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AFRICAN COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

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Introduction

The African Communication Systems course offers a comprehensive examination of communication practices, traditions, and systems across the diverse and rich cultures of the African continent. Students will explore the historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts that shape communication dynamics within African societies. This course aims to provide students with a nuanced understanding of African communication systems, emphasizing both traditional and contemporary modes of communication, and their significance in fostering social cohesion, preserving cultural heritage, and addressing contemporary challenges.

Module 1: WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is a process by which a sender passes information to the decoder or receiver. It involves contacting, relaying and transferring of ideas, news, secrets, messages, orders and information from people, groups and communities to others. Communication in general terms can be described as the act of sending and receiving messages from a source through a medium.

MacBride et al (1981) define communication not just as the exchange of news and messages but as an individual and collective activity embracing all transmissions and sharing of ideas, facts and data. So, communication may be looked at as a system or process. However, this definition does not highlight the feedback component and thus has not fully described the process of communication.

According to Okunna (1999:6), communication is a complex process. Because the communication process is an exchange or sharing of information or a message, it requires certain basic component. These include the source from whom the message originates; the medium through which the message is conveyed; the audience who receives the message; and the feedback which is the reaction of the receiver to the message.

What Are the Functions of Communication?

Welcome to this sub-section which is a continuation of our discussion of communication, but from a different angle. Now that we know what 'communication' means, it is important to also know the functions. That is, what exactly does communication do in any society? This sub-section focuses on the functions of communication.

Every society has evolved ways of transmitting information from one person to another and Africa is not an exception. Again, in Africa, the traditional communication systems apart from transmitting information which includes the news function and other announcements, entertains, persuades, and also is used for social exchanges (Doob, 1966). MacBride et al (1981) identified some specific functions of communication as:

a. information

- b. socialisation
- c. motivation
- d. education
- e. cultural promotion
- and f. entertainment

Information: the collection, storage, processing and dissemination of news, data, pictures etc required for everyday life.

Socialisation: the provision of a common fund of knowledge which enables people to operate as effective members of the society in which they live.

Motivation: the fostering of individual or community activities, geared to the pursuit of agreed goals. **Education:** the transmission of knowledge so as to foster intellectual development, character formation and acquisition of skills.

Cultural promotion: the dissemination of cultural and artistic products for the purpose of preserving the heritage of the past.

Entertainment: the diffusion through signs, symbols, sounds and images for personal and collective recreation and enjoyment.

What is African Communication Systems?

Olulade (1998) stated that traditional communication as used in Africa is an admixture of social conventions and practices that have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems which have almost become standard practices for society. It is a complex system of communication, which pervades all aspects of rural African life.

According to Denga (1988) cited in Mede (1998), it has varied characteristics which include dynamism and the fact of its being a multi-media and multi-channel system. It is perhaps the most important way by which the ruralizes communicate among themselves and with others.

So, despite the advent of the modern day media in Africa, the use of traditional cues and materials is still very much common and adaptable, acceptable and recognizable by the people.

Uniqueness of African Communication Systems

Below are some of the uniqueness of African communication systems.

- It is understood by members of a community

- It readily appeals and connects with the people's language, culture, belief, myth, legend and customs, which enhances effectiveness of communication (relates to values, norms, ethos and culture of Africans)
- Uses symbols, values and indigenous institutions, which enhance messages' effectiveness
- Projects African historical past (traditions)
- Derived from the culture, beliefs, and the way of life of Africans
- Rooted among the local people and respected by the people, especially the ruralites
- Embedded in the culture of the people, which is the driving force
- Relies on indigenous technology, employs values and symbols that the people identify with.

From a general point of view, the African Communication system is seen as a traditional or indigenous mode of communication and it is indigenous. Indigenous communication is steeped in traditional culture. So, what is culture?

Module 2: WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is necessary for a healthy society. It is usually established from enlightenment, acquired through education, observation and exposure to an environment. Culture is the belief, custom, tradition, practices and social behaviour of a particular nation and its people. In anthropology, culture is further defined as the patterns of behaviour and thinking that people living in a social group learn, create and share. Culture distinguishes one human group from another.

People's culture includes their rules of behaviour, language, rituals, arts, style of dress, religion and economic systems. So, culture is the totality of the way of life of a people through which they associate and relate with their environment. Tradition can be said to be the norms and values of each individual group under a particular ethnic group or tribe.

Culture is dynamic i.e. changes with time while tradition is a bit stagnant. For example, strictly traditional marriage has changed over time to include the church and court marriage (James and Soola, 1990). Culture and tradition are interwoven, but culture is highly influenced by the environment and vice versa. Culture is strongly linked with time - changes with time. So, for our purpose, African communication systems can be described as that form of communication that has its root in the African environment. It is original in the African locality and to the natives.

It has been referred to variously as traditional and indigenous communication by various authors. Wilson (1987) in his own definition, stated that traditional communication is "a continuous process of information dissemination, entertainment and education used in societies which have not been seriously dislocated by Western culture or any other external influence". Wilson also stressed that the ownership of the traditional communication media lies with the society.

The Neglect of African Communication Systems

African communication systems constitute an integral part of the sociocultural heritage of Africans. However, according to Ibagere (1994:81- 82),... Civilisation, which has brought about modernisation, has compelled the African to cannibalise some of [the traditional modes of communication]. The direction of modernisation which has tilted strongly in favour of Westernisation has dislocated almost all the modes in the urban areas and supplanted them with the modern mass media.

Thus, the socio-economic terrain has made it impossible to relate to these cannibalised modes, especially in the urban areas. For example, it is now virtually impossible to use smoke as a means of attracting attention in African cities, because it could be interpreted differently... because the context in which urban dwellers relate to themselves ...is quite different from that of the rural society which is still relevant to the people's experiences as mode of communication.

These traditional modes of communication have, therefore, continued to exist by the grace of the slow pace of development, especially in communication which has impeded the spread of the modern mass media (in term of hardware and software) to the rural areas, where these modes are the only means of sustaining the information needs of the people.

Africa is a vast continent that is made up of diverse peoples. These peoples existed for centuries before their contacts with the colonial masters. Each had its own unique language and cultural patterns. Within each cultural setting, however, there existed well established systems for sharing information, opinion formation and cultural values. Buttressing this position, Rogers cited in Opubor (1975) stated that "a far flung network of communication existed in 'less developed' countries before the introduction of the print or electronic media."

Although a rich network of communication channels existed in indigenous Africa before the introduction of modern media of communication, studies into these local channels of communication is quite recent as African scholars in the past and even up till now have concentrated much of their research efforts mainly on the western media of communication such as radio, television, newspapers and magazines. It is therefore no wonder that the quantity and variety of research literature on traditional channels of communication in Africa are very scanty.

This text therefore brings into focus the various aspects of African indigenous communication systems aimed at inculcating in the minds of people that the various peoples of Africa had ways of sharing information that were as effective as modern day media of communication.

It is hoped that this text would add to the general efforts of African and Afrocentric scholars at salvaging our culture; lead to a greater understanding of African systems of communication as reflected in the diverse cultures of the various peoples of Africa; and would be of benefit to communication policy makers and development communication experts in that it would further

enhance their knowledge about the communication needs of those living in rural areas and how to effectively reach them.

Why Study African Communication Systems?

African peoples in spite of their great linguistic and ethnic diversity have been communicating among themselves in a variety of ways for a long time. The sheer range of a variety of human and inter-personal communication on that immense continent poses a challenge to contemporary communication scholars (Hatchen, 1971:15)

A look into the reality of the existence of indigenous communication systems in Nigeria shows that before the advent of modern means of communication, there were traditional means in Nigeria by which information is made to reach its recipient. There were also means of propagating the collective knowledge of the recognised custodians of the people's oral traditions. Some of these are still being used. From the above, it is obvious that a variety of traditional communication channels existed in Africa, particularly in Nigeria before the introduction of the modern mass media systems.

So, it should be noted that a communication system which does not take into account the traditional, social and cultural dynamics of society will only succeed in alienating the highly placed from the majority of the people in the rural areas (Wilson, 1982).

This statement summarises the effect of negligence in the study of our indigenous sources of communication, opinion formation, processes of decision and actions. What is responsible? According to Ibagere (1994), Western education is the bane of these, as it has made people to continue regarding African communication systems with contempt.

The question at this juncture is: should this be allowed to continue? Again, Ibagere (1994:96) stated that: The modern mass media, however, cannot serve, fully, the communication needs of Africa, unless they are combined with the traditional modes of communication. Therefore, rather than supplanting these traditional modes, efforts should be geared towards harnessing and developing them to serve our information needs in general.

Therefore, there is the need to increase studies on our traditional communication systems not just to add to knowledge but also to find alternative systems of information dissemination; fully understand the dynamics and systems of delivering information and receiving feedback among the various ethnic groups in indigenous Africa who live mostly in the rural areas, and who are currently outside the effective reach of the westernised mass media (Opubor, 1975).

Furthermore, Ugboajah (1972) cited in Wilson and Unoh (1991:28) stated, "The most important thing about African's traditional communication is that the audience has learnt to attach great significance to it. Traditional media has (sic) force and credibility. They put stability into African's

indigenous institutions.” So, from all that has been discussed so far, one can argue like Opubor (1975) that African traditional channels of communication represent the most potent mechanism for communication among the various peoples of Africa.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the flaws that may be inherent in the traditional channels of communication in Africa, the fact remains as Hatcher (1971:15) pointed out, “the sheer range and variety of traditional communication offer a challenge to contemporary [African] communication scholars”. This underscores the need to stimulate scholarship in this area of communication studies. Hence, we should study it to educate ourselves on the culture and heritage of Africa.

Put succinctly, we should study African communication systems for knowledge and because of its relevance and acceptance in Africa. Looking at knowledge, studying African communication systems will help us to understand our cultures, idiosyncrasies and peculiarities. Again, it relates to African culture, values and beliefs which engenders acceptance. On relevance, it is still relevant for communicating with some people in Africa.

Characteristics Of African Communication Systems

Value

Values in communication deal with the effectiveness of communication. Effectiveness means that messages are received by intended audience, interpreted as conceived by the sender; message is remembered over a reasonably extended period of time, and message is used appropriately. African communication systems have value, and it is an important aspect of our culture. It is the agency by which culture is preserved, handed down, responds to new situations and adapts. The influx and explosion of exogenous media endangers the survival of and may even lead to the erosion of traditional African communication, which might threaten cultural transmission and the survival of indigenous technical knowledge (ITK).

Reach

African media are ubiquitous because they reach many rural people who are not reached by even the most widespread exogenous channels. So, it should always be realised in designing communication strategy and in choosing channels of communication that television, newspapers and magazines are largely confined to the urban areas in the developing countries. African communication systems are useful in conveying messages to people out of the reach of exogenous channels.

Channel Credibility

Messages transmitted through the exogenous (i.e. externally controlled) mass media are more often than not, greeted with hostility or scepticism. Since traditional channels are familiar to the target and controlled locally, they are deemed credible.

Channels of Change

Researches into the diffusion of innovations have shown the importance of informal and interpersonal contacts in persuading people to adopt, or reject innovations (Opubor, 1975). Opubor argued that mass media are strong in creating awareness but weak in persuading people to adopt change. So, such contacts are more commonly made through the traditional channels. Hence, traditional channels of communication are important conduits of change. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate indigenous and exogenous communication systems to enhance to support development. Although some development intervention programmes depend on information diffusion processes to take innovations and development messages to their target audiences, many have made explicit use of traditional channels to reach their intended beneficiaries of innovations.

Module 5: Useful for the Collections and Dissemination of Development Information

Development programmes can utilise traditional communication channels for the collection and dissemination of development information. Data on the local situation and response to outside initiatives can be gathered by attending village or social groups meetings and interviewing local people. At some time, participants in a communication system act as a recipient-disseminator. So, recipientdisseminators who are linked to outside societies are important conduits for lateral exchange of both indigenous and exogenous innovations. This means that there is an interface between knowledge and communication types (Chambers, 1997).

Problems of Indigenous Communication

Indigenous communication has some shortcomings. It has a problem of defining and explaining issues and illustration in modern language (lack appropriate terminologies). Again indigenous communication is an extension and externalisation of the individual knowledge system. So, the relevance of indigenous communication depends on the setting/area of occupation. There are the core and peripheral people who make up the indigenous people. Essentially, indigenous communication systems thrives most where they employ such indigenous forms of communication as the town announcer. Despite these shortcomings, indigenous communication would continue to be relevant for as long as there are traditional societies or settings.

Module 3: CLASSIFICATION OF THE TRADITIONAL CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION IN AFRICA

For the purpose of a fair guide, it is necessary to explain meanings of the two words – traditional and channel as used in this text. Traditional as used in this text refers to cultural institutions, ceremonies, events, and arts of African ancestors observed, practised and perpetuated by successors from generation to generations; while Channels are link up ways and means by which ideas, messages information, orders, instructions, secrets and movements are carried out, contacted and contracted. So, traditional channels of communication are numerous as some of them tend to serve specific or secret purposes and others serve the interests of all in general.

Though some appear to be obsolete, their uses still linger on today in rural societies. They are commonly used to advise, inform, warn, encourage, and incite people on what, how, when and where to act. They are of different types. Akpan (1977) mentioned bells, canon shots, drums, artificial communication, folksongs and proverbs, which made him conclude that traditional media are more visual than audio. Again, Modum (1980) mentioned music and rituals as media of communication in indigenous Nigeria. Another scholar, Ugboajah (1979) also noted that traditional societies of Nigeria communicate more of informal than formal mechanism. He cited songs, dances, symbols, cult scripts, iconography, linguistic and market place dialogue as channels.

Another similar but more encompassing view is that the informal channels are rooted in the people's governments, social structures, titles and secret societies, marriage structures, cultures and in their laws and customs. Ugboajah (1979:43) asserted, "the most significant thing about Africa's traditional communication is that the audience has learnt to attach great significance to it.

Local media are also said to have force and credibility and that puts stability into the African indigenous institutions". An attempt has been made below to classify them.

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal Communication Verbal communication refers to direct contacts and actions or words of mouth. People communicate through discussions and songs as needs arise. By this mode, people meet face to face to discuss, decide and act. It is practised in almost all affairs of life from age to age. Since, most of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria were basically non-literate, oral forms of communication played a significant role in their indigenous communication network.

It offers them opportunities for finding peaceful solutions to problems of life. It encourages and promotes socialization, peace and harmony among individuals, groups and societies. In many

places, the most important channel for the circulation of news (information) is the word of mouth i.e. verbal communication. Oreh (1980) divided verbal communication, into three main groups.

The first, which is spoken communication – consists of simple statements, proverbs and riddles and narrative. The second group narratives – folktales (folktale characters or folktales which contain both animals, human and superhuman characters); and the third, mythology, and legends. Further looking at the verbal mode, Wilson and Unoh (1991:23) stated, “[verbal] communication is an activity that is common to all cultures except in those cultures (if any) without a language.”

It uses the human mouth, including all the sounds made with the mouth as they relate to spoken word. Ibagere (1994) listed the following forms as verbal modes – spoken language; song; poetry, chant and incantations. Song, poetry, chant and incantations are discussed under demonstratives. So, spoken language is discussed below.

Module 4 and 5: CHANNELS OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Spoken Language

Language is a set of arbitrary symbols, matched with meaning and used by a group of people for communication. So, spoken language is commonly referred to as word of mouth and used for everyday conversation. It is easy to relate to most common and most used of all traditional modes of communication.

According to Ibagere (1994:84): Since it is the most common mode, it is easy to understand and is the first, after body language, to be learnt by a stranger. It is usually employed alone but it could be combined with any other mode, depending on the circumstance [and need].

For example, one could accompany one’s speech with music to make the speech more effective, depending on the occasion. However, such combination should be significantly functional in enhancing the creation of the right impact on those who receive the information being passed by the communicator.

Furthermore, language communicates one’s cultural area of origin. The tone, intonation and sound production amongst others could reveal the speakers’ linguistic group or mother tongue. For instance, some Nigerian speakers of English as second language, through speech communication.

Characteristics of Language

- It depends on sound for its meaning and the correspondence between sound and meaning is determined by culture (society itself).

- Language is a structured system of symbols i.e. produced based on linguistic rules. It is articulate, systematic and ordered.
- It is creative i.e. there is no limit to which you cannot use human language (you can use it to write plays, tell stories). The limits of human language are unlimited
- Exhibits displacement. Displacement here means the ability to talk about an event that is far away in space and time i.e. you can use language to tell what has already happened.
- It gives us the ability to communicate about “the not here and the not now” (Rothwell, 2000: 91).

Human language has two aspects – the biological and social aspects. This means that man can speak many languages according to his environment and ability to speak.

Module 6: SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION

Most channels discussed in the various literatures on African communication system reviewed tend to be partial and fail to recognise some classes of people – the physically challenged. Some are blind, deaf, dumb and lame.

At this point, one should consider sign languages (that can be likened to Morse code in Western culture) which is used to communicate with them, for they are part and parcel of the society and are involved in events around them. When and where some other channels exclude them, sign language and natural phenomena are kinder to them.

According to Rothwell (2000:119) “Sign language is not non-verbal because it possess all the characteristics of language”, although used for communication with the physically challenged. It is an aspect of Morse code. Sign language is a traditional channel of communication that is still in use in the modern times. It is shrouded with elements of open secrecies.

It is used for normal, deaf, dumb and even the blind people. It is made up of gestures and signs intended for a particular persons and groups or purposes to the exclusion of others. Others may see, hear and touch them, yet they would not understand what is said or shown. They are secret ways of sending and receiving information, messages and guides on what to do, how to, where to and when to do things.

Non-Verbal Communication

Communication is more than speaking. “Action speaks louder than words”. According to Rothwell (2000:119) “Non-verbal communication is sharing meaning with others nonlinguistically.

” So, it refers to the mode of communication done with the human body and does not involve the use of words. It involves all such modes of communication, which make use of any device other

than the spoken word, song, chant, incantation and other related modes, that make use of the mouth.

This does not suggest that different modes cannot be combined for the purpose of a more lucid dissemination of information. So, it should be noted that any of the verbal modes could be combined with the non-verbal mode (Ibagere, 1994). Ibagere (1994) further classified the non-verbal mode into the following groups: body language, symbology, dance, music and the hardware of music (idiophone, membranophone, chordophone, aerophone and xylophone).

Symbology would be discussed under visuals; dance and music and music hardware under instrumental. So, the main types of non-verbal communication used during transactions include physical appearance, hair; facial expression; and gestural communication.

However, some of them (physical appearance, and hair) are discussed under visual communication while the rest are discussed below as communicating with parts of the human body. Essentially, non-verbal communication is multi-channeled, but this unit only discussed body language.

Module 7: CHANNELS OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Body Language or Gestural Communication

Body language is not peculiar to Africa, but is commonly used in Africa for communication. Body language refers to all signs and gestures made with any part of the human body for the purpose of communication (Ibagere, 1994). Amali (1990:12) asserted, "these gestures and signs contain and emanate messages with meanings".

Essentially, body language involves actions, such as facial contortions, walking and other movements which are used to communicate messages. The particular movements of a person or a people and particular facial expressions and other gestures are used to communicate different messages depending on the circumstance (Ibagere 1994:87).

Communicating with Parts of the Face and Other Parts of Human Body

Parts of the human body such as the face, fingers, eyes, head, nose, and lips constitute media of communication. Below are the various forms. Facial Communication: The eyes and face are the most immediate cues used to form first impressions. On facial expression, Rothwell (2000:132) stated that "the face is your personal billboard, ...it never gets totally hidden".

First the face signals specifies emotional states: a smile signals happiness and a frown signals sadness. The universal emotions identified by all cultures from specific expressions are fear, anger, surprise, contempt, disgust, happiness and sadness. Furthermore, according to Rothwell (2000:131) "eye contact is an important aspect of non-verbal communication. For instance, stress

can be measured by how often someone blinks. Thus one non-verbal cue may suggest relaxed demeanour while another non-verbal cue contradicts the observation.

Eye contact regulates controversial turn taking, communicates involvement and interest, manifests warmth, and establishes connection with others. It can also command attention, or look cold and intimidating.” It should be noted however, that the appropriateness of eye contact differs from culture to culture.

Eye contact invites attention and interpersonal communication is quite dependent on eye contact. For instance, blinking or winking or shutting the eyes in a particular way has much and varied messages to pass across to the other person or group.

Touch Communication: Touching skin is an enormously powerful and important communication code. American playwright Tennessee Williams testified to the power of touch when he wrote, “Devils can be driven out of the heart by the touch of a hand on a hand, or a mouth on a mouth”. Touch is essential to the expression of love, warmth, intimacy, and concern for others. Misuse of touch can repel, frighten, or anger others.

Touch communicates power. Sexual harassment is often an issue of inappropriate, unwanted touch communication, while handshake is most often wanted touch communication and a sign of friendship.

Voice Communication: Voice is second only to face in communicating emotions. Voice communicates information about age, sex, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and regional background. Vocal cues (paralanguage) are divided into three.

They are vocal characteristics (laughing, yelling, moaning, crying, whining, belching); vocal qualifiers (Volume, tone, pitch, resonance, rhythm, rate); and vocal segregates (uh-hum, uh, mm-hmm, ooh, shh). This also obtains in Africa. According to Ogwezzy (1999) groaning, coughing or croaking the voice is generally a warning against a person or his utterances and or actions; and sometimes a sign of slight.

The Differences between Verbal and Non- Verbal Communication

Visual Communication and their Communication Functions

Visuals communicate in traditional African society. It is derived mainly from the sense of sight and knowledge of the peoples of Africa. The mere sight of someone’s tribal marks, hairdo, tattoos, and incisions communicates. Visual communication is used for different purposes and communicates different messages. Each has its own peculiar meaning. Some warn people or signify sundry things. Black for instance communicates mourning; red, signifies danger, fire, war; green, conveys life; black, gloom, white, purity, simplicity, innocence, purity and gaiety; yellow, lightness; brown, blight; and parched environment, communicates famine.

Types of Visual Communication and Examples

Some examples of visual communication channels include dress code, colours, tribal marks, hairdo, tattoos, incisions and other marks on the skin and they all communicate. According to Akpabio (2003), visual communication can be grouped into two – colours and appearance. This author would rather adopt pigmentation and colour as a group instead of colour. Furthermore, this author would add a third group – records.

a) Colour

examples • White • Red • Green • Black

b) Appearance

examples • Physical Appearance • Clothes • Accessories

C. Records

examples • Written • Carved • Painted • Excavation • Memorised • Marked sticks

Module 8: APPEARANCE: PHYSICAL LOOK AND COSTUME\FACIAL MARKS AND TATTOOS\RECORDS

Appearance

Appearance communicates. It might communicate “about ethnic origin and to some extent disposition and attitude to life” (Akpabio, 2003:39). Appearance is discussed from five angles – physical, dress pattern (clothing and accessories), tattoos and tribal marks and records in this unit. These are discussed below. Some Examples and their Communication Functions

Physical Appearance

Physical appearance is a major channel of visual communication in Africa. In Nigeria, people who are tall, light skinned and have a pointed nose commonly identified as Fulanis; while the short and stocky are mostly south easterners and people from Calabar (a city in Cross Rivers State of Nigeria) and so on. Again, short people are said to be aggressive and try to assert themselves, while tall people are more amiable, accommodating and tolerant (Akpabio, 2003). Looking at Africa, people from Congo especially the pigmies are easy to identify mainly by their physical look, while Ghanaian are mostly very dark in complexion.

Costume (Clothing)

Clothes communicate class, social grouping, associations, age, profession and other demographic variables. In Africa, it is easy to identify a person from the kind of cloth the person is putting on.

Again in Nigeria, velvet material (Akwa-Oche) is associated with the south-south and south-east geographical zones; plain George wrapper with the people from Rivers and Bayelsa States; George Wrapper, especially Intorica and Supermint (mainly used for occasions) brands are common among Delta State people; Ankara (Hollandis Dutch wax) with people from the Delta and Edo States, South Eastern and Northern Nigeria.

However, the single yards variant of Hollandis Ankara is more common with Delta State women, while the double yards are more common with the other parts mentioned. Lace materials of various brands, quality and colours are more commonly used in Western Nigeria.

Furthermore, the way it is sewn (designed) and tied communicates. The Itsekiri people of Delta State tie the big wrapper underneath and the small one on top. Igbo women make a blouse and two wrappers and among the Ibos, a married woman ties her wrapper full length, while the unmarried a little above the knee. Hausa women sew a top and skirt/top and wrapper plus a head tie; Edo woman buba and wrapper; and a Delta State woman two wrappers and a matching top commonly made of a different fabric.

Costume (Accessories): Accessories are channels of communication in Africa as various accessories such as neck/wrist/ and waist beads tell about places of origin, show royal status/title in the society, ethnic nationality and occasion amongst others. They are worn to complement clothing and enhance beauty and dignity. The type of dress worn by an old man or woman, whether adorned with beads or not, shows that he or she is a chief or not. Beads and in some cases, caps distinguish a chief while the man with the crown must be the king (Ogwezzy, 1999).

Facial Marks and Tattoos

Although it seems Wilson (1998) classification presented facial marks and tattoos as channels of communication under symbology, this author believes they should be treated as channels of communication under visual communication because of the thematic linkages.

Facial Marks and Tattoos, and their Communication Function

Facial Marks

The use of facial mark as a channel of communication is an age long practice and common among Africans. Such marks are usually on the face and are used as a means of identification, particularly during the periods of inter tribal wars and slave trade. The marks are sometimes associated with aesthetics, a concept that varies from tribe to tribe. According to Doob (1966:83), facial marks and scars communicate personal satisfaction, achievements, status, or ranks and bravery. It is also meant for personal gratification.

To some people it actually gratifies, but some people who were given facial marks, especially on the face when they were young, grow beards to cover them up for various reasons such as to hide

their identity or because they do not like the marks! In Nigeria, facial marks commonly reveal people's ethnic groups i.e. we can tell from where a person comes from by looking at the facial marks.

The Isokos and Urhobos have short horizontal marks on the cheek; Ibos, short vertical on the sides of the forehead; Igalas, three horizontal marks on each side of the mouth, and one vertical on each cheek; Yorubas various depending on the sub-ethnic group. Oyos a group within the Yoruba group, horizontal "tiger" marks normally four to five depending on the sub-ethnic group.

Tattoos

Tattoos are designs printed on people's faces, hands, body and at calves. They are printed for certain reasons and easy identifications. Some are tribal, for fancy or aesthetic interests and to identify easily and silently aristocrats and other castes including slaves (Ogwezy, 1999 and Akpabio, 2003).

Module 9: ICONOGRAPHIC CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION: OBJECTIFIED, FLORAL, PLANTS AND CROPS

Iconographic Communication

Icons are basically symbols. For instance, your photograph is your icon. According to Doob (1966:60), "In a symbolic relation, the medium is able to suggest reality because, not through any necessary or inherent connection but through custom and habituation, the symbol arouses response very similar to those evoked by reality itself."

In some parts of Nigeria, when people who living abroad want to do their traditional marriages and cannot come to Nigeria either (for reasons of cost, or questionable travel documents or their documents are expired and they might be refused entry when returning to the foreign country), their families normally place the enlarged and usually framed photographs of the bride and the bride groom in a strategic place at the venue of the ceremony to represent the couple. This has become established in many parts of Nigeria and it is understood by many Nigerians.

INSTRUMENTAL CHANNELS

What Is Instrumental Communication? Instrumental devices are part of items used for communication in the traditional African society. Ibagere (1994) refers to it as the hardware of music. Every group of people in Africa has instrumental devices that are peculiar to their setting and perform different communication functions.

Such instruments may be totally different from those used by other people or they have special meanings as used by people in other cultures. It is hoped that after studying this unit, you would have become familiar with some instrumental devices used for communication in Africa.

IDIOPHONES

Wooden Drums Drum is the oldest musical instrument. Bunhart (1995) described it as a member of the percussion family which consists of instruments that are played by striking them with the hand, sticks, or other objects. Such other objects may include a pair of enteres or brushes.

Describing the wooden drum Akpabio (2003:14) stated that: ...the wooden drum is made from tree-trunk. To enable it produce mellifluous sounds, the bark is removed and an opening is made at the top. This way when struck with a stick it produces sounds. The drums come in various sizes and shapes and it has various designations.

The Annangs of Akwa-Ibom State refer to the wooden drum with the brass sound as Aworum; the smaller one with the tenor/treble sound as Akporo (Akpabio 2003). Furthermore, Akpabio (2003) citing Akpabot (1975:15) stated that among the Ibibios, there are three main types of wooden drums – Obodom Ubong (royal drum), Obodom Mbre (common drum used by masquerade group), Obodom Usuan Etop or Obodom Ikot (drum for message dissemination). He however, did not specify the functions of the royal drum.

The Communication Functions of Wooden Drums

Drums generally function to summon villagers to village square meetings and other meetings of village importance; summon the villagers for communal labour; remind the people of planned work; communal celebrations; public launching; farm harvest; and for entertainment. When people do not understand the specific messages of the drums, they seek clarification.

In his study of Erian village, Akpan (1977) found that canon shots and drums are used either separately or combined to announce the death of non-members of the church in the village. Wilson (1998:30) drawing from Akwa-Ibom and Cross Rivers States of Nigeria succinctly stated that wooden drums perform four function – installation of kings and royal celebrations; announcement of the passing away of kings; alerting citizens of grave danger; and ushering in various masquerade groups such as Ukwa, Ekombi, Ekong, Ekpo Nyoho and Ekpe.

Bells

In his study of Erian village, Akpan (1977) found that elephant tusk, bells, canon shots and drums are common African channels of communication. According to Akpabio (2003) the bell is referred to in Yoruba as Agogo; Igbo, Ngbirigba; Ibibio, Nkanika; and Hausa, Kararraw. He stated that the bell has wooden handle from which a conical shape metal is suspended. "It produces sound when the ballshaped metal suspended on the inside of the cone-shaped structure hits the side of the structure in the process of jiggling"

The Communication Functions of Bells

A bell “is mostly used to get attention, opening as well as to announce, closing and break-time” (Akpabio, 2003:16). Bells are used as communication instruments mostly by modern institutions especially the Christian churches and schools. They are used to invite or call the congregation to service. During the service too, bells are manipulated to provide melodious tunes to songs. Apart from this, bells are used to silence the congregation, and to signify the end of a particular prayer bit, thereby informing the congregation of the time to open their eyes.

Gongs

The metal gong is made from metal and is V-shaped. It is known in Efik as Akangkang; Ibibio, Akpongpong and Ibo, Ogene (Wilson, 1998:33). Some are carried by the younger persons and beaten by the older people. They are beaten to convey different messages. Gongs are appliances of instrumental sound in traditional channels of communication.

Some are made of woods and others of metals, but mainly of metals. Gongs have an opening called mouth each. They are of different sizes dependent on need and use. There are king size or giant size which is about four feet high and others between ten and eighteen inches long. Their mouths or openings depend also on size.

Module 10: MEMBRANEOPHONES

What are Membranophones? According to Wilson (1987), membranophones are media on which sound is produced through the vibration of membranes. They include all varieties of skin or leather drum. These drums are beaten or struck with well carved sticks. Such drums include the ‘Iya lu’ in the dundun set or drums among the Yoruba, the “Ikoro” by the Igbo and the drum of the Ikine Society among the Kalabari (Akinfeleye, 1986). It is also called ‘Ajo’ among the Tiv people of Nigeria. (Mede,1998).

The Communication Functions of Skin Drums

Among the ukwuani speaking people of Ndokwa West Local Government Area of Delta State, the talking drums are used to stimulate and incite people into actions. Of course, they are also used to mellow down people’s tempers or soothe them, or cheer them up. They produce vibrations that raise spirits of people at tense moments. They are mainly used during festivals, wrestling contests, some burial ceremonies, hunting expeditions, installation of chiefs, etc (Ogwezzy, 1999).

During festivals, talking drums are put into rampant uses by all age grades and groups to call their grades and groups into moods, actions and to assemble them. During other ceremonies, they are used to encourage chief artists – dancers and wrestlers to be keen, strong and dexterous (Ogwezzy, 1999). Talking drums direct chiefs on steps and skills to adopt during public exhibitions to avoid errors and win public acclamations during their initiations in foot-work dances.

So, one other special use of the talking drums is the noble dance during installation of chiefs. During the dance, the rub-a-dub drums tell, direct and influence actors' steps and behaviours at every dance. It incites, excites and stirs them into gale action, when they have to demonstrate various aspects of past adventures and gallantry. When messages and instructions from the instruments die down or slowly fade away; actors slump as if they have just ended a marathon race (Ogwezzy, 1999).

AEROPHONES

Whistles, Pipes and Flutes

Whistling by forcing breath through closed lips communicate in Africa. Similarly, Akpabio (2003) stated that the use of instruments like deer horn, ivory tusk, gourd or reed pipes serve as devices and for the most parts as musical instruments in African communication. Similarly, drawing from the Ukwuani speaking people of Ndokwa West Local Government Area of Delta State, some examples are discussed below.

Module 11 and 12: DANCE AND SONG

Dance

Dance could be defined as the rhythmic movement of the body in time and space. In the artistic sense, dance could be considered in terms and movement created just for its own sake, even above its interest of meaning. But dance as a mode of communication must be considered against the backdrop of what meaning it makes (Ibagere, 1994:88).

In Africa, dance is an important mode of communication among a people because different dances connote different things. Dance involves the movement of the body, which is the basic material in time and space. So, dance is an art. The regularity of the movement (times) and the design of movements (use of space and steps) combine to give it meaning.

Thus in Africa, meanings are attributed to different dances whenever they are performed. In this way, a dance becomes a symbol when completed.

Song (Amo in Tiv; and Ebu in Ukwuani)

According to Ibagere (1994:84) a song is "couched in spoken language and expressed melodiously in musical succession articulately." It is the lyric in music and used in particular instance. It is a potent channel of communication in Africa.

The Communication Functions of Song In looking at the functions of song, Wilson (1998:41) stated that "in some traditional societies, grapevine stories are presented in songs by cultural groups and other social groups." Wilson (1998:41) further stated that itinerant music entertainment groups use satire, criticism, moralisation, praise, symbolism, didacticism, suggestion and labelling

to communicate with individuals, groups and society at large. Such groups might include the Akata, Ekpo, and age grades in Akwa-Ibom and Cross River States. Also, gossips about the rich and proud are presented in the lucid details in music.

Types of Song

Some songs are for mourning or celebrations, while other are for title installation, praise, show of emotions and so on. Songs contain a great deal of information and many songs are essentially used to pass on information to people. Lyrics of such songs are composed for special occasions. They are categorised based on the meanings they portray.

Frustration and Sorrow

Among the Binis in Edo State, Nigeria, a woman beaten by her husband expresses her frustration in sorrowful songs.

Praise

Praise songs are used for praising the Almighty God. They are sometimes composed for respected members of the society and sung at occasions. According to Akpabio (2003:3), they are “usually directed at individuals or gods based on reasons ranging from victory in war, military prowess, coronation ceremonies, bountiful harvest, [highlight virtues of love, kindness, humility] or at inspiration to carry out a task.” Praise songs generally eulogies and shower encomiums – praise heroic acts, encourage good deeds in the community.

Lullaby

Lullabies are soft songs with sweet lyrics, which appeal to babies and meant to pacify them. Mothers and caregivers use them to put babies to sleep. Essentially, they are meant to lull babies to sleep or sooth and stop them from crying. The songs’ rhythmic nature or the promises contained in their lull are intended to send babies to sleep.

Dirge

Dirges are sung at the funerals of loved ones and are believed to enhance a smooth passage to the world beyond (Akpabio, 2003). It is also meant to encourage the deceased family and friends, to pray God to give them the fortitude to bear the loss.

Worship

Songs meant to tune the soul of man to the Almighty God in worship. It is meant to lift the soul from present problems, to give thanks to God.

Unity

Songs composed to show and promote togetherness, for instance, the national anthem, church anthems and other songs by musicians.

Satire

Done to criticise someone or people especially those in authority. It is used to address social problems so as to cause a positive change in society. Essentially, it is used to address inequalities in the society, warn or castigate a bad act/wrong doing in order to free and liberate the people from inhuman, authoritarian and apartheid governments amongst others. Proponent of this type of song is the Late Fela Anikulapo Kuti and a contemporary

Love Song

Used to express emotional feelings towards a loved one commonly used by lovers .It is also used by parents for their children.