

SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION AND KANU'S IGWEBUIKE IDENTITY: AN ANTIDOTE FOR INTERPERSONAL MISUNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

That which is validly true about our human existence and all that pertains to it is the reality of communication. It is communication that breeds human interrelationships, a rapport, assuring us that we are not isolated in the world, but have access to other human persons like us. The communication that is spoken of here cannot be limited to just the verbal type, if we do that, we would be registering a stereotype. Communication also pertains to the non-verbal, the non-visible (the supposedly telepathic means of communication), etc. Yet, what is to be maintained is that whether it is verbal or non-verbal, visible or non-visible, communication is mediated through the use of signs. Language is what can be defined as an oral/worded/lettered, yet mental (This is because before ever a word is uttered, it is first constructed in the mind, whether it be consciously or unconsciously. More to that, people think or construct their line of thought in tandem with the language they speak.) representation of signs. This goes to indicate that, even though there is the external world, the human person, in his own subjective worldview (which is internal), is able to make contact with the external world, by means of sign inter-rapport. That is to say that he understands the signs that are external to him and is able to relate to the external world also by means of signs. The external world that is being spoken of here also pertains to the other human person that is not "I", but the "YOU". The individual mediates the external world, by means of signs received and perceived (The focus of this piece is between the "I" and the "YOU."). There is no means of really understanding what lies in the depths of the mind of the other person, the "You". The "I" can only decipher according to those signs that have been let out by the "You". It should be noted that misunderstandings arise when the signs given by the "I" is not properly deciphered by the "You". Misunderstandings have been the bane of the human existence, causing strife, suspicion, conflicts, divisions, etc. The Igwebuike ideology proffers what its name signifies, namely "togetherness", arising on the wings of a better understanding amongst persons. Yet, this would not be the case when there is a failure to rightly understand and decode those signs that are received, with the reciprocal giving of the right signs as well. Semiosis, which considers the meaning of signs, can also prove to be very vital in the ensuring of the "togetherness" which the Igwebuike stands for. Igwebuike itself is a sign, one that communicates to us and that needs to be

semiotically interpreted, to make sense of what it proffers, namely "ensuring a communal existence of the humanity." Yet, it seems as if the issue of misunderstanding will always remain with the human person. This is because there is a near impossibility of decoding what is in the mind of the other. That is to say that the mental state of the other person remains his exclusive hub, unless such a one allows another in, via the unleashing of signs. The other side of the coin is the right way in which such mental state should be conveyed to the other. This piece will be dedicated to the rightful appreciation of the sign Igwebuike communicates.

Keywords: Igwebuike, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Semiotics, Semiosis, Human Person, Igwebuike, Social Interaction.

What is Semiotics?

Semiotics is properly referred as the science of signs and developed out of the need of physicians of the western world to understand the interactive pattern between the body and the mind within certain cultural domains.¹ It is the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behaviour, the analysis of systems of communication, as language, gestures or clothing. At its most fundamental level, semiotics is the study of how meaning is made. Even if we endorse the fact that it studies signs, this is to be taken on a broad spectrum of the meaning of a sign: that is to say, sign as that which communicates a meaning beyond itself. We call signs all and only those things which represent something other than themselves, and we have found that this can occur only when and insofar as the "other" is represented to or for some other still.² For example, a Rose may represent naturally a flower (plant), or it may indicate love or passion. At the most basic level, human beings interpret signs as they communicate with one another. Meaning derivation from signs denotes that which is proper to the animal (even brutes, what has now come to be referred to as zoosemiosis³). Nonetheless, "Semiotics", however, as a term, has become conventionalized as the generally accepted term to label the study of signs in their distinctive action.⁴

"Semiotics" as an English word comes to us from a kind of bastard Greek coinage made by John Locke in the *Essay concerning Humane Understanding* that he published in 1690, where, at the conclusion of his book, he proposed *semiotike*

¹ T.A. Sebeok, *An Introduction to Semiotics*, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 1994, xi.

² J. Deely, *On 'Semiotics' as Naming the doctrine of Signs*, in *Semiotica* vol 152, 2004, 75-139.

³ There are other areas of semiosis added to the zoosemiosis, they include, anthroposemiosis and phytosemiosis, all these pertain to a larger area of study known as biosemiosis.

⁴ J. Deely, *On 'Semiotics' as Naming the doctrine of Signs*.

as the one-word equivalent of the English expression, “doctrine of signs”.⁵ This term, as it appears in Locke, according to J. Deely, is malformed. Deely remarked that, according to the applicable requirements of Greek grammar, the term should have had an epsilon separating the *mu* from the *iota*, as in *semeiotike*. This is not apparent. Furthermore, in his reasoning, one cannot say that this malformation be dismissed as a printer’s error; for, in every subsequent edition of the *Essay* prepared by Locke prior to his being overtaken by the boundary of time and made a definitively *past* author, the original malformation is meticulously maintained.⁶ J. Deely notes:

Now it is interesting that “semiotics” is not a straight transliteration of Locke’s Greek malformation. What *is* a straight transliteration of the Greek malformation Locke introduced, however, is the Latin term “*semiotica*”, which no Latin author ever used. So the term, a Greek malformation in Locke’s *Essay*, is in effect a neologism in Latin transliteration, but it means in English “the doctrine of signs”, according to the only definition Locke provided in his original introduction of and comment upon the term. The reason that this detour through the Latin transliteration of Locke’s Greek malformation is interesting is because “*semiotica*” as Latin neologism would be a neuter plural name that could only be translated into English as “semiotics”. Professional linguists have been careful to point out that there is in English a class of “-ics” words which do not conform to the usual rule that an English noun is made plural by adding an “s” to its ending. By this reckoning, “semiotics” is not the plural form of “semiotic”. Nonetheless, “semiotics” is the direct English transliteration of the Latin “*semiotica*”, which in turn is the direct transliteration of the Greek malformation Locke introduced into the closing chapter of his *Essay*. So a Latin, rather than a Greek, background proves etymologically decisive for sign and semiotics alike as contemporary notions, despite Locke’s conscious choice of the Greek root (*sem-*) for the notion of “natural sign” (*semeion*) in his one-word summation or name (*semiotike*) for the doctrine of signs.⁷

The phenomenon that distinguishes life forms from inanimate objects is semiosis. This can be defined simply as the instinctive capacity of all living organisms to

⁵ J. Deely, *The Red book. The Beginning of PostModern Times* or Charles Sanders Peirce and The Recovery of *Signum*, in the Metaphysical Club for the University of Helsinki, Finland, 2000, 1-79. We ought to note that even though John Locke had translated this word *semiotike* from the greek, to mean semiotics, it was 50 years earlier thoroughly studied by John Poinsett, unknown to Locke.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *ibid.*

produce and understand signs. A sign is any physical form that has been imagined or made externally (through some physical medium) to stand for an object, event, feeling, etc., known as a referent, or for a class of similar (or related) objects, events, feelings, etc., known as a referential domain. In human life, signs serve many functions. They allow people to recognize patterns in things; they act as predictive guides or plans for taking actions; they serve as exemplars of specific kinds of phenomena; and the list could go on and on. The English word 'cat' for example, is an example of a particular kind of human sign - known as verbal- which stands for a referent that can be described as a 'carnivorous mammal with a tail, whiskers and retractile claws. Each species produces and understands certain kinds of specific signs for which it has been programmed by its biology. These can range from simple bodily signals to advanced symbolic structures such as words. Signs allow each species to

- (1) Signal its existence,
- (2) Communicate messages within the species, and
- (3) Model incoming information from the external world.

Semiotics is the science that studies these functions. The goal of this opening chapter is to introduce several basic notions for the formal study of semiosis.⁸

The primary objective of semiotics is to understand both a species' capacity to make and understand signs and, in the case of the human species, the knowledge-making activity this capacity allows human beings to carry out. The former is known, as mentioned above, as semiosis, while the latter activity is known as representation. Representation is a deliberate use of signs to probe, classify, and hence know the world. Semiosis is the biological capacity itself that underlies the production and comprehension of signs, from simple physiological signals to those that reveal a highly complex symbolism.⁹ Human intellectual and social life is based on the production, use and exchange of signs and representations. When we gesture, talk, write, read, watch a TV program, listen to music, look at a painting, etc. we are engaged in sign-based representational behaviour. Representation has endowed the human species with the ability to cope effectively with the crucial aspects of existence - knowing, behaving purposefully, planning, socializing and communicating. However, since

⁸ T.A. Sebeok, *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics 2nd ed*, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Toronto, 2001, 3.

⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

representational activities vary from culture to culture, the signs people use on a daily basis constitute a mediating template in the worldview they come to have.¹⁰

Semiotics considers both verbal and non-verbal signs, enabling a community of communication between and amongst biological species.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Signs

According to Semiology, there are six types of verbal signs, which include:

1. Symptom: the symptom is a reflex of anatomical structure. Animals with widely divergent anatomies will manifest virtually no symptomatology in common. It is interesting to note, by the way, that the term symptom is often extended metaphorically to refer to intellectual, emotional and social phenomena that result from causes that are perceived to be analogous to physical processes.
2. Signal: All animals are endowed with the capacity to use and respond to species-specific signals for survival. Birds, for instance, are born prepared to produce a particular type of coo, and no amount of exposure to the songs of other species, or the absence of their own, has any effect on their cooing.
3. Icon: An icon is a sign that is made to resemble, simulate or reproduce its referent in some way. Photographs may be iconic signs because they can be seen to reproduce their referents in a visual way. Onomatopoeic words are also iconic signs because they simulate their referents in an acoustic way.
4. Index: An index is a sign that refers to something or someone, in terms of its existence or location in time or space, or in relation to something or someone else. Smoke is an index of fire, pointing out where the fire is; a cough is an index of a cold; and so on. The most typical manifestation of indexicality is the pointing index finger, which humans the world over use instinctively to point out and locate things, people and events in the world.
5. Symbol: A symbol is a sign that stands for its referent in an arbitrary, conventional way. Most semioticians agree that symbolicity is what sets human representation apart from that of all other species, allowing the human species to reflect upon the world separately from stimulus-response situations. Words in general are symbolic signs. But any signifier - object, sound, figure, etc. - can be symbolic. A cross figure can stand for

¹⁰ Ibid.

the concept 'Christianity'; a V-sign made with the index and middle fingers can stand symbolically for the concept 'victory'; white is a colour that can be symbolic of 'cleanliness,' 'purity,' or 'innocence,' but dark can be a symbol of 'uncleanness,' 'impurity,' or 'corruption'; and the list could go on and on. These symbols are all established by social convention. '

6. Name: This is an identifier sign assigned to the member of a species in various ways, as we shall see subsequently, that sets the specific member off from the others. A human name is a sign that identifies the person in terms of such variables as ethnicity and gender. Added names (surnames, nicknames, etc.) further refine the 'identity referent' of the name.¹¹

Another form of sign conveying is by non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication takes place within an organism or between two or more organisms. Within an organism, participators in communicative acts may involve - as message sources or destinations or both - on rising integration levels, cellular organelles, cells, tissues, organs, and organ systems. In addition, basic features of the whole biological organization, conducted non-verbally in the *milieu interieur*, include protein synthesis, metabolism, hormone activity, transmission of nervous impulses, and so forth.¹² Homo sapiens are capable of communicating, simultaneously or in turn, by both non-verbal and verbal means. The expression 'by verbal means' is equivalent to some such expression as 'by means of speech , ' or ' by means of script,' or 'by means of a sign language ' (e.g., for use in a deaf group), that are , each , manifestations of any prerequisite natural language with which human beings are singularly endowed. However, not all humans are literate or can even speak: infants normally do develop a capacity for speaking, but only gradually; some adults never acquire speech; and others lose speech as a result of some trauma (e.g., a stroke) or in consequence of aging. Such conditions, notwithstanding, humans lacking a capacity to verbalize - speak, write, or sign - can, as a rule, continue to communicate non-verbally.¹³

These two modes of signature can also stand in as the two modes of communication in the human person.

Understanding the Concept of "Igwebuike"

Igwebuike is the heart of African thought and, in fact, the modality of being in African philosophy. It is taken from the Igbo language, and is a composite word made up of three dimensions. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as

¹¹ Ibid, 9-11.

¹² Ibid, 12

¹³ Ibid, 11-12.

a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involve: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force.¹⁴ *Igwebuike* is anchored on the African worldview, which is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny.¹⁵ Life is a life of *sharedness*, one in which another is part thereof. It is a relationship, though, of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole.¹⁶ Philosophically, according to A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike* points to the complementary nature of reality and is not limited to the Igbo world, it is a universal philosophy that is the incarnation and confirmation of the universal relevance of solidarity and

¹⁴ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike As A Trend In African Philosophy* In *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 2, No. 1, 2016, 97-101. Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *Igwebuike and the Logic (Nka) of African Philosophy*, 14. Kanu, I. A. (2018). *Igwe Bu Ike* as an Igbo-African hermeneutics of national development. *Igbo Studies Review*. No. 6. pp. 59-83. Kanu, I. A. (2018). *Igwebuike* as an African integrative and progressive anthropology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 151-161. Kanu, I. A. (2018). New Africanism: *Igwebuike* as a philosophical Attribute of Africa in portraying the Image of Life. In Mahmoud Misaeli, Sanni Yaya and Rico Sneller (Eds.). *African Perspectives on Global on Global Development* (pp. 92-103). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Kanu, I. A. (2019). Collaboration within the ecology of mission: An African cultural perspective. *The Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. Vol. 15. pp. 125-149. Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuike* research methodology: A new trend for scientific and wholistic investigation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities (IAAJAH)*. 5. 4. pp. 95-105. Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikeconomics*: The Igbo apprenticeship for wealth creation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities (IAAJAH)*. 5. 4. pp. 56-70. Kanu, I. A. (2019). *Igwebuikecracy*: The Igbo-African participatory cocio-political system of governance. *TOLLE LEGE: An Augustinian Journal of the Philosophy and Theology*. 1. 1. pp. 34-45. Kanu, I. A. (2019). On the origin and principles of *Igwebuike* philosophy. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol. 11. No. 1. pp. 159-176. Kanu, I. A. (2019b). An *Igwebuike* approach to the study of African traditional naming ceremony and baptism. *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. Vol. 11. No. 1. pp. 25-50. Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African philosophy for Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria. In Mahmoud Misaeli (Ed.). *Spirituality and Global Ethics* (pp. 300-310). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars. Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African philosophy for the protection of the environment. *Nightingale International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 3. No. 4. pp. 28-38.

¹⁵ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike As An Igbo-African Ethic Of Reciprocity*, in *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 3 No 2, March 2017, 153-160.

¹⁶ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Philosophy of Education*, A paper presented at the International Conference on Law, Education and Humanities. 25th -26th November 2015 University of Paris, France.

complementarity.¹⁷ The richness of this philosophy pointing to the complementarity and solidarity of reality also has much relevance in a meaning-laden reality. What is being said is that the reality that confronts the human person is a reality that is teeming with meaning. Thus, it is worthy of note to insist that this philosophical term, although of Igbo origin, has universal implications. A.I. Kanu succinctly touches on this point as he says

Negotiation is very important in the African universe because it is a world that one shares with the other in an atmosphere of inter-subjective relations. This intersubjective relations only plays out without chaos when the individual is able to skillfully bridge his or her interiority with the individuality of the other.¹⁸

Can there be negotiations, without an in-depth grasp of the terms of negotiations? Can humans engage in any meaningful discourse, pertaining to ways and means to forge ahead in the bond of solidarity, when misunderstanding looms large? Can we as humans complement one another, in the absence of true brotherhood soldered on the ground rules of a rich understanding of each person's individuality? This is where semiotics (or Semiosis) meets with the *Igwebuike*.

***Igwebuike* in the Light of Semiosis: Part One**

The *Igwebuike* philosophy is grounded on certain principles that have their roots in African proverbs and idioms. It should be said that communication in the

¹⁷ A.I. Kanu, *On the Origin and Principles of the Igwebuike Philosophy*, in *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, Volume 11 No. 1, 2019, 159-176. Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Igwebuike* as the hermeneutic of individuality and communality in African ontology. *NAJOP: Nasara Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 162-179. Kanu, I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuike* and question of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3 No. 1. pp. 131-138. Kanu, I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuike* as a philosophical attribute of Africa in portraying the image of life. A paper presented at the 2017 Oracle of Wisdom International Conference by the Department of Philosophy, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, 27-29 April. Kanu, I. A. (2017b). *Igwebuike* as a complementary approach to the issue of girl-child education. *Nightingale International Journal of Contemporary Education and Research*. Vol. 3. No. 6. pp. 11-17. Kanu, I. A. (2017b). *Igwebuike* as a wholistic response to the problem of evil and human suffering. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3 No. 2, March. Kanu, I. A. (2017e). *Igwebuike* as an Igbo-African modality of peace and conflict resolution. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars*. Vol. 1. No. 1. pp. 31-40. Kanu, I. A. (2017g). *Igwebuike* and the logic (Nka) of African philosophy. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 1. pp. 1-13. Kanu, I. A. (2017h). *Igwebuike* philosophy and human rights violation in Africa. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3. No. 7. pp. 117-136. Kanu, I. A. (2017i). *Igwebuike* as a hermeneutic of personal autonomy in African ontology. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars*. Vol. 2. No. 1. pp. 14-22.

¹⁸ Ibid.

African verse, before the dawn of the colonial rulers, was by means of idioms, proverbs and the likes. According to J.J Dyikuk,

Communication in the traditional Igbo societies was by the means of idioms, proverbs, and figures of speech...Without idioms, proverbs, and figures of speech, conversation would be bland and distasteful. It is only infants and little children that speak in plain language.¹⁹

While the major reference in the aforementioned quotation is to the Igbo traditional society, it should be noted that such means of communication cut across the entirety of the African traditional society. As earlier noted, the *Igwebuike* is grounded on certain principles having their roots in the African proverbs and idioms, a few of these proverbs and idioms include:

- a. A person is a person because of other people.
- b. Sticks in a bundle cannot be broken.
- c. When spiders unite they can tie up a lion.
- d. If one finger tries to pick up something from the ground, it cannot.
- e. Behind an able man there are always other able men.
- f. It takes a village to raise a child.
- g. If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.
- h. I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am
- i. If a lizard stays off from the foot of a tree, it would be caught.
- j. A tree does not make a forest.
- k. If two or more people urinate in the same place at the same time, it would produce more foam.
- l. When a bird builds its nest, it uses the feathers of other birds.
- m. One person is not the whole world.
- n. It is by taking a goat around that you are able to sell it.²⁰

There is a seeming thread that cuts across the above-mentioned proverbs, namely "TOGETHERNESS". The *Igwebuike* ideology that is borne on the wings of these proverbs express a sign, a sign that should be well elaborated in semiotic terms.

At this point, we need to really understand what a sign is, because inherent in every aspect of communication is the penchant to understand what is being communicated or signaled from the "signaler" to the one who is communicated

¹⁹ J.J. Dyikuk, *The Intersection Of Communication In Igwebuike And tradi-Rural Media: A Critical Evaluation*, in *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* Vol. 2 No 3, 2019, 175-192.

²⁰ A.I. Kanu, *On the Origin and Principles of the Igwebuike Philosophy*.

to or signaled. In other words, in communication, there is a back and forth movement of signs. This back and forth movement of signs is conveyed verbally and non-verbally by words and actions. A word is the sign of some "thing"²¹ which can be understood by the hearer when pronounced by the speaker.²² According to Augustine, a sign is something that shows itself to the senses and something other than itself to the mind.²³ He repeats this further in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, where he says,

a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, cause something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself, just as when we see a footprint, we conclude that an animal whose footprint this is has passed by; and when we see smoke, we know that there is fire beneath; and when we hear the voice of a living man, we think of the feeling in his mind and when the trumpet sounds, soldiers know that they are to advance or retreat or do whatever else the state of the battle requires.²⁴

Augustine gives two distinct types of signs, namely; the natural and the conventional signs.

Natural signs are those which, apart from any intention or desire of using them as signs, do yet lead to the knowledge of something else, as for example, smoke when it indicates fire. For it is not from any intention of making it a sign that it is so, but through attention to experience we come to know that fire is beneath, even when nothing but smoke can be seen. And the footprints of an animal passing by belong to this class of signs. And the countenance of an angry or sorrowful man indicates the feeling in his mind, independently of his will; and in the same way every other emotion of the mind is betrayed by the tell-tale countenance, even though we do nothing with the intention of making it known.²⁵

As pertaining to *signa naturalia*, no mental state is induced when such signs arise in our consciousness; that is to say that we do not enter into any mental state when we become aware of such signs. For instance, when we think of some

²¹ A thing according to Augustine, in his *De Dialectica*, V, «is whatever is felt (sensed) or understood or 'latet' (is hidden, inapprehensible) »

²² Augustine, *De Dialectica*, V. «uniuscuiusque rei signum, quod ab audiente possit intelligi, a loquente prolutum.»

²³ Ibid. «Signum est quod se ipsum sensui et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit. »

²⁴ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, i, 1.

²⁵ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, i, 2.

natural or cultural entity, like a tree, or a flag, we are not aware of any "mental state" as such. Rather, we are aware of a tree or a flag,²⁶ just that. Conventional signs are those which living beings mutually exchange for the purpose of showing the feelings of their minds or their perceptions, or their thoughts.²⁷ In other words, conventional signs are the exclusive reserve of the human beings. These are articulate signs that reflect the mindset, thought pattern, emotional state, and mood of the one who is talking or speaking. The hearer is able to perceive directly and understand wholesomely what the speaker is saying. In conventional signs, *signa data*, mental states are induced. Augustine continues,

Nor is there any reason for giving a sign except the desire of drawing for the conveying into another's mind what the giver of the sign has in his own mind. We wish then to consider and discuss this class of signs so far as men are concerned with it... the beasts, too, have certain signs among themselves by which they make known the desires of their mind. For when the poultry-cock has discovered food, he signals with his voice for the hen to run to him, and the dove by cooing calls his mate, or is called by her in turn...²⁸

According to a medieval Thomistic commentator, John Poinsett, there are two things that concur to constitute the general rationale of a sign. The first is the rationale of something manifestative or representative. The second is an order to another, specifically, on the one hand, to the thing which is represented (which must be other than the sign, for nothing is a sign of itself nor signifies itself), and, on the other hand, to the cognitive power to which the sign manifests and represents the thing distinct from itself.²⁹ To the division of the sign, he notes:

There are twofold division of the sign formal and instrumental signs... but insofar as signs are ordered to something signified, they are divided according to the cause of that ordering into natural and stipulative and customary. A formal sign is the formal awareness which represents of itself, not by means of another. An instrumental sign is one that represents something other than itself from a pre-existing cognition of itself as an object, as the footprint of an ox represents an ox. And this definition is usually given for signs generally. A natural sign is one that

²⁶ J.N. Deely, *Cognition from a Semiotic Point of View*, in *Semiotics 1981*, J.N. Deely-M.D. Lenhart (eds), Plenum Press, New York, 1983, 23.

²⁷ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, II, ii, 3.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John Poinsett, *Tractatus De Signis*, Part one, bk 1, q.1i, 646a9-41, University of California Press Berkeley, Los Angeles, California, 1985.

represents from the nature of a thing, independently of any stipulation and custom whatever, and so it represents the same for all, as smoke signifies a fire burning. A stipulated sign is one that represents something owing to an imposition by the will of a community, like the linguistic expression "man." A customary sign is one that represents from use alone without any public imposition, as napkins upon the table signify a meal.³⁰

What should be said here is that, in the thought pattern of John Poinset, also known as John of St Thomas, there are two categories of signs. There is the sign that is ordered according to power and that which is ordered according to something signified. As regards that which is ordered according to power, the sign can either be the formal or the instrumental. And for that which is ordered according to something signified, it is divided into the natural, stipulative and the customary sign.

In the light of the explication given by John Poinset, we can situate *Igwebuike as a stipulative sign, one that represents something owing to an imposition by the will of the community*.³¹ This implies that a stipulative sign is one that is knowable not immediately but mediately by means of another. The knowledge of *Igwebuike* is mediated upon the principles on which it stands.

In line with the Aristotelian categories of the substance and nine accidents, A Sign resides in the level of a relation. This relation, according to John Poinset, is not a transcendental one, according to the way of being, but is an ontological one, that is according to the way the relation has being.³² While it stands that to represent another is indeed required for a sign, a sign does not consist in this alone; for a sign adds something beyond representing, and formally bespeaks of representing another deficiently, or dependency upon the very thing signified, and by substituting in the capacity of that thing. And thus, a sign respects a significate, not as something purely self-manifested and self-illuminated, but as the principal knowable and the measure of the sign, something in whose place the sign is surrogated and whose vicegerent the sign is in bringing that knowable thing to a cognitive power.³³ A vivid example is in the case of smoke that signifies fire. As an ontological relation, a sign is not formally a relation but is the foundation of a relation. John Poinset, notes,

³⁰ John Poinset, *Tractatus De Signis*, Part one, Chapter II, 9b34-10a26.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, Part one, bk 1, q.1i 647a16-b26.

³³ Ibid.

Therefore a sign does not formally consist in a relation, but in the fundament (foundation) of a relation. The major premise follows from the definition of sign. If a sign is "that which represents something to a knowing power," then it is accordingly something leading the power to an object signified.³⁴

The foundation of a sign is seen in its propensity to move the cognizing power, or arouse in such mind, that to which it points to. It is to this that John Poinset refers to the sign as a mover or an arouser, because it belongs to the capacity of arousing or moving.³⁵

Igwebuike as a stipulative sign bears the major mark of a sign, namely; that it is the foundation of a relation. It is for this that we say that a stipulated sign moves (acts) by reason of the imposition, not as knowable immediately and by reason of itself, but mediately and through another, just as any other unreal beings; and thus, we say, presupposing that its knowability is got by borrowing, a stipulated sign takes on the rationale of something moving and representing, just as it also takes on the rationale of something knowable.³⁶

***Igwebuike* in the Light of Semiosis: Part Two**

As already noted there are principles on which *Igwebuike* is founded, and these include:

1. The principle of identity
2. The principle of hierarchy
3. The principle of contrariety
4. The principle of unity³⁷

Yet, *Igwebuike* is anchored on an Igbo-centric African worldview, which, according to Iroegbu, is characterized by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny. It is a complementary philosophy which understands life as a shared reality.³⁸ It indicates literally 'number is strength' or 'number is power;' that is, when human beings come together in

³⁴ *ibid*, 650b20-651a14.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 652a14-b16

³⁶ *Ibid*, 653b29-654a40

³⁷ A.I. Kanu, *On the Origin and Principles of the Igwebuike Philosophy*.

³⁸ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike As An Igbo-African Ethic Of Reciprocity*, in *Igwebuike. An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 3 No 2, March 2017, 153-160.

solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force.³⁹ Its English equivalent is 'complementarity'. At this level, no task is beyond their collective capability. It is a concept that was employed by African traditional philosophers of the complementary school of thought to discuss the nature of the observed African reality.⁴⁰ *Igwebuike* rests on the African principles of solidarity and complementarity. It argues that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings. This is based on the African philosophy of community, which is the underlying principle and unity of African Traditional Religions and philosophical experience.⁴¹ According to B.I. Ekwulu:

If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation.⁴²

It is a sign that indicates a move towards the other, the "YOU", for the sake of existential thriving of the self, the "I". This is the bedrock of *Igwebuike*. The implication of this is the rich complementarity that the *Igwebuike* philosophy brings to bear on the broader spectrum of philosophy. It indicates how much of the "other" is in the "I", or better put, how much of you is contained in me, and me in you.⁴³ Ekwulu opines further that the self is not only completed in relating with the other, but that it attains self-realization in the other:

I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou

³⁹ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike as a trend in African philosophy* in *Igwebuike*. An African Journal of Arts and Humanities, 2. 1. 2016, 97-101.

⁴⁰ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike as an Igbo-African hermeneutic of globalization* in *Igwebuike*: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities. 2. 1. 2016, 1-7.

⁴¹ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike as a trend in African philosophy* in *Igwebuike*.

⁴² B.I. Ekwulu, *Igbo concept of Ibe (the other) as a philosophical solution to the ethnic conflicts in African countries* in B. I. Ekwulu (Ed.), *philosophical reflections on African issues*, Enugu Publications, Delta, 2010, 183-192

⁴³ D. Iwuh OSA, *Action Understanding Is Not Entirely Neutral It Is Existential, It Is Igwebuike*, in *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* Vol. 5 No 6, September 2019, 51-70.

there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They',
there is no 'We'.⁴⁴

It is within this being-laden context, which is life as sharedness, that all questions of meaning can be handled adequately and fully within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations.⁴⁵ According to Kanu, from the foregoing, this explains why the Igbo would refer to the 'Other' as *Ibe*, which means 'a piece of' or 'a part of', as in *ibe anu* (a piece of meat) or *ibe ede* (a piece of cocoyam). The Igbo would, therefore, refer to the 'other person' as *ibe m*, which means 'my piece' or *mmadu ibe m* (my fellow human being). This is the concept also employed in reference to relationships and reciprocity: love one another (*hunu ibe unu n'anya*); help one another (*nyere nu ibe unu aka*); respect one another (*sopuru nu ibe unu*), etc. Since, the 'other' refers to my own piece; it would, therefore, mean that to love the other is to love oneself, to help the other is to help oneself and to respect the other is to respect oneself.⁴⁶ Put in another way, to hate the other is to hate oneself, to refuse help to the other is to refuse help to oneself and to disrespect the other is to disrespect oneself.⁴⁷

This complementarity that is the crux of the *Igwebuike* is that which is being given out as a sign or symbol that ought to be understood. It is a concept that is existential and ontological, arising from a culture and a people that have assimilated within themselves the importance of standing together and working together. It does not negate the reality of individuality; it rather pays a lot of tributaries to it by means of emphasis, as seen in the principle of identity (which is one of the principles, albeit the first principle, of the *Igwebuike*). As to the human individuality, it also endorses the fact of contraries, in life, in reality (physical and spiritual), in the mindset of persons, etc. That is to say that, in just as we would find contraries in reality and in every aspect that surrounds the human person, there is also bound to be contraries in thought patterns in each individual. This also emphasizes the individuality in persons. It supports and aligns itself with the principle of hierarchy, which appreciates the fact that in reality, although the physical is separated from the spiritual, yet there seems to be a communication between both, a communication of forces; the spiritual stands as a force higher than that of the physical. Yet in the singular reality of the spiritual, there is a gradation of powers, a diversity of forces, inherent in all these

⁴⁴ B.I. Ekwulu, *Igbo concept of Ibe (the other) as a philosophical solution to the ethnic conflicts in African countries*.

⁴⁵ I.I. Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda. New complementary ontology. Beyond world immanentism, ethnocentric reduction and impositions*, Lit Verlag Publications, Munster, 2007, 252-253.

⁴⁶ A.I. Kanu, *Igwebuike As An Igbo-African Ethic Of Reciprocity*.

⁴⁷ D. Iwuh OSA, *Action Understanding Is Not Entirely Neutral It Is Existential, It Is Igwebuike*.

is the presence of contraries, all working together for the furtherance of one cause, namely existence. This is also visible in the physical realm. Nonetheless, there is a united working of each person, force or power, in a united front (the principle of unity), for the sake of existence. According to I.M. Onyeocha, "the African conceives of reality in terms of a universe of forces that are linked together, and are in constant interplay with one another".⁴⁸ This is because what is pertinent to *Igwebuike* is not that the branch grows out of the tree; it is that the branch remains connected to the tree, sharing one life force. It knows the tree as much as the tree knows it.⁴⁹ *Igwebuike* understands every individual reality as part and completion of the whole, and thus, there is a unity in the midst of diversity. *Igwebuike* presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations.⁵⁰

As a stipulative sign, what does *Igwebuike* indicate? From the aforementioned, we have seen solidarity; we have also seen complementarity and we earlier saw togetherness. And all these are aimed towards one end, namely, Existence. The beauty of the human existence is seen not in isolation, but in interaction; it is not seen in a solipsistic reality, but in a shared reality; it is not seen in "I" alone, but in "YOU and I".

Final Remarks

A cursory look at the work of John Poinsett, also known as John of St Thomas, will reveal that his definition and understanding of signs have no special affinity with the real or the unreal, being equally at home in signifying either. That is to say that signs can be equally and conveniently used to explain both the real and the unreal, the abstract and the concrete. Again, signs are necessarily mind-dependent, for it is the function of a sign as such to represent, not to explain. It follows that to some extent, signs can take on a life of their own. Sign thus, is a being in its own right, as our words do, becoming relatively mind-independent as they are embedded in our culture by linguistic habit. Words, that are internally and externally representations of signs, are cultural signs; thus, to translate them is to bridge cultures, bringing one way of life into contact with another. *Igwebuike* philosophy has arisen from the Igbo people with their own culture, mode of thinking and operation. But, it is philosophy that has far-reaching implications. The *Igwebuike* sign is one that does not seek to explain what it stands for; it only seeks to represent or indicate what it refers to, namely;

⁴⁸ I.M. Onyeocha, Africa's idea about the nature of reality in *Maryland Studies*. 3. 5., 2006, 89-105.

⁴⁹ D. Iwuh OSA, *Action Understanding Is Not Entirely Neutral It Is Existential, It Is Igwebuike*.

⁵⁰ A.I. Kanu, *On the Origin and Principles of the Igwebuike Philosophy*.

complementarity, solidarity and togetherness. As already noted, it is a sign that shows how much of the “I” resides in the “YOU”, and how the “YOU” and the “I” complement each other. It represents how much can be achieved when human persons graft together, working for a well-defined purpose. In his *Magna Moralia*, Aristotle defined the friend as a second self, “For the friend is as we assert a second self”.⁵¹ There are far-reaching implications to this Aristotelian mode of thinking, one of which is this: Since this friend is a second self, it stands affirmative that knowledge of the self, can also be attained by focusing on the friend, the second self. Even though Aristotle downsized this relationship to existing between friends, that is, friends of character (friends of virtue, in the thought of Aristotle, are rare, because people of this kind are few.⁵²), we can in the thought pattern of the *Igwebuike* extend this beyond the confines of the friends of character. *Igwebuike* maintains that we are all born out of one thread. It is to this effect that “I” find myself in “YOU”, as much as “YOU” find yourself in “Me”. As rare as it might seem to be, the friendship of virtue was never rare to the African, for it has always been a part of the African. We might allude here that the friendship of this sort (friendship of virtue) in the present time, for the African, is rare; *Igwebuike* calls out to us all, telling us to retrace our steps, to find out who we truly are. In *Igwebuike*, the strength of the other is my strength; the glory of the other is my glory; the positives of the other and her concomitant negatives are mine. I live for the other, just as the other lives for me. It is a reality founded on the friendship of virtue, thus making it an existential reality that ought to stand the test of time.⁵³

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⁵¹ Aristotle, *Magna Moralia*, Bk II, I2i2b20-I2i3a23, Translated by G. Stock, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1908.

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