

PRAGMA-SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF KOLANUT RITUAL IN TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE CEREMONIES IN NIKE

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Abstract

The people of Nike perform different rituals to enact a marriage contract but the most crucial of them is the *Ita oji nwanyi* (the consumption of bridal kola). Despite its centrality to traditional marriage contract, there is scarcity of linguistic scholarship on the language, acts and symbols that characterize it in Nike. This study is, therefore, a pragma-semiotic inquiry into the major pragmatic acts that characterize the textual and visual communications in *Ita oji nwanyi*, its semiotic dynamics, and to relate them to the broader context of traditional marriages in Nike. The data were sourced from twelve different traditional marriage ceremonies held within the villages of Nike through observations and interviews spanning a period of fifteen months (November 2021 through February 2023). The study is guided by some of the analytic categories provided in Mey's (2001) theory of Pragmatic Acts and Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) socio-semiotic multi-modal analytic approach. While the textual component of the data relating to linguistic features was analysed using Mey's theory of pragmatic acts, the visual component relating to the non-linguistic features was addressed following Kress and Leeuwen's socio-semiotic approach to multimodal analysis. The result revealed that the rituals of *Ita oji nwanyi* in Nike were enacted through six specific practs which include the practs of welcoming, intention expression, questioning, kola presentation, vowing and blessing while dynamics like

day/time, location, and symbolic object constitute the semiotic elements. The practs were realized through the interaction of items in the activity part such as psychological and physical acts with context elements like MPH, SCK, INF, and REL. All of these practs constitute a major situational prototype in the data which is the pragmeme of betrothing.

KEYWORDS: Nike, marriage, kola nut, pragmatics, semiotics

Introduction

The philosophy of every culture is reflected in the language and cultural elements that obtain within their respective cultural contexts. More so, the language that they speak helps them to express their uniqueness and cultural heritage. Language is a means of conveying messages between interlocutors (person to person or group). Language is the outward expression of the values of civilization which mediates and directs the orientation of the movement of civilization, (Siregar, 2022). Language is an essential variable to be studied and revised scientifically as a basic tool for the preservation and promotion as well as propagation of culture and civilization. Siregar, (2022) viewed language as a system of sound symbols employed by humans to communicate in their everyday interactive context. This sound system is recognized as symbols that have meaning and conveys meaning to something else or the context of what is referred to. The effective use of language is achieved when the meaning conveyed in any communicative event is understood by both parties. Language is a key component of culture and it is used to express the same culture that creates and uses it.

The communicative events in Nike traditional marriage are carried out through the use of symbols. Chandler (2011) holds that signs and symbols take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects etc. Therefore, the items used in traditional marriage rites in Nike especially kola nuts are symbols/signs. Kola nut is a significant symbol used in Nike land to contract marital pact between intending couples. This symbol conveys the world

view of the Nike people with regards to the marriage context within which it is used. The symbolic import of kola nut is also used to convey the intention of the couples before the people. Ogunkunle (2013) asserts that such a sign (kola nut) becomes an economic way of communicating so much with a little. She avers that in a traditional marriage context, such a symbol is effective in communicating the intention of the parties and at the same time representing the symbol of proper request for betrothal and prayer for successful union for the new couple. This kind of linguistic inquiry falls within the confines of pragmatics.

Pragmatics, as Mey (2001) argues, is interested in the process of language production and in its producers, not in the end-product, language. He adds that pragmatics studies the way humans use their language in communication as determined by the conditions of the society. Levinson (1981) also suggests that pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language. The definitions of pragmatics lay much emphasis on how individuals, groups or society use language and the context within which the language is used. At the heart of pragmatics is *context* which plays a pivotal role in our ability to make meaning of what is communicated. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is to explore the textual and visual components of communication in *Ita oji nwanyi*, the significance of kola nut in the ritual, and to relate same to the broader context of traditional marriages in Nike— a community in Enugu State, south east Nigeria, predominantly occupied by *Ẹ̀dì Ìgbò*.

The Igbo people are unique in their social life. They have rich traditional heritages that are consistently handed on from one generation to another. One of such traditions is the celebration of traditional marriage between members of the community. This rich culture and tradition is performed using functional verbal acts and traditional symbols. One of such symbols is the kola nut ritual as a cultural element used to contract traditional marriages in Nike land. The use of symbols in communication is as West and Turner

(2013) stated that the social process of individuals allows the use of symbols to create and interpret meaning in their environment.

Thus, the culture of the Igbo people concerns their worldview, mannerisms and ways of life of people who use the language. Language and culture are inextricably intertwined because the former cannot be discussed in the absence of the latter. Culture is the determinant of code, symbols, signs, context, and meaning of language, while language is the 'life wire and social lubricant' of any society (Ademola & Okunola, 2013). In the light of this assertion, the traditional marriage ritual in Nike is examined with specific focus on the symbol of kola nut in the marriage rites. Three research questions will guide this work and they are as follows: (i) what are the major pragmatic acts that characterize the verbal and nonverbal communication in *Ita oji nwanji*? (ii) What are the dominant semiotic features in kola nut ritual in the marriage ceremonies in Nike? (iii) How do the pragmatic and semiotic features relate to the general significance of kola nut in traditional marriages in Nike?

Context in Nike traditional marriages

Nike town is one of the oldest kingdoms in Enugu State, Nigeria. Nike town is located in the Eastern part of Enugu state. Nike people are predominantly found in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State. The town is made up of twenty-four villages most of which have felt the impact of urbanization. The people of Nike enjoy rich arable land of the rain forest and have a natural table land. Among the richness enjoyed by the Nike people are the different festivities in the land most especially traditional marriages and the rituals attached to it. Traditional marriage is a revered union in Nike which dates back to ancient traditions of the land.

From the ancient time, arrangement for marriage was the ultimate responsibility of the parents. When a baby girl is born in a family, the parents of a growing-up male child within the neighborhood go to the family to perform a traditional rite called

Igbanyu Oku Omugo (extinguishing the fire of post-natal care). The family of the growing-up male child will take a calabash/keg of palm wine and kola nut to the family of the baby girl as a sign of betrothal. Once this ritual is carried out, it means that both families have agreed that their children will marry each other when they come of age. Henceforth, the growing boy and his parents have the obligation to serve the family of the betrothed girl in different ways. Part of the laborious services rendered by the intending family are: helping the in-laws to cultivate and harvest their farms during the planting seasons, organizing group works to weed their farm, fetching firewood, fishing and hunting games for the intending in-laws amongst others. This service continues until the girl is about 13-15 years of age before she enters her adolescence age. By this time the parents will invite the intending in-laws and inform them that their daughter has come of age to become a woman. This invitation signals to the intending in-laws that it is time to perform the traditional marriage rites.

Traditional marriage rites in Nike take four significant stages. The first stage is known as *Iku aka n'uzo* or *Igba nju* (first introduction of marriage intention). This introduction involves only the parents of both families excluding the bride and groom to be. The second stage is called *Igbazu nju* (final introduction of marriage intention). At this stage, the parents invite the bride-to-be and the groom. They are informed about the purpose of the gathering. But prior to this time, the bride and the groom would never know the marriage arrangement going on between the both parents. The marriage between a young man and woman is arranged by their parents without their initial consent. The young couple would never set their eyes on each other on purpose because once the bride sights the young man coming in opposite direction, she changes her route.

The third stage in the traditional marriage in Nike is known as *ita oji nwanyi* (the consumption of bridal kola). It is the most significant stage of the marriage rites in Nike. It entails a ceremonial blessing of the couple and the handover of the bride to

the groom and his family. This marriage rite can only be performed on *Nkwo* or *Oye* market days. The Igbo people have four market days of *Afo*, *Nkwo*, *Eke* and *Oye* (in this order), which constitute their traditional week. Traditionally, *Nkwo* and *Oye* are considered female while *Eke* and *Afo* are male. According to the belief system of Nike people, the rites of marriage can only be performed on *Nkwo* or *Oye* market days. The remaining two market days, *Eke* and *Afo*, are reserved for other festive celebrations in the town.

Ita oji nwanyi is performed once in the life time of any bride in Nike. There can never be a repeat even if the marriage fails and the bride marries another person; the new husband can perform other marriage rituals but can never repeat *Ita oji nwanyi*. The ceremony of *Ita oji nwanyi* is performed using kola nuts which are brought by the in-laws alongside some kegs of palm wine and other edible items for entertainment of guests. The in-laws must bring four lobes of kola nuts which are the most significant item in the marriage ritual. From the four lobes of kola nuts, one and half lobes will be taken to the maternal family of the bride who also would pray for their successful married life. The kola nuts stand as bound of unity between the couple and the two families. This means that once this kola nut ritual is performed, the couple is bound to each other forever and never to be separated. Prior to the day of *Ita oji*, the parents of the bride and groom would invite them differently to question them about the intending marriage. The questioning is important because in line with Nike tradition, *Ita oji nwanyi* can only be done once in life time. Therefore, total consent of the two must be sought before the ritual is performed.

On the day of *Ita oji nwanyi*, the kola nuts are presented to the eldest man in the family or the father of the bride with seven gourds of palm wine. At this point, the bride and the groom are invited before the entire family where they will come and kneel or prostrate before her father or the eldest man in the family. The eldest man breaks one of the kola nuts and begins to chant incantations; invoking their ancestor to rain down blessing on the couple: *to bind them in sincere love, bring them male and female*

children, keep them faithful and in fidelity to each other, drive away every evil spirit, increase their field and produce and fight their enemies from every angle. After these invocations, the kola nut is broken and a piece given to the couple to share and eat as a pact/covenant of fidelity and bound to each other. With this eating of the piece of kola nut, their marriage bond is sealed and the other family members would eat the remaining kola nuts and continue with the foods and drinks provided for the occasion.

The aim of this study is to examine the pragma-semiotic features that characterize *Ita oji nwanyi* in Nike. This aim will be guided by the three specific objectives which include to:

- i. examine the major pragmatic acts that characterize the verbal and nonverbal communication in *Ita oji nwanyi*,
- ii. explore the dominant semiotic features in kola nut ritual in the marriage ceremonies in Nike, and
- iii. evaluate how the pragmatic and semiotic features relate to the general significance of kola nut in traditional marriages in Nike?

Literature review

Several studies have been carried out using semiotic analysis to investigate or analyze the symbols/signs used by different cultures and traditions to conduct traditional marriage/wedding ceremonies. Some of these are; Anugrah (2016), semiotic analysis of the Javanese traditional wedding procession; Aziz (2011), analysis of Betawi traditional marriage; Melinda and Paramita (2019), the symbolic meaning of the doorstep at the Betawi ethnic wedding; Wibowo and Ayundasari (2021), the Palang tradition of the Betawi community; Siregar (2022), semiotic analysis in the Betawi traditional wedding. These studies were carried out under different contexts and cultures just as they have adopted varying theoretical approaches. For instance, Siregar (2022) studied the semiotic analysis in the Betawi traditional wedding “Palang Pintu, using Roland Barthes’s semiotic theory and its taxonomy- denotation, connotation and myth. Ogunkunle (2013) did a semiotic reading of

the symbols of Yoruba traditional marriage using Hallidayan (2004) systemic metafunctions – ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions to analyze the meaning attached to the symbols of marriage in Yoruba land. Onipede (2022) equally examined the Yoruba and their symbolic means of communication employing pragma-semiotic analysis anchored on Mey’s (2001) pragmatics act theory and Peirce’s (1931) symbolic sign in semiotic theory. Furthermore, Siregar and Yahaya (2022) explored the semiotics of Roti Buayaas a cultural ornament focusing on the relationship, process and meaning of Roti Buaya in marriage customs in Jagakarsa – Indonesia. They employed a qualitative approach to semiotic analysis of the Roti Buaya in marriage custom of the Jagakarsa people. Clearly, none of these studies paid attention to traditional marriages in Igbo land, nay, Nike.

However, a couple of studies have been conducted to highlight the significance and symbolism of kola nuts in Africa, West Africa, Nigerian and Igbo land in particular. Unya (2021) asserts that kola nut is highly prized throughout West Africa by the rich and the poor, men and women, Christians, Muslims and traditional African worshippers. This, therefore, underscores the high cultural value attached to kola nut within the different tribes in Nigeria. Although other tribes in Nigeria have great regards and value for kola nut, it has been evidently proved by different studies that the Igbo in the South east Nigeria have the greatest respect and reverence for kola nut. Basden (1983) states that kola nuts have tremendous cultural significance in Igbo land. Nwachukwu (2012) supporting him added that emotional and cultural attachment to kola nut in Igbo land makes it religiously infectious and that kola nut is to the Igbo people what the prayer book stands for in the Christian world. In a similar vein, Obineche (2017) agrees that kola nut has ritual powers for peace, long life, prosperity, unity and facilitates communication between men and the gods. Odo, *et al.* (2023) support the significance and symbolic role of kola nut in Igbo land and state that “kola nut is an object that depicts life, progress and peace.” In Unya (2021) and Odo *et al.* (2023), the

symbolic significance of kola nut to the Igbo is highlighted as, symbol of acceptance, cooperation, solidarity, recognition and a unifying agent.

Ezeifeke et al. (2019) highlighted the communicative power of kola nut in traditional marriage such as making appeals, promises, pronouncements, vows, assertions and requests. This was supported by Eruchalu (2012) who highlighted the importance of the language of kola nut in traditional Igbo setting to perform such functions like: ushering in a new day, welcoming guests, public events, divination, sacrifices, oath taking, idol worshipping and marriage ceremonies.

Notwithstanding the enormous literature on the significance, value and roles of kola nut in Igbo land, it is obvious from the above literature that scholars have not paid attention to the pragmatic and semiotic implications of kola nut rituals in traditional marriage ceremonies in Nike. The above, therefore, is the research gap that this present scholarly effort addresses. This will be done by looking at the pragma-semiotic implications of kola nut rituals in traditional marriages in Nike.

Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative research design to identify, highlight and discuss the symbolic and significant rituals performed during the *Ita oji Nwanyi* ceremony in Nike. The data were sourced from twelve different traditional marriage ceremonies held within the villages of Nike through observations and interviews spanning a period of fifteen months (November 2021 through February 2023). The study is guided by some of the analytic categories provided in Mey's (2001) theory of Pragmatic Acts, and Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) Socio-semiotic Multimodal Approach to textual analysis. Tables were provided where the locutions, as they were originally rendered in Igbo were captured and glossed in English. Figures were also provided to reflect the semiotic particulars of the data.

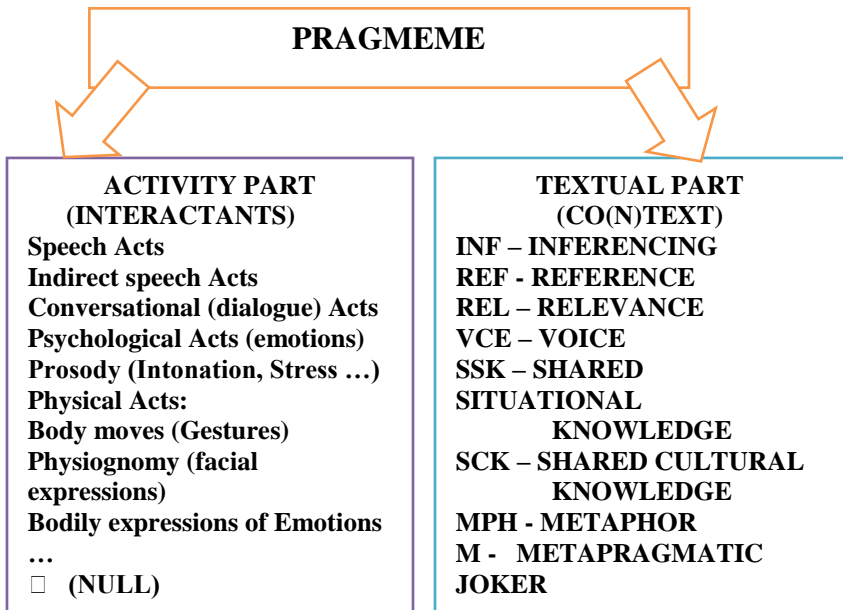
Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory (PAT), and Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) Socio-semiotic Multi-modal Approach to textual analysis. The aim of Mey's theory is to explicate language use in context. Mey considered pragmatics an essential tool for scholarly engagement and understanding of how language is made to function in different situations and contexts of use. For Mey, pragmatics deals with the meanings beyond the direct or denotative inference that can be drawn from words. Although pragmatics has several analytic tools or theories which suit different communicative acts, this study will be anchored on Mey's Pragmatic Acts, and Kress and Leeuwen's (2001) Socio-semiotic Multi-modal Approach to textual analysis. According to Mey cited in Olawe (2022), Speech Acts theory is faulted for not accounting for the action acts and not situated in context. This means that what is considered an act in one context may likely not be considered in another context because of the differences that abound. Therefore, for Mey, an act is not complete with or on the speech. It needs to be situated in a context and it is what the context affords the interactant that will determine the success or failure of an act. Thus speech act can only be achieved with the help of other resources.

Mey's Pragmatic Act theory is premised on the environment in which both the speaker and the hearer find their affordances in a manner that the speech situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation and what is actually being said. According to Mey (2006), a pragmatic act is created by means of a *pract*, which realizes a *pragmeme*. A *pract* is a blend of the first two letters of 'pragmatic' joined with 'act' to convey the pragmatic import of an utterance or any instance of language use. According to Mey, a *pract* is determined by participants' knowledge of the interactional situation and the potential effect of a *pract* in a particular context.

The *pragmeme* as a communicative analytic tool has two main parts which are the activity part, meant for interactants and

textual part, referring to the context within which the pragmeme operates. The activity part includes the resources available to the interactants from which choices could be made. They are: speech act, indirect speech act, conversational (dialogue) act, psychological act, physical act, physiognomy and prosody. The textual/contextual part is concerned with the context comprising, Inference, (INF) Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Shared situational knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH) and Metapragmatic joker (M). Hence, the two parts of pragmeme – activity and textual parts interact together to decode the contextual meaning of any communication. Below is the diagram of Pragmeme analysis model as proposed by Mey (2001). For this work, we shall adapt Odeunmi’s (2006) modification of the pragmatic act theory where he replaced SSK (shared situational knowledge) with SCK (shared cultural knowledge). This adaptation is motivated by the ostensible cultural orientation of this work.



Socio-semiotics

Socio-semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2010; van Leeuwen, 2005) is an approach to communication that has been developed by drawing on Halliday's (1978) social and functional take on language, and by expanding it onto all resources that humans use to make meaning. Anchored in the social, the approach considers all semiotic resources to be as they are at any moment in time as the result of the functions that social groups need them to serve. Social dynamics shape the semiotic resources we have available. The ways in which we use them not only reveal these social dynamics but also contribute to shape societies in their turn. By looking at representations and communicative events one can trace organizational principles and power dynamics lying in society. By looking at individuals' communicative practices, social semiotics is particularly interested in sign- and meaning-makers' agency in relation to broader social forces (Adami, 2023). Social semiotics has drawn on Halliday's (1978) concept of mode (which he used to distinguish speech from writing) to label any organised set of resources that humans have developed to make meaning, like image, gesture, music, face expression, proxemics and so on – hence the term “multimodality” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) to define the combined use of these semiotic resources in communication and interaction.

Semiotic resources have no fixed meaning; rather, they have meaning potentials, which derive from their materiality and their past uses in given social spaces. People draw on these potentials and, out of the resources they have available, they choose and combine those that, at each given time, they consider to be the best apt for their communicative needs (Kress, 2010). Multimodality is considered to be “the normal state of human communication” (Kress, 2010: 1) because meanings are best expressed by drawing on the potentials afforded by different modes, rather than by only one. This theoretic perspective will help us to account for semiotic dynamics like time, location, symbolic object, clothing and colour.

Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis in this study is structured along six specific practices which include the practices of welcoming, intention expression, questioning, presenting, vowing and blessing, and other relevant semiotic dynamics like time, location, symbolic object, clothing and colour. This shall be taken in succession.

Practice of welcoming

The first conversational contact to be initiated would be welcoming the in-laws and exchange of pleasantries. Prior to this time, the bride's family would have arranged chairs outside the compound in a circular form. The bride would be well dressed in her traditional outfit with her closest friends because she understands the relevance of having to look good on such special occasions. The arrival of the groom's family invites filial exchange of pleasantries beginning with the parents of the bride and some immediate family members and this practice is usually characterized by the following exchanges captured in Table 1.

Table 1. Welcoming the in-laws

Locution	Gloss
<i>Ndi ogo dejenu o</i>	Our in-laws you are welcome ooo
<i>Ndi ogo anyi unu ga-adi ka echi maka na echi adighi agwu agwu</i>	Our in-laws you will be like tomorrow that never ends He who come to us should not destroy us
<i>O biara be onye abiagbukwene ya</i>	Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! Our people
<i>Ndeje –Ndejenu</i>	Our path will be the path to the river that never ends
<i>Ndejenu, ndejenundu be anyi</i>	Our in-laws greetings, whatever title you hold, accept and answer
<i>Uzoanyi ga-abu uzo mmiri na-adighiechi-echi</i>	

*Ndi ogo kwenu, nke
onye chiri ya zelu*

A close look at the above locutions show the use of contextual elements like Metaphor (tomorrow, river); SCK, (he who comes to us should not destroy us); Meta-pragmatic joker (Welcome! Welcome! Welcome, our people!). In welcoming the in-laws, utterances located in orientational metaphors were made. Two types of orientational metaphors were identified: exclusive and inclusive orientational metaphors. The exclusive orientational metaphor selects the second person singular/plural exclusive pronoun ‘you’ as in: Our in-laws *you* will be like tomorrow that never ends, while the inclusive orientational metaphor makes use of inclusive possessive adjective, ‘our’, as in: *Our* path will be the path to the river that never ends. Specifically, the exclusive orientational metaphor, in the context of its use above, is an invocation of goodwill on the groom and his people, excluding the bride and her family. Conversely, inclusive orientational metaphor is an invocation of goodwill on both families.

It is a shared cultural knowledge that the expression “He who comes to us should not destroy us” is a vital aspect of locutionary rituals in traditional marriages in Nike. Otherwise, the In-laws would misconstrue it as unnecessary accusation. If not for SCK, it will be difficult to convince anyone that such utterance, capable of generating negative implicatures like suspicion and distrust, is necessary in the context of a traditional marriage ceremony. We also observe the use of meta-pragmatic indicators in form of structural repetitions, as in “Welcome! Welcome! Welcome, our people!” However, the meanings here do not depend on the repetitions made, but rather on the indexical context. The indexical contexts here point to person who utters them (the bride’s father) and the conditions that necessitate his utterance (traditional marriage ceremony of his daughter).

The bride is usually the last person to come to greet the in-laws and she is accompanied by other maidens or her best friends.

In her first appearance, she appears shy as goes about greeting the in-laws one after another genuflecting before each of them. What is significant in her greeting is that she will not look at the husband to-be in the eyes even when she reaches where he is seated. Her word of greeting to the in-laws is simply, ‘*Ndejenu oo! Ndejenu ooo! Nnonu oo!*’ (welcome ooo repeated in Nike dialect). The pract of welcoming is realized through such other allopracts like greeting, wishing, blessings, projecting, and genuflecting as shown in Table 1 above.

Pract of intention expression

When the in-laws have been welcomed and offered seats, both families at this point would be seated facing each other in circular form. The initiator of the dialogue for marriage ritual would be the eldest man from the groom’s family who self-selects. He does not wait to be nominated as he infers from the contextual realities of the occasion (that he is the eldest man from the groom’s family), supported by SCK (that a man in his position should be the first to speak). Given that intention expression makes a lot of demand on the psyche, it is a psychological act which interacts with contextual features such as metaphor (MPH), inference (INF), shared cultural knowledge (SCK) and relevance (REL) to produce the pract of intention expression. He, therefore, adjusts his position, clears his throat and motions for attention especially from people who were still exchanging pleasantries. Usually, this session signals wise saying, characterized by the use of proverbs and idioms, in relation to the locutionary dexterity of the speaker. Table two captures the locutionary constituents of the pract of intention expression.

Table 2. Intention expression

Locution	Gloss
Elder: <i>Ndi anyi biara be ha, anyi ekene unu’</i>	Elder: Those whose home we visited, we greet you.
<i>Ndu mmiri, ndu azu,</i>	The life of water, the life of fish
<i>Nke onye chiri nya zelu</i>	Let everyone answer his/her title

<i>Anyi furu oka chara achan'ugbo unu; anyi we bia ka anyi malu ma o ga-ekwe ka anyi ghoru ya ka ogbo anyi agu.</i>	(clears throat) We saw a ripe corn in your farm and we have come to see if we can harvest it for our consumption
Bride's father: <i>E enwere m otutu oka n'ugbo m; kedu nke unu choro ka unu ghoru?</i>	I have many corns in my farm; which one do you want to harvest?

Intention expression, a largely psychological act, is practiced through indirect speech acting and context elements like MPH, SCK, INF, and REL. The corn and farm metaphor has a symbolic significance in Nike culture because Nike people believe in the fruitfulness of marriage just like the fruitfulness that is attuned to farming. Through SCK, all that have gathered for the traditional marriage ceremony are able to make a connection between the proverb *we saw a ripe corn in your farm and have come to see if we can harvest it* and the intention of the speaker. It is relevant that he used the corn metaphor for the girl whose hand in marriage they have come to seek because it adds some grace, candour and respect to such conversations. The bride's people will infer from the use of the above metaphor that the grooms' people share a cultural knowledge with them which is that it is human being they came to take, not mere object in a market place, and that it is relevant to both parties that they oriented their speech accordingly. At the end of the expression of intention comes the practice of questioning as seen below.

Pract of questioning

This is the stage where the bride and groom are, for the first time, interrogated in public. Note that since the beginning of the marriage negotiations, it had been the parents of the intending couple who have been in dialogue excluding the bride and the groom.



Fig. 1. Bride and the groom

The following dialogic encounter marked Table 3 captures the locutions characterizing pract of questioning.

Table 3. Interrogating the bride/groom

Locution

Bride's father: (invites the bride and groom to come forward and kneel before the elders) *I mara ihe mere anyi ji gbakoo na ebe a?*

Bride/groom: *Eee, Nna anyi*

Bride's father: *Unu amaburu onwe unu tupu ubochi taa?*

Gloss

Bride's father: Do you understand why we have gathered here?

Bride/groom: Yes, father

Bride's father: Have you had anything in common prior to this

- Bride/groom: *Mba, Nna anyi*
Anyi ji maka unu n'abo gbakoo ebe a maka na anyi bu ndi muru unu kwekotara na unu ga abu di na nwunye. Unu ekwere?
Bride/groom: *Anyi kwere, Nna anyi*
Bride's father: (to the bride) *I siri anyi taa oji a e wetere maka olulu gi?*
Bride: *Unu tawa ya.*
Bride's father: *I maara na anyi gozie oji a, waa ya ma taa ya n'aha gi, na e jikoola unu onu, na a gaghi enwe nkewa ozo?*
- day?
Bride/groom: No, father
We have gathered here because of you both. We, your parents have agreed that you shall become man and wife. Do you agree to that?
Bride/groom: Yes father
Bride father: do you want us to eat the kola nuts brought on your behalf for the contract of this union?
Bride: You people should go on
Bride father: Do you understand that once this kola is blessed, broken and eaten on your behalf, you are forever joined together with each other and there would never be a separation

Pract of questioning is realized relying on interactant elements like conversational acts, psychological acts, physiognomy and a number of contextual acts such as SSK, REL, INF. The conversational act (dialogue) between the bride's father and the young couple carries a literal force of utterance inviting the couple to declare their intention to accept the marriage contract publicly before the sealing of the marriage vows with the kola nut ritual. This signals the psychological emotions where the couple expresses their feelings through their responses and physiognomic features such as facial expressions. Being the first time the couple is seen together publicly, it could be inferred that they would exhibit some level of shyness as well as bodily emotions of love

for each other which is relevant for the occasion of marriage ceremony. The affirmative responses of the couple are relevant to the conversational context. It is relevant that the couple is asked a question bothering on whether they have agreed to become man and wife before the public because such public confession will make it difficult for them to renege. Similarly, it is relevant that the father asked the couple if they had had anything in common prior to the day of their public proclamation of their intention to become man and wife, to which their answer was “no”. The audience will infer from the above interrogation that the couple had maintained marital purity pending the time they become man and wife in the eyes of tradition. The above interactant elements and the contextual elements combined to produce such other sub acts like: directing and informing on the side of the bride’s father, and vouching and promising on the side of the bride/groom.

Pract of presenting

Aspects of the activity part which include bodily moves, physiognomy, psychological acts and context elements like SCK, REL, INF and MPH are evoked in this part of the ceremony. Here, the parents of the groom present four lobes of kola nut and seven gourds of palm wine, tobacco and alligator pepper. The father of the bride accepts the gifts and hands over the kola nuts to the wife who goes and washes it and returns it on a wooden saucer and presents it to her daughter. The bride ceremoniously takes it to her father. The father would remove 1 ½ lobes to be taken to the bride’s maternal relatives. Then the bride’s father holding the remaining 2 ½ lobes goes to show it to the elders around and returns to his seat. He further invites the bride and the groom to step forward and kneel before him while he begins the blessing of the kola nuts: at this point, bride’s father invokes the spirit of the ancestors, the gods of Nike (Anikenwaawuwa), and the god of fertility using parallel structures while the crowd chorus ‘Isee’ which loosely translates to ‘Amen’. All the steps taken in sharing the kola nut are guided by shared cultural knowledge and the

bride's father understands how relevant it is that he strictly followed the sharing formula that is in line with the tradition knowing that anything in the contrary could lead to chaos.



Fig. 2 . Kola nuts

Table 4. Presenting the kola nuts

Locution	Gloss
Bride's father: <i>Ndi ogo, o ga adiri anyi na mma.</i>	Our in-laws, it shall be well with us
Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Ndu nwoke! Ndu nwanyi</i>	Let men live! Let women live!
Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Ada m nwanyi ga-abu ngozi nyeru unu</i>	My daughter will be a blessing to you all

Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Omumu nwoke na nwanyi bu ofo m n'isi unu</i>	My prayer for you is that you shall have both male and female children
Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Unu ga- amuta Eke na Ori n'uju</i>	You shall give birth to <i>Eke</i> and you shall give birth to <i>Orie</i>
Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Unu ga- amuta Afo naNkwo</i>	You shall give birth to <i>Afo</i> and you shall give birth to <i>Nkwo</i>
Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Unu ga n'eje eje na abata –abata</i>	You shall set forth in peace and you shall come back in peace
Inlaws: <i>Isee</i>	Amen
Bride's father: <i>Ani Nike kwalu unu uzo ma n'uno ma n'agu</i>	Let the land of Nike prepare your path, home and abroad.

The above invocations are characterized by SCK, MPH, INF REF, and REL. It is a shared cultural knowledge in Nike that the most treasured prayer anyone can make for their visitor is the prayer for long life. Every other consideration is secondary. The bride's father is aware of this cultural demand which explains why he did

not hesitate to pray “Let men live! Let women live!” He also explores the metaphoric resources available to him in his prayer for procreation where he used the four native market days to represent both male and female children which he asked the Supreme Being to bless the couple with. It is also important that the bride’s father performed all the relevant rituals that should accompany traditional marriage in Nike. At this stage, therefore, the father breaks the kola and gives a piece to the groom. The groom receives it and in turn breaks it into two halves and gives a piece to the bride. He holds the hand of the bride and says *take this kola nut and eat it as a sign of my union with you forever*. In the same manner, the bride holds his hand and repeats the same promise. Each of them feeds the other with the kola nut in the mouth. This ritual signifies the sealing of their marriage bond.

This is relevant because it signifies the completion of the marital pact between the two families. From the above moment, the two are customarily joined in marriage that is not to be dissolved. Again from the above moment, the two families enter into an everlasting covenant of mutual relationship in which they are bound to protect the interest of each other everywhere and at any time. The context elements combine with the elements in the activity part to produce such sub-acts like breaking, giving, exchanging and promising which leads to the realization of the pract of presenting.



Fig. 3. Performing kola nut rituals

Pract of giving out

Pract of giving out is characterized by interactants like expression of emotions, usually exhibited through shedding of tears, physical acts such as gestures and facial expressions, and context elements such as SCK, REL and INF. At this stage, the bride's parents hold the hands of the bride and the groom and hands them over to the family of the groom. They receive the young couple and pray for them while they kneel, all constituting physical acts. The act is relevant to the occasion because from this point, the bride is joined to the family of her husband and his parents become her parents.

Socio-semiotic dynamics of kola nut ritual in traditional marriages in Nike

Kola nut rituals in traditional marriages in Nike are principally characterized by semiotic elements like day/time, location, and symbolic object. We shall take them in succession.

Day/Time

Day/time for *Ita oji nwanyi* in Nike land constitute a vital component of the process because of their significance. In Nike, it is a shared cultural knowledge amongst the in-laws that *Ita oji nwanyi* must be on *Nkwo* or *Oye* market days. On such occasions, the immediate members of the two families would gather before sunset, usually around 3pm. However, they do not gather around 12pm because it is equally a shared cultural knowledge that Nike people do not discuss traditional marriage issues when the sun is still overhead. It is believed that holding such discussion when the sun is overhead and harsh translates to laying a harsh marriage foundation devoid of peace and the soothing ambience of a good marriage.

Location

This has to do with the place where *Ita oji nwanyi* takes place. In Nike, this event is obligatorily conducted at the bride's father's house. *Ita oji nwanyi* is not conducted in foreign lands (urban areas

where the groom and the bride may have met each other). If anyone chooses to obey the wave of civilization and conducts *Ita oji nwanyi* in township (outside the bride's father's house in the village), it is not regarded as *Ita oji nwanyi* in the eyes of Nike tradition. At the location, seats are arranged in circular form so both families will use the opportunity to interact and get to know one another the more.

Kola nut as symbolic object

Nike traditional marriage celebration, kola nut stands out as one of the most vital symbols that must be present before the enactment of marital rituals. As a symbol upon which the marital vows between the couple is pronounced, its consumption involves four stages: blessing, breaking, sharing and eating. When a kola nut is broken and it has four lobes, there is usually expression of excitement amongst the people because of its socio-semiotic significance. It is a shared cultural knowledge that the four lobes represent the four native markets in Nike. It is seen a good omen as it signifies progress. If a kola nut is broken and it has three lobes, it is not consumed as it signals bad omen. A kola nut could also yield five lobes. This is not as ominous as the one that yielded three lobes yet it is not as acceptable as the one that yielded four lobes. Additionally, kola nut is presented to the gods in order to invoke blessings, protection, and productivity upon the bride, good fortune, peace and abundance amongst others.

Summary of findings and conclusion

The pragmatic acts characterizing the verbal and nonverbal communication are realized in five stages in *Ita oji nwanyi* in Nike. The stages consist of practs of welcoming, intention expression, questioning, kola presentation, and blessing. Similarly, the analysis shows that the dominant semiotic features in kola nut ritual in Nike are semiotic dynamics like day/time, location, and symbolic object. It is further in the semiotic universe of Nike people, kola nut could have either positive or negative implication.

Pract of welcoming is characterized by contextual elements like Metaphor (tomorrow, river); SCK, (he who comes to us should not destroy us); Meta-pragmatic joker (Welcome! Welcome! Welcome, our people!). In welcoming the In-laws, utterances located in orientational metaphors were made. Two types of orientational metaphors were identified: exclusive orientational metaphor and inclusive orientational metaphor. Given that to express intention makes a lot of demand on the psyche, it is a psychological act which interacts with contextual features such as metaphor (MPH), inference (INF), shared cultural knowledge (SCK) and relevance (REL) to produce the pract of intention expression. Pract of questioning is realized relying on interactant elements like conversational acts, psychological acts, physiognomy and a number of contextual acts such as SSK, REL and INF.

The analysis reveals that the dominant semiotic features in kola nut ritual in Nike are semiotic dynamics like day/time, location, and symbolic object. Day/time for *Ita oji nwanyi* in Nike land constitute a vital component of the process because of their significance. In Nike, it is a shared cultural knowledge amongst the in-laws that *Ita Oji nwanyi* must be on *Nkwo* or *Oye* market days. On such occasions, the immediate members of the two families would gather before sunset, usually around 3pm. It is observed that such gathering does not happen around 12pm because it is equally a shared cultural knowledge that Nike people do not discuss traditional marriage issues when the sun is still overhead. It is further observed that In Nike, this event is obligatorily conducted at the bride's father's house while kola nut, as a symbolic object, is considered the most vital symbol that must be present before the enactment of traditional marriage rituals. All of the above holds a strong pragma-semiotic significance in Nike. For instance, the analysis further revealed that when a kola nut is broken, the number of lobes it yields has either positive or negative connotation.

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