly.	Polite/Virgin bride.
42.	When a woman shakes someone with both hands and bows slightly.	Not applicable
43.	When a woman rejects a man's handshake.	Shaking is not allowed.
44.	Hitting the two laps while listening to a story.	Not Applicable
45.	Thrusting forward the hand and showing the	Stop

	palm in a vertical position.	
46.	When a queen intertwines her fingers, turning them upwards while kneeling before her king.	Asking for forgiveness
47.	When the King being appealed to touches her intertwined fingers.	Indicates forgiveness has been granted.
48.	Wagging the forefinger at someone's face.	Be careful
49.	Turning your palm inside out with a raised eyebrow.	What is happening or where are you going to?
50.	Hitting both palms together, sliding them on one another.	Indicating noninvolvement.
51.	Rubbing both palms together in an upward direction.	Pleading for mercy.
52.	A woman removing her scarf, tying it on her waist and shaking her right leg.	Ready to fight
53.	Snapping the fingers and clenching the fists with the thumb pointing back.	I will deal with you at home.
54.	Frowning your face and flinging hand and fingers.	I will deal with you later.
55.	Biting your finger and shaking your head.	Regret
56.	Rolling one's index finger at the edge of one's temple.	To indicate that the person being referred to is crazy.
57.	Shrugging	No
58.	Waving aggressively	Disinterest
59.	When a woman kneels before the King or husband.	Indicates humility and respect
60.	Prostrating before an elder	Indicates respect.
61.	Steady eye contact	Indicates interest/involvement
62.	Avoiding eye contact	Indicates insincerity and disinterest
63.	Winking at a lady	Indicating interest
64.	Raising One's thumb at someone	Indicating 'Well done'
65.	Rubbing one's tummy with a frown	Indicating tummy ache or sickness
66.	Greeting with the right fist clenched and the arm raised at shoulder level, with the left arm crossed at the stomach level, the left fist clenched and touching the right elbow.	Humility exhibited by royal guards.

Table 3: Distribution and analysis of Hausa paralanguage using the semiotic theory

S/N	Signifier	Signified (Hausa)
1.	Shaa!/Taa!	Not Applicable
2.	Ohoo!	Used to indicate that 'I told you'
3.	Kum	Sound made with the tongue and the upper palate, to indicate displeasure over something.
4.	Hiss	Sound made with clenching the teeth, rounding the lip and exhaling air, used to

		stop people from making a noise.
5.	M..m..m..m..!	Not applicable
6.	Mm!	Assent indicator
7.	Mm..m!	Negative indicator
8.	Ah!	Surprise
9.	Scream	A high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain, excitement or amusement.
10.	Ehh!	Not Applicable
11.	Tsk tsk with shaking the head sideways.	Indicating disapproval
12.	Gasp	Used to indicate when somebody is shocked, afraid or when something suddenly happens.
13.	Cry	A loud inarticulate expression of pain, rage or surprise.
14.	Laugh	To express amusement.
15.	Rhythm	Slow rhythm. The pattern of sound that characterizes a language or dialect of the ethnic group.
	GESTURES	
16.	Wagging the forefinger before somebody.	Be careful.
17.	Calling someone with the forefingers.	Derogatory, for animals.
18.	Calling someone with your palm facing up or down and wagging your whole fingers.	Polite way of calling someone.
19.	When a woman rejects a man's handshake.	Shaking a woman is not allowed.
20.	Opening One's lower eyelids with One's hands.	Used to Indicate 'Serves you right'
21.	Slanting ones mouth to one side.	Disrespect/snubbing
22.	Turning ones back, opening the under garments, holding the buttocks in both hands, bending down and showing the other person the bare buttocks.	Not Applicable
23.	Nodding	Yes
24.	Shaking the head sideways	No
25.	Holding and pulling both ears while talking with somebody.	Used to warn somebody.
26.	Spreading ones palm at the other person, when one is angry.	Used to indicate displeasure at ones action.(Uwaka)
27.	A man shakes a lady and scratches her palm	Used to indicate a proposal of love.

	softly.	
28.	Snapping with the third finger and the thumb at somebody.	Used to indicate being disgusted at someone.
29.	Waving gently	Goodbye
30.	Waving one's palm backwards	Go
31.	Wrinkling your nose at someone.	Not Applicable
32.	Clenching both fists and raising them to the stomach level and scowling at someone.	Do you want to fight?
33.	If the person being challenged, clenches his right fist and raises it towards the person, while spreading his left palm.	The person wishes to fight.
34.	If the person being challenged hits the back of one palm on the other palm facing up.	The person wishes not to fight.
35.	During a marriage ceremony, when the bride wears a short sleeved dress and looks up boldly greeting guests.	Non-virgin bride.
36.	When a man clenches his fist and raises the arm to shoulder level after greeting someone.	It is an acknowledgement of esteem.
37.	Using the left palm to hold on the lower right arm when greeting someone.	Not Applicable.
38.	When a man after greeting one, touches his chest.	It means peace.
39.	Raising two hands beside the ears.	Prayer mood.
40.	Joining the two hands together, closing the eyes and bending the head.	Not applicable
41.	When a bride shies away from her guests and does not look at them boldly.	Polite/Virgin bride.
42.	When a woman shakes someone with both hands and bows slightly.	Not applicable
43.	When a woman rejects a man's handshake.	Shaking is not allowed.
44.	Hitting the two laps while listening to a story.	Not Applicable

45	Thrusting forward the hand and showing the palm in a vertical position.	Stop
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Discussion

The internationalization of the English language has not completely resolved the linguistic conundrum predominant in many climes. Consequently, globalization, industrialization and trans-border commerce are significantly impeded. In a heterogeneous linguistic population, the systematic development of a semiotic communication template will significantly bridge the linguistic gap among the diverse linguistic populations and attenuate the impact of linguistic exclusion on foreigners.

The Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure provides valuable insights into the similarities and differences inherent in the non-verbal cues of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria viz; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The semiotic congruency inherent in these non-verbal cues highlights, to a great extent, the feasibility of infusing these non-verbal cues into the national communication pattern.

However, the study further recorded significant diversities within the framework of the signifier and signified. While the signifier ‘‘Shaa/taa’’ conveyed the paralanguage (meaning) of ‘‘hushing a child’’ within the Igbo speaking population,

it is unknown to the lexical semantics of other ethnic groups. The expression ‘‘M.m.m.m’’ was found among the Igbos as representing a ‘‘sound made in the glottis, used to indicate danger’’, but does not exist in the paralanguage of the Yorubas and Hausas. When a man clenches his fist and raises the arm to shoulder level after greeting someone, the signified among the Hausas shows that the person wishes to fight, while this is not applicable to the Igbos and Yorubas. Among the Hausas, peace is depicted when a man touches his chest after greeting someone, while the signified is non-existent among the Igbos and Yorubas. In addition, the Hausas represent readiness for prayer by raising two hands beside the ears, while the Igbos and Yorubas do not do the same. On the contrary, the Igbos show their readiness to pray by joining the two hands together, closing the eyes and bending the head unlike the Yorubas and Hausas.

On the overall, 55% of the signifier and signified were found to be common among the three major ethnic tribes in Nigeria, while 45% were recorded to be different among the ethnic groups. In addition, the predominant and more commonly used signs were shared

among the majority of the participants. Despite the minor differences in the paranguages of the three tribes, the harmonization of the common paranguages into a common template will go a long way in providing a semiotic resource system to address the communication gap between Nigerians and the non-English speaking immigrant communities.

The study provides very valuable insight into the potential efficacy of paralanguage in resolving social conflicts arising from linguistic intolerance. The remote influence of a Semiotic Resource System on the socio-economic metrics of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The development of the SRS will eliminate the linguistic barrier between Nigerians and non-English speaking immigrants and promote cordiality and economic deliverables.

Although few differences exist in the paranguages of the major ethnic groups, they can be tweaked into a common symbolism in the construct of a national SRS. It is noteworthy that paranguages are preponderant among the locals of the three ethnic groups investigated. This highlights the potential acceptability and applicability of the SRS when adopted as a national linguistic resource.

Furthermore, the adoption of the SRS will remediate, to a great extent, the challenges of developing a common indigenous Nigerian language. In addition to resolving language-related conflicts within Nigeria, it will also provide effective communication tools for foreigners who are confronted with myriads of linguistic challenges while in Nigeria.

The discourse on linguistic indigenization and the Africanization of our socio-economic constructs are gaining momentum in the language communities of Africa. The adoption of the SRS will further this resolve and strengthen the linguistic ties between Nigerians and the non-English speaking immigrant community.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.