

Zoological Codes as Nonverbal Communication in Yoruba Novels

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Abstract

Non-verbal communication is a very important type of communication which plays a crucial role in the day-to-day activities of man. Equally, it is as old as man and predates verbal communication which is germane to the understanding of the culture of any society. Scholars in this field and related disciplines have conducted research extensively on aspects relating to human beings, objects, environments, etc. but have hardly touched animals. This paper filled the gap as it examined zoological codes as non-verbal communication in Yoruba novels with a view to establishing its functions. The semiotic theories of Ferdinand De-Saussure and Charles Sanders Pierce were adopted and samples were taken from four Yorùbá novels consisting of mythological novels, novel of realism and historical novel which were purposively selected because they contain the nonverbal codes needed for the analysis of this study. Data were subjected to textual and semiotic analyses. Findings revealed that determination of time was made possible through historical novel, looming trouble was established by mythological novels and mysterious sickness by novel of realism. Non-verbal communication occurs in animals by the interpretation given to the behaviours of such animals in their relationship with human beings. This occurs in every culture and also helps in the understanding of the situations in which they occur.

Keywords: nonverbal communication, culture, semiotics, Yorùbá novels, zoological code

Introduction

Non-verbal communication plays a very prominent role in interpersonal relationship. Devito (1992: 151) explains that non-verbal communication is often used to emphasize a part of the verbal message. In other words, non-verbal communication accents verbal communication. Hall (1973: xiv) underscores the complementary nature of non-verbal communication to verbal communication:

In addition to what we say with our verbal languages, we are constantly communicating our real feelings in our silent language – the language of behavior.

The opinion of the author is that non-verbal communication validates spoken words. This is actually true considering an observation of February 10, 2010. Early in that year, Goodluck Jonathan, the Nigerian president granted a British

Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) interview on several issues on the country. He was also asked to speak on whether he would run for the post of president in the 2011 elections. He however replied that he did not have any of such plan as at the time of the interview. About one week later, the president's interview was analysed¹ and the analyst maintained that the president's body language contradicted his spoken words. A few months later in the same year, the president began a campaign to run for the presidency in 2011 elections. This shows that non-verbal communication cannot be used to easily deceive an unsuspecting listener. This is unlike the verbal message.

Non-verbal communication accounts for a greater percentage of messages in communication. This, is in accordance with Mehrabian and Ferris (1967: 250) who say "It is suggested that the combined effect of simultaneous verbal, vocal and facial attitude communications is a weighted sum of their independent effects – with coefficient of .07, .38 and .55 respectively." Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) recognize three levels of communication. These are words, tone of voice and body language. They find out in their investigation that words account for 7 per cent, tone of voice accounts for 38 per cent and body language takes 55 percent. The research shows that non-verbal communication takes precedence over verbal communication.

Literature Review and Theory

One of the earliest researchers of non-verbal communication is Darwin (1872) who observes the field from a scientific point of view. Darwin (1872: 8 – 11) considers eight items in his study. These are: "infants, who exhibit many emotions... with extraordinary force" (p.8) He also considers "insane... as they are liable to the stronger passions, and give uncontrolled vent to them." Equally, he reflects on photography, painting and sculpture, observation of different races of the world and finally, observation of animals. Referring to animals, Darwin (1872: 11) explains:

... I have attended as closely as I could to the expression of the several passions in some of the commoner animals and this I believe to be of paramount importance, not of course for deciding of how far in man certain expressions are characteristics of certain states of mind, but as affording the safest basis for generalisation on the causes or origin of the various movements of expression. In observing animals, we are not likely to be biased by our imagination; and we may feel safe that their expressions are not conventional.

Darwin (1872) investigates how different physiological features in man and animals are used to express emotions like excitement, pain, rage, joy, terror, aston-

ishment, sobbing, anxiety, grief, dejection, despair, love, devotion, pride, determination, sulkiness, hatred, patience, contempt, self-attention, shame, shyness and a host of others.

Another early scholar who contributes immensely to non-verbal communication is an anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Hall (1959, 1966) in separate studies, explores non-verbal communication in both human and animal behaviours. Hall (1959: xviii) avers that “before the days of written scores, people learned informally by imitation” and maintains that non-verbal communication consists of “the hidden rules that govern people” (p. 32.) Hall (1959: xiii) attributes all the negative traits of the Americans like ethnocentrism and high-handedness to their ignorance of non-verbal communication in what is expected of them in other countries and what they (Americans) communicate to other people by their own normal behaviour.

In stressing the importance of non-verbal communication, Hall (1959: xiv) recommends formal training for American personnel who work in its foreign aid programmes in “the non-verbal language which exists in every country of the world and among the various groups within each country”

Communication researchers also devote attention to non-verbal category. Examples of such are: Infante et al. (1990), De Vito (1992), Pearson et al (2003) and Adedina (2003) who have added their voices to non-verbal communication. Infante et al. (1990) identify seven forms of non-verbal communication. These are kinesics, eye and facial behaviour, vocalics, physical appearance, proxemics, touch and time. Devito (1992) pinpoints nine types of non-verbal communication. They are body movement, facial communication, eye communication, touch communication, paralanguage, spatial messages, territoriality, artifactual communication and temporal communication. Pearson et al. (2003) dichotomize non-verbal communication into seven. They are bodily movement and facial expression, bodily appearance, space, time, touching, vocal cues and clothing and other artifacts. Adédínà (2003) classifies non-verbal communication into thirteen. They are body language, facial expression and occulesic, posture, body physiological shape, gestures, signs and symbols, spatial arrangements, chronemics, proxemics, paralanguage, body designs and wearing apparels, handwriting and colour symbolism. These works are devoid of serious analysis.

Oreh (1980: 103), another African scholar, underscores the non-verbal use of gun throughout Igbo land. He maintains:

The gun is also one of the universal instruments of communication throughout Igboland. A gun shot at night conveys the unmistakable message that an important person has died and that burial obsequies are to commence. The fir-

ing must be done repeatedly and at intervals and can last for days when a very important person dies. In some areas, firing of a gun behind a woman being led to her father's compound by her husband means that she's being divorced; the man will never remarry her.

Other forms of non-verbal communication objects discussed by Oreh (1980) include *omu* (facial tribal marks), dress patterns, hair style, *ugba* (calabash with broomstick in it), a pot of palm-wine (with some leaves in it), beads, feathers, and chalk (black and white) among others. Oreh (1980) gives us an insight into some non-verbal musical instruments and objects by cataloguing them. Since we are interested in non-verbal communication in Yorùbá novels, Oreh's work is useful in this study.

Theory

The theory adopted in this study is semiotics. Semiotics is a communication/signification theory that investigates sign systems and the modes of representation that human beings and animals use to convey feelings, emotions, thoughts, ideas and ideologies. Semiotics is rarely considered a field of study in its own right; however, it is used in a broad range of disciplines, including medicine, science, arts, literature, anthropology, sociology and mass media. Semiotics attracts cultural and psychological patterns that underlie communication and other cultural expressions. It is the study of the action of signs. In the words of Eco (1976: 7):

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used "to tell" at all. I think that the definition of a "theory of the lie" should be taken as a pretty comprehensive program for a general semiotics.

A synthesis of Eco's views above indicates that semiotics is something that can be used to represent something else. It equally shows that semiotics may be used to mislead because it can represent or stand for the truth as well as a lie. If one considers, for instance, someone who puts on a wig of red colour and whose hair colour is black, one may believe that such a person has red hair. This is a lie and, therefore, misleading even though it is harmless. In the Yorùbá culture, when the head is raised up and brought down immediately, it is a non-ver-

bal sign for giving approval for something. This same sign may be used to tell a lie for the same thing. Equally, dyeing a cloth from its original colour of white to blue or pink and dyeing of a mat from its original colour of brown to another colour are examples of lie and may mislead.

Signification

Signification according to Saussure (1974:114) is the relationship between the two parts of the sign, which is the signifier and the signified. Barthes (1964:33) also agrees with Saussure that signification is not the ‘thing’, but the mental representation of the ‘thing’, which is the concept. He maintains that signification is the association of the signifier with the signified but points out that the association is arbitrary. Eco (1976:8) explains that “a signification system is an autonomous semiotic construct that has an abstract mode of existence independent of any possible communicative act it makes possible.” A synthesis of the authors’s views above on signification shows that it is the outcome of the relationship between the signifier and the signified but it will be too hasty to jump to a conclusion that such a relationship is arbitrary as noted by Barthes. An examination of the three modes of the signification as postulated by Peirce and most commonly employed within a broadly Saussurean framework will shed more light on the relationship. They are symbol/symbolic, icon/iconic and index/indexical. However, in this study, attention is focused on symbolic signification.

Symbolic Signification

According to Chandler (2006:49), symbolic signification is a mode in which the signifier does not have any resemblance with the signified which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional – that the relationship must be studied. Examples are language (alphabetical letters, punctuation marks, words, phrases and sentences), numbers, Morse code, traffic lights, national flags, etc. The symbolic signification does not have a natural link between the form and the thing represented, but only has a conventional link. The traffic sign of an inverted triangle is such symbol, as a matter of fact; it shares no natural link between its form and its meaning, ‘give right of way’. The link between its form and meaning is purely conventional. The same may be said of military emblems, the naira sign ₦, almost all flags and all languages. Thus there is no natural connection between the Yorùbá word *sá lẹ* (run away) and its meaning. According to William et. al. (2004:90), the term *symbolic* as used in linguistics is understood in the sense that, by general consent, people have “agreed” upon the pairing of a particular form with a particular meaning. This sense of *symbolic* goes back to the original meaning of the Greek word *symbolon* ‘a token of recognition’ used

between two guests or friends, e.g. a ring broken into two halves, which allowed them to identify each other after a long time by matching the two parts and checking whether they fit together. The two halves of the ring are inseparable, just like the form of a word and its meaning.

William et al.(2004:91) further argue that symbolic signs are the exclusive prerogative of humans. In other words, other lower animals cannot make use of symbolic signs. The authors maintain that human beings have more communicative needs than pointing to things and replicating things. Also, man wants to talk about things which are more abstract in nature such as events in the past or future, objects which are distant from him, hopes about peace and a host of others. They believe that all these can only be achieved by means of symbols which humans all over the world have created for the purpose of communicating all possible thoughts.

According to Danesi (2004:31–33), a symbol stands for its referent in a conventional way. A cross figure can stand for the concept “Christianity”; white can stand for “cleanliness,” “purity,” “innocence,” and dark for “uncleanliness,” “impurity” and “corruption.” The author expresses that symbolism is more prevalent in mathematics and science than any other area of human endeavour pointing out that the science of geometry, as an example, has helped human beings solve engineering dilemmas since ancient times. Symbol equally plays a role in religious life – the Cross symbolizes Christ’s death and all Christian beliefs. The Star of David represents Jewish teachings. People throughout the world have agreed on certain symbols to serve as a shorthand system for recording and recalling information. Every branch of science has its own information system – astronomy uses a set of ancient symbols to identify the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars; in mathematics, Greek letters and other symbols make up an abbreviated language. Specific kinds of symbols appear in such fields as commerce, engineering, medicine, packaging and transportation. All the countries of the world have official or unofficial national symbols. A flag or an anthem may symbolize a nation. In Nigeria, for example, two horses facing each other and raising their forearms to carry an eagle is the symbol for the country. The United States is symbolized by Uncle Sam and the statue of Liberty. Canada is symbolized by the maple leaf while John Bull stands for England.

Commenting on the arbitrariness of symbolic signification, Johansen and Larsen (2002:43) declare:

Negatively symbolic signs are characterized by being arbitrary, unmotivated, i.e. neither connected to the object nor similar to it. In other words, it is not their own characteristics that make them signs, as with iconic signs; nor is there a natural bond between sign and object, as with indexical signs. Instead, symbol-

ic signs are constructed or agreed upon to be used as signs for given purposes in the internal or external world, i.e. as conventional designations with a referentiality and a meaning that are determined by conventional usage.

The authors above pinpoint that there is no relationship whatsoever between the symbolic sign and what it stands for. Language is a good example of symbolic sign. If we take the word *ewé* which translates to ‘leaf’ in English, we see that there is no bond or association in any form between the word and the object it represents. We may decide to give the same name to *igi* (tree). However, there must be a communal consensus. An illustration is given from Fágúnwà’s *Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje* below:

Baálẹ̀ fún èèbò ní obì àbàtà mẹ̀fà, èèbó la mèjí sí wẹ̀wẹ̀. Ó mú ọ̀kan, ó sì ní kí wọ̀n pín iyókù kárí (p. 29)

Baálẹ̀ gave six pieces of kola *acuminata* to the white man. The white man broke two into pieces, took one and asked them to share the rest among all.

In the text above, the present given to the white man (six pieces of kola *acuminata*), a particular kind of kolanut, is *àrokò*, a Yorùbá symbolic non-verbal communication. The kola is used to encode an offer of friendship by the Baálẹ̀ to the Whiteman. Although both the object (kolanuts) and the number (six) presented are symbolic, they have a great tie with what they connote in Yorùbá socio-cultural context.

Analysis

In this section of the study, the interpretation given to the relationship between human beings and some animals in some of the novels is given attention. In other words, the sounds made by some animals and their behaviours and their signification at different contexts are the concern here.

In *Şaworoide*, the zoological code of the cock is used by Amawomárò to determine the time:

Amawomárò jókòó sí ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀, ó ní ro àtubòtán gbogbo ọ̀rọ̀ yì. Orí ìjókòó ló wà tí àkùkọ̀ àkọ̀kọ̀ fì kọ. Oorun kan fẹ̀ gbé e lọ díẹ̀ kí àkùkọ̀ è̀èkẹ̀jì tóó kọ. Bí àkùkọ̀ tí kọ tán, ó dìdẹ̀, ó sí fẹ̀rẹ̀sẹ̀, ó rí í pé òkùnkùn sì kùn. Ó tún jókòó tí tí àkùkọ̀ àkọ̀gbà fì ní kọ. Ó dìdẹ̀ láti lọ sọ fún àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ náà kí wọ̀n ó bọ̀ sọ̀nà. (p.132)

Amawomárò sits in the passage and keeps thinking on this issue. He is on the seat while the first cock crows. He slightly dozes off when the second cock

crows. As the cock crows, he gets up and opens the window only to see that it is still dark. He sits down again until cocks begin to crow one after the other; he then rises to tell the children to embark on the journey

During Lápité's coronation anniversary, Arésè inadvertently, due to alcoholic intoxication, unveils to Arápá, the princess, that he is also a prince. This fact had hitherto been made secret because its revelation may make Lápité to send hired assassins to him as done to his parents who contested the throne with him (Lápité). This unfortunate loose talk and undue revelation makes the king to send hired assassins to execute prince Arésè. However, he escapes with Arápá to Amawo's house who hides them in the evening till dawn. Amawo who could not sleep throughout the night determines the dawn by the signification of the crow of the cock – *àkùkò àkókó, àkùkò èèkèjì, àkùkò àkògbà* (the first cock crow, the second cock crow, the continuous cock crow). The reason why Amawo sends both Arápá and Arésè out of the town before the daybreak is to enable them escape from the hired assassins of the king. The sense of time which Amawo makes through the zoological code is symbolically signified. It is part of his Yorùbá cultural heritage.

In *Ògbójú Ode Nínú Ígbó Irúnmọlẹ*, the owl accidentally slaps Àkàrà Oògùn on his face with its wings. He later enters into trouble on that day:

...eyẹ òwìwí kan fò kojá tí ó sì fi iyẹ gbá mi lójú, bẹẹ ni àmì burúkú pátápátá gbàà ni. Mo dúró lójú kan tí mò ní ronú àpẹpẹ búburú wọnyí ní ìkẹyin sáá mo gbé ikú tà, mo ní "Háwù o, ẹ se ìnyàn kí í kú lẹ̀ẹ̀mejì." (p.22)

...one owl flies over and slaps my face with its wings. This in actual fact is a terribly bad omen. I stand in one place thinking of these bad signs but in the end, I summon courage, daring the death consequence and say 'What is it? A person dies but once.

Àkàrà Oògùn sees the behaviour of the owl with him, *eyẹ òwìwí kan fò kojá tí ó sì fi iyẹ gbá mi lójú* (an owl flies over and slaps my face with its feathers) as a terribly bad omen. The behaviour of the bird may be seen as a signifier of the capture of Àkàrà Oògùn later on that same day in a cave. The gnome, Àgbákò chains up Àkàrà oògùn after giving him several beatings of his life.

An investigation from the Ìyálóde of Ibà who is also a traditional midwife confirms that if an owl slaps someone with its feathers, it would bring troubles into the life of that person. She explains:

Wàhálà àtí idààmú ní ó máa n bá ẹni tí òwìwí bá fi iyẹ gbá lójú. Bákan náà ni ó jẹ wí pé ; ibi tí eyẹ yìi bá ti gbá èniyàn máa n wú tàbí kí ó lápáá.

Troubles and tribulations befall the person that the owl slaps in the face with its wings. Also, any part of one's body which this bird slaps goes swollen up or marked.

The view of the Ìyálóde of Ibà is close to that of Ọpẹbíyí. Ọpẹbíyí unfolds that if an owl slaps anyone with its wings, the person may die except s/he performs certain sacrifice. In the text, all the charms Àkàrà Oògùn uses to free himself from the incarceration of the creature that arrested him proved abortive until he prays to God. Prayer to God may be equated to the offering of a sacrifice.

In *Aiyé d'Aiyé Ọyinbó*, the perching of black butterfly on Àṣàbí's eyelids on the night of her wedding ceremony is a symbolic signification of sickness:

Bí mo ti nájó li agbo li ojọ iyawó mi tí onírúúrú ènià nýé mi sí *labalábá dúdú kan bà lé ipènpéjú mi*. Babalolá rí i. Àwọn iyawó ilé wọn, èyí ni ni àwọn iyálé mi tí ó wà lárín agbo li ojọ nǎ, tí nwọn nýé mi sí rí i. Babalolá fẹ pa á sùgbón ibi tí ó wà yelegé púpò, o gbìdanwò láti pa á sùgbón, ó fò lọ. Kíni labalábá n wá lí alé òní yìi nínú agbo ijó? Èyí jẹ ohun abàmì. (p.19)

As I am dancing in the crowd on the day of my wedding and several people are praising me, *a black butterfly perches on my eyelids*. Babalola sees it. The wives in their house, these are my senior co-wives who are praising me in the midst of the party see it. Babalolá attempts to kill it but it is in a very delicate place. Although he tries to kill it yet it flies away. What is a butterfly looking for in this night in the crowd of a party? This is a strange thing.

In the text, Àṣàbí narrates what she refers to as a strange event on the night of her wedding ceremony – *labalábá dúdú kan bà lé ipènpéjú mi* (a black butterfly perches on my eyelids). After the zoological code, she narrates further:

Kò tójó, kò tósù àsàn dé, mo dùbúlẹ àmódi. Ìyá Babalolá tọka sí àmì labalábá dúdú tí a rí lí etí oṣọn lí ojọ tí mo wọ ilé ọmọ rẹ. Ọmọ rẹ pápá tọka sí àmì kanná tí ó rí ní ipènpéjú mi nígbatí mo nájó lágbo. (p.19)

Within a short time, I lie down in sickness. Babalolá's mother refers to the black butterfly on top of a wooden tray on the day I entered into her son's house. Her son also refers to the same sign he sees on my eyelids when I was dancing in the crowd of the party.

Àṣàbí's mother-in-law and her husband symbolically signified her sickness with the zoological code- *labalábá dídú* (black butterfly) which perched on her eyelids on the night of her wedding ceremony. The sickness lasted for several months until Abóḍerìn; Àṣàbí's father's friend brought in a herbalist who offered sacrifices and rituals before Àṣàbí finally recovered. Linking Àṣàbí's protracted illness to a butterfly is controversial especially if we consider the views of the Yoruba people of the butterfly. According to Abímbólá (1976:217):

The butterfly is a very prominent creature of the Yoruba natural environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that it features prominently in *Èṣẹ́ Ifá* where it is regarded as a *playful, healthy and harmless creature*.

If we look at the stance of the Yorùbá people about butterfly as a 'harmless creature' and the novelist's view of it as an agent of sickness then they contradict each other. Symbolic signification is cultural; it is a communal property which cannot be individually altered. On the other hand, we may say that the novelist focuses on the colour of the butterfly rather than the insect itself. According to Adélékè (2009:110):

Black will then be synonymous with obscurity or opaqueness. In another context, black represents 'sorrow' or death' which perpetually lurks around man... It can also symbolize the evils that men do in the dark. It is important to say that there are few occasions when black can take positive connotations.

Also, contextual significance is very important in this work especially if we consider the time that the black butterfly perched on Àṣàbí's eyelids – the night. In the words of Deely (2005:47):

... a sign is neither a thing nor an object but the pattern according to which things and objects interweave to make up the fabric of experience, wherein one part so stands for other parts as to give greater or lesser "meaning" to the whole at various times and in various contexts.

The novelist may be justified if we consider the context of the event – a wedding ceremony, the observation of the people that witnessed the event (those who saw the butterfly) and the earlier rift between Abóḍerìn, Àṣàbí's father's friend who was suspected to have sent the butterfly and Àṣàbí's mother. This may equally be individual signification whereby the rift is a pointer to the black butterfly which brought Àṣàbí's protracted sickness. One may also surmise that the signification by the author of the novel, an Ègbá Yorùbá, is localized.

Conclusion

In this paper, zoological codes which refer to the behaviours of some animals and the interpretation derived from them by human beings have been analysed. For instance, cockcrow was used to determine the early morning time of the day, while slapping of human beings by the owl with its wings and perching of a black butterfly on the eyelids of human beings were used to determine bad omen. Therefore, zoological codes have symbolically signified the time of the day, pending trouble and sickness, in the texts.

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