



## **Cross-Ethnic Literary Semiotics in Nigerian Languages as a Tool for National Unity**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper illuminates the concept of semiotics, delineates French Structuralism as its theoretical framework, undertakes an ample review of related literature and explores the convergences in semiotic indices among selected Nigerian ethnic languages/literatures, emphasizing them as tools for national unity in Nigeria. It then makes a number of recommendations towards the attainment of unity in Nigeria in spite of our surface heterogeneous linguistic character.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The paper argues that though the different ethnic groups in Nigeria have their individual personalities and identities, they have a lot in common in their cultures and languages. It specifically explores the similarities in semiotics across selected ethnic groups in the country and recommends the highlighting of these similarities by each ethnic group as tools for ethnic and national unity. It has 6 sections with I dealing with this short introduction. Section II focuses on definition and delineation of the term, semiotics, and III on the theoretical framework within which the paper puts its argument while IV deals with a review of literature germane to the topic. Section V, which is the high point of the paper, identifies and discusses similarity in some semiotic items among 8 ethnic/linguistic groups in Nigeria with VI showing findings, conclusion, recommendations.

#### **I**

#### **Semiotics**

The founding fathers of Semiotics – Ferdinand de Saussure (a Swiss Linguist commonly referred to as father of general linguistics) and Charles S. Pierce

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(an American Philosopher) came to the term from their perception of the possibility of meaning beyond the strictly verbal sign. Saussure, in his later years, according to Scholes, began to find in texts, hidden messages that no one else could perceive while Pierce formulated terminologies and systems of thought beyond the grasp of most other mortals. Semiotics as a field of study resulted from the efforts of these two scholars, Saussure calling the concept “Semiologie” and Pierce calling it “Semiotic”.

A central assumption in Saussurian semiotics is the dichotomy between sign (name) and the object it represents. For Saussure, a sign comprises sound-image and a concept or signifier and a signified. Certainly, Saussure as echoed by Roland Barthes and others, emphasized “an unbridgeable gap between words and things (or) signs and referents” Qtd by Scholes (24). Signs, according to Saussure and his apostles, do not refer to things but signify concepts, concepts being aspects of thought, not of reality. Recent findings by Semioticians such as Scholes and Borges (qtd by Scholes) have shown that the world which language describes is not just a concept. Surely, words by the critical opinions of these later scholars do refer to both linguistic and non-linguistic signs; for language being an open system phenomenon, is enhanced and preserved from decay by non-linguistic experience which speakers have brought to bear on it. Semiotics or sign language as employed in this study identifies with this post-Saussurian position on semiotics, which has gained wide popularity among contemporary scholars.

Contributing to the debate, Wellek and Warren see semiotics as using a symbol as something standing for something else (188). They argue that the Greek affix for symbol, which means “to compare,” suggests analogy between sign and signifier. They describe literary signs or symbols as objects which refer to other objects but which demand attention in their own rights as a representation. This position tallies with Scholes distinction between verbal semiotics (which sees linguistic elements as sign) and literary semiotics which relates to non-linguistic sign, the latter being adopted for this study.

Scholars such as Frye, Urua and Udoh (1992), Wilson, and Idorenyin Akpan, have also widely discussed semiotics in the sense used in this study. Frye for example argues that a sign (symbol) is verbal if it refers to the word pattern but where external meaning is attached, it “adds to the verbal symbol the thing symbolized by it” (73). Frye raises a fundamental issue which differentiates strictly linguistic sign which is outside this study and literary semiotics which this study deploys. As he puts it, “Correspondence between phenomenon and verbal sign is truth; lack of it is falsehood” (74). The veracity of this enunciation crumbles if it is applied to literary sign; for, literary sign does not tell scientific truth but imaginative and metaphorical truth, or what Frye calls “hypothetical truth” (74). Urua and Udo distinguish semiotics from pure linguistics which they call a study of human speech sounds. Semiotics according to them deals with such non-linguistic sounds as thunder clap and barking of dogs (98).

Wilson calls “Semiotic indexes symbolographic elements” (53) and cites the young palm frond as an example of semiotic elements used for

communication in traditional settings. Wilson conception of semiotics fits into the concept of semiotics used in this study; so does the conception of semiotics by Fiske and Hartley (qtd by Idorenyin Akpan as “covering the sign itself, the codes system and the culture within which the codes and signs operate,” (231) which underscores the intricate relationship among semiotics, main language and the speakers’ culture.

All in all, semiotics as used in this study is literary, not purely linguistic; it is however not possible or necessary to discuss semiotics in total isolation from language, both, being systems of communication. For the avoidance of doubt, the semiotic items used in the study do not bear linguistic (denotative) relationships with their meanings. They bear metaphoric, imaginative or hypothetical truth relationships, capturing the philosophical cosmology and artistic truth of mind of the ethnic communities under study. This section of the study has tried to delineate semiotics as used in the paper, emphasizing the literary and non-verbal aspects of semiotics.

## II

### **Towards a Critical Framework: Structuralism and National Integration**

As it is well-known, French Structuralism rose from the ruins of Russian Formalism in the 1930’s and received filip from the development of two important centres of linguistic study in Europe following the death of Ferdinand de Saussure. These centres were the Prague or functional school represented by the work of Nikolay Trubetsky and the erstwhile formalist, Roman Jakobson and the Copenhagen (or glossematic) school represented by the work of Louis Hjelmaslev. These two centres, with the product of efforts by the Americans, Boas, Sapir, Whorf and Bloomfield, termed “descriptive linguistics”, constitute the major structuralist modes of linguistic analysis in the 20th Century (Hawkes 74). Many scholars have written about the origins, nature and influence of structuralism: Genette, Cowley, Anozie and Jameson.

Structuralism has many aspects, but the one germane to this study is that aspect defined by Jean Piaget (qtd by Hawkes) and demonstrated by Anozie. As Piaget defines it, structure, which provides the stem for structuralism, can be observed in an arrangement of entities which embodies three fundamental ideas: wholeness, transformation and self-regulation (qtd by Hawkes). The idea of wholeness implies a sense of internal coherence, the arrangement of entities complete in itself and its constituent parts conforming to a set of intrinsic laws which determine its nature and the nature of the parts. The idea of transformation suggests that the structural entity is not static but dynamic, allowing for necessary changes within it while preserving the structure itself. The idea of self-regulation implies that a structure makes no appeals beyond itself in order to validate its transformational procedure.

Expatriating on this delineation by Piaget, Hawkes notes that structuralism as defined by Piaget involves the realization that, despite appearances to the contrary the world does not consist of independently existing objects whose concrete features can be perceived clearly and

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individually. Anozie illustrates this, likening a structure to the game of soccer, arguing that a structure exists when elements are united within a totality presenting certain properties as such and when these properties depend, entirely or partially, upon the very characteristics of the totality (29).

Just as the components of soccer: the lawn, the players, the officials, the rules, the ball, etc operate and make meaning only within the game of soccer, so do constituents of a structure operate within a structure and fail to make meaning outside the structure.

The significance of this theory in this study on national unity cannot be missed. Structuralism or specifically structure, as used there is a metaphor for the Nigerian nation – which comprises about 513 ethnic/linguistic groups according to recent findings (Urua 2004:117). For the country to remain a structure, these components, require unity among themselves and unity within the structure, the nation. The relevance of structuralism to this study is therefore not in doubt, nor is its instructiveness to Nigerians regarding their constitutional duty of promoting national unity, an issue which is examined in part, in the next section of the paper.

### **III**

#### **Review of Related Literature: Semiotics, Literature and National Unity**

A few publications in language and literature on national unity exist in Nigeria. A few also exist on the use of signs for communication in traditional communities in Nigeria, but few exist on literary semiotics and national unity in Nigeria. Maduka in his inaugural lecture at the University of Port Harcourt used a fitting title: “Across Frontiers”. Comparative Literature and National Integration” to call on Nigerians to use our ethnic literatures for national integration. According to him:

Each national literature encodes values which guide the people towards the development of effective mechanisms of response to the challenges of civilization in the modern world through the acquisition of such qualities as grace, poise, finesse, patience, gentility, urbanity tolerance benignity, sense of fair play and justice (18).

Maduka’s message, which is differently re-enacted in his other works: “The Clouds are Gathering: Nigerian Languages and Literatures in National Development”, and “Nigerian Literature in English and the National Question” emphasizes the need for Nigerian scholars and literate to use our language, literature, indeed our culture for the unity and progress of the nation.

Contributing to this campaign, Okoh calls for the use of Nigerian oral literature for national development in spite of the adversity facing oral literature in a technology dominated society. Eka 2000; 2005; Atakpo, Ashong, Enoidem have made significant contributions from the perspectives of language, Theatre, Communication and Fine Arts. Eka calls for linguistic tolerance as a means of resolving cultural conflicts in Nigeria and suggests ways of using our multilingualism for national unity (1996; 2000). Ashong

suggests national development through indigenous languages publications while Atakpo and Enoidem respectively suggest the use of Community Theatre and Fine Arts. All these views are important contributions towards national unity and progress; none of the authors however discusses the use of semiotics for national unity, though such authors as Udo, E. A.; Wilson; Akpan, Wilson and Mboho; Maduka and Eyoh have discussed the use of symbols and signs in communication and literature.

Two previous works by this author relate to the present study: “Animal Symbolism as Indicator of Cultural Unity in Nigeria: Similarities in Ibibio and Ijo/Urhobo Animal Symbolism in J. P. Clark-Bekederemo’s Poetry” and “Proverbs as Evidence of Ethnic Unity in Nigeria: A Study in Ijo, Urhobo and Ibibio Oral Literatures,” but neither is identical with the study. The first focuses only on animals and covers only three ethnic groups while the second deals with verbal signs (proverbs) still in only three ethnic groups. The present study covers flora, fauna and non-living matters in eight ethnic groups in Nigeria as shown in the next section of the paper.

#### IV

#### **Cross-Ethnic Semiotics in Selected Nigerian Languages**

To garner information for this study, an *instrument* called “Questionnaire on Cross-Ethnic Semiotics in Nigerian Languages as a Tool for National Unity” was designed. The instrument solicited the following personal data from the respondents: name, ethnic group, state, ethnic language, age and gender. It contained 30 semiotic items, each with some symbolic meaning from the point of view of Ibibio semiotics. The items which were named in English language were to be given local names by each of the informants who was to tick the meaning applicable to his linguistic/ethnic group (see appendix).

The instrument was administered to one adult male from each of six ethnic groups in Nigeria as follows:

1. Dr. Joseph A. Ushie Dept of English University of Uyo, Bette-Bendi Cross River State.
2. Dr Chris Egharevba Department of English UNIUYO, Edo, Edo State.
3. Chief Michael Okafor Igbo, Ewet Timber Market, 22 Uruan, Street, Uyo Akwa Ibom State, Igbo, Abia State
4. Mr. John Christopher, Department of English, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State Ijo/Izon, Bayelsa.
5. Mallam Mustapha Umar No. 40 Abak Road, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Hausa/Fulani, Sokoto State.
6. Dr. Olu Awofeso Department of Political Science and Public Administration UNIUYO, Yoruba, Ogun State.
7. Mr. Efe Victor Enajekpo Okpe L. G. A., Urhobo, Delta State (adapted from “Animal Symbolism ...” Eyoh – 2002).

As can be seen from the addresses, these informants were contacted either at school or business places; it was not possible to go to the ethnic group in view of time; so, no woman was around to be contacted. Also, the number of persons (one for an ethnic group) was considered adequate since all the informants were mature adult, although some of them did not know some of the names of items in

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their languages. In some cases the items were not applicable because of geographical or natural distribution. The data generated and collected are shown in tables as follows:

**Table 1: Showing Meanings of 30 Semiotic Items from Ibibio Perspective.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	ndom	1. symbolizes joy 2. symbolizes peace
2.	charcoal	nkan	1. used to rub thieves to make them ashamed 2. used by masquerades to disguise
3.	cam wood	idiot	1. used in traditional medicine 2. used to decorate maidens
4.	sand	ntan	3. used to rub chicken to fool the hawk. 1. used for making a curse 2. used to show poverty
5.	air	afum	3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand 1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air? 2. invisibility
6.	river or sea	inyang	3. lightness, not heavy. 1. you do not keep enmity with it because you must cross it to your destination 2. it does not discriminate what it receives as objects (food). 3. he who urinates into it will drink his urine
7.	fire	ikan	t burns the tortoise in his shell, it will consume the fowl that carries tinder t may be dull but it melts the yam all the same t does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream. could be used for a curse by a parent, usually the mother.
8.	saliva	etap	2. sweet talk if it is described as parrot's.
9.	young palm frond	ekpi or eyei	1. used for prohibition 2. used for injunction 3. used to indicate what is sacred 4. used for summon
10.	dry- leaf	nsat mfa	1. used to signify lightless 2. used to describe one who has no courage 3. used to describe an aging person
11.	silk cotton tree	ukim	1. trees near it receive its due 2. abode of witches and wizards
12.	oil bean seed	ukana	suggests the uncertainty of one's domicile in life 2. suggests choice of settlement
13.	oil bean tree	ukana eto	1. present at every local market square 2. suggests hardness
14.	periwinkle	mfi	1. in-subordination 2. tiny size
15.	tortoise	ekit	1. long life 2. cleverness 3. craftiness
16.	the owl	nkidikid	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 2. evil
17.	cock	ekiko	autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. pride for beauty of feathers.
18.	dove	ibiom	1. peace, 2. gentleness
19.	parrot	inim	tale bearing
20.	snake	uduk-ikot	1. danger 2. guile 3. deceit 4. fetish totem
21.	wallgecko	ukpong eyen	1. harmlessness 2. sloth because of unadventure
22.	the bat	emiang	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 3. ambivalence 4. wickedness.
23.	cat	anwa	1. cleanliness 2. agility 3. good habits: it buries its faeces
24.	rat	ekpu	1. insincerity 2. stealing
25.	lamb	nyinedong	1. gentleness 2. innocence 3. uncomplaining
26.	goat	ebot	1. foolishness 2. stubbornness
27.	lizard	okpo	1. boasts that it dose not feed on excreter ays he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
28.	dog	ewa	1. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing
29.	weaverbird	nsiak	ating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits 1. destructiveness 2. a good omen when it nests at a homestead
30.	termite	ebu	1. suggests destructiveness ts flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire hows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).

**Table 2: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Bendi and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	Uzoum	Symbolizes peace
2.	charcoal	abi	used to rub thieves to make them ashamed
3.	cam wood	likwuu	used to decorate maidens
4.	sand	ayiaa	used for making a curse
5.	air	whufem	invisibility
6.	river or sea	umbuo	1. you do not keep enmity with it because you must cross it to your destination 2. it does not discriminate what it receives as objects (food). 3. he who urinates into it will drink his urine
7.	fire	shinde	t burns the tortoise in his shell, it will consume the fowl that carries tinder t may be dull but it melts the yam all the same t does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream.
8.	saliva	akaung	ould be used for a curse by a parent, usually the mother. 2. sweet talk if it is described as parrot's.
9.	young palm frond	owhuhwai	1. used for prohibition 2. used for injunction 3. used to indicate what is sacred
10.	dry- leaf	whukpioshia	1. used to signify lightless 2. used to describe an aging person
11.	silk cotton tree	whukem	1. trees near it receive its due
12.	tortoise	atiaklwu	1. long life 2. cleverness 3. craftiness
13.	the owl	shikaung	1. witchcraft 2. evil
14.	cock	shigiauku	autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. pride for beauty of feathers.
15.	dove	kelulu	1. peace, 2. gentleness
16.	snake	oshii	1. danger 2. fetish totem
17.	wallgecko	kemamapupu	1. harmlessness
18.	the bat	whulaam	1. ambivalence
19.	cat	kebang	1. agility
20.	rat	ufeb	1. stealing
21.	lamb	onwai-utia	1. gentleness 2. innocence
22.	goat	obu	1. foolishness 2. stubbornness
23.	lizard	shidiong	1. boasts that it dose not feed on excreter ays he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
24.	dog	obuang	1. sexual promiscuity ating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
25.	weaverbird	otuu	1. a good omen when it nests at a homestead
26.	termite	inzulnzul	3. shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).

Table 2 shows significant similarities in the ways Bendi and Ibibio assign meanings to 26 out of the 30 listed semiotic items as those Bendi and Ibibio languages have common meanings for. This figure represents about 87%. Table 3 indicates about 100% similarities between Edo and Ibibio in their use of semiotic items for communication. Virtually all items listed were ticked by the informant. For the Edo people therefore, white chalk symbolizes peace, joy and purity even as termite symbolizes both destructiveness and organization. These are the meanings assigned these items by Ibibio. Table 4 shows about 87% ( $\frac{26}{30}$ ) similarity between Hausa and Ibibio in the ways they use some semiotic items to communicate. The absence of rain forest accounts for the non-applicability of items 3, 9, 12, 13, to the informant.

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**Table 3: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Edo and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	orhue	1. symbolizes joy 2. symbolizes peace 3. purity
2.	charcoal	igievbibi or ibi	1. used to rub thieves to make them ashamed
3.	cam wood	umeh	1. used in traditional medicine 2. used to decorate maidens
4.	sand	ekhai	1. used for making a curse 2. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
5.	air	ehoho	1. invisibility 2. lightness, not heavy.
6.	river or sea	eze	1. you do not keep enmity with it because you must cross it to your destination 2. it does not discriminate what it receives as objects (food). 3. he who urinates into it will drink his urine
7.	fire	erhen	it burns the tortoise in his shell, it will consume the fowl that carries tinder it does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream.
8.	saliva	asen	1. could be used for a curse by a parent, usually the mother.
9.	young palm frond	ome	1. used to indicate what is sacred
10.	dry- leaf	ebenokai	1. used to describe one who has no courage
11.	silk cotton tree	erikporu	1. abode of witches and wizards
12.	oil bean seed	ikpokpagha	suggests the uncertainty of one's domicile in life 2. suggests choice of settlement
13.	oil bean tree	okpagha	1. present at every local market square 2. suggests hardness
14.	periwinkle	ironron-eze	1. in-subordination 2. tiny size
15.	tortoise	egui	1. long life 2. cleverness 3. craftiness
16.	the owl	esughusughu	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 2. evil
17.	cock	okpa	autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. declares dawn (the break of day) 3. pride for beauty of feathers. 4. used during the igue festival to worship the head.
18.	dove	elikhukhu	1. peace, 2. gentleness
19.	parrot	okhue	tale bearing
20.	snake	eyen	1. danger 2. guile 3. deceit 4. fetish totem
21.	wallgecko	ekpowa	1. harmless 2. sloth because of unadventure
22.	the bat	eguen	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 3. ambivalence 4. wickedness.
23.	cat	ologbo or ovbieden	1. cleanliness 2. agility 3. good habits: it buries its faeces
24.	rat	ofen	1. insincerity 2. stealing
25.	lamb	ohuan	1. gentleness 2. innocence 3. uncomplaining
26.	goat	ewe	1. foolishness 2. stubbornness
27.	lizard	osikpalo	1. boasts that it dose not feed on excreter says he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
28.	dog	ekita	1. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
29.	weaverbird	ahiavben	1. destructiveness 2. a good omen when it nests at a homestead
30.	termite	edon	1. suggests destructiveness its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier). it shows organization it shows the principle of monarchy



**Table 4: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Hausa and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	kalmare	1. symbolizes joy 2. symbolizes peace
2.	charcoal	gawai	1. used to rub thieves to make them ashamed 2. used by masquerades to disguise
3.	sand	kasa	1. used for making a curse
4.	air	iska	1. lightness, not heavy.
5.	river or sea	gulbi/korama	1. you do not keep enmity with it because you must cross it to your destination 2. it does not discriminate what it receives as objects (food). 3. he who urinates into it will drink his urine
6.	fire	wuta	it burns the tortoise in his shell, it will consume the fowl that carries tinder it may be dull but it melts the yam all the same it does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream.
7.	saliva	miyau	1. could be used for a curse by a parent, usually the mother.
8.	dry- leaf	busasho ganye.	1. used to signify lightless 2. used to describe one who has no courage 3. used to describe an aging person
9.	silk cotton tree	iccen kada	1. trees near it receive its due 2. abode of witches and wizards
10.	periwinkle	dodon alkwato	1. in-subordination 2. tiny size
11.	tortoise	kurkunu	1. long life 2. cleverness 3. craftiness
12.	the owl	mujiya	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 2. evil
13.	cock	zakara	autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. pride for beauty of feathers.
14.	dove	kuti	1. peace, 2. gentleness
15.	parrot	aku	tale bearing
16.	snake	maciji	1. danger 2. guile 3. deceit 4. fetish totem
17.	wallgecko	tsakaka	1. harmlessness
18.	the bat	jemage	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 3. ambivalence 4. wickedness.
19.	cat	mussa	1. cleanliness 2. agility 3. good habits: it buries its faeces
20.	rat	kusu	1. insincerity 2. stealing
21.	lamb	dantumkiya	1. gentleness 2. innocence 3. uncomplaining
22.	goat	aluya	1. foolishness 2. stubbornness
23.	lizard	kadangare	1. boasts that it does not feed on excreter says he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
24.	dog	kare	1. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
25.	weaverbird	maray	1. destructiveness 2. a good omen when it nests at a homestead
26.	termite	zago	1. suggests destructiveness its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire shows ingenuity in protecting its queen (mouthier).

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**Table 5: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Igbo and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	nzo	1. symbolizes joy 2. symbolizes peace 3. igboannouncing happy news
2.	charcoal	ughi	1. used by masquerades to disguise
3.	cam wood	uhwe	1. used to decorate maidens 2. used to rub chicken to fool the hawk.
4.	sand	aja	1. used for making a curse 2. used to show poverty 3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
5.	air	ikuko	1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air? 2. invisibility 3. lightness, not heavy.
6.	river or sea	umiri	1. you do not keep enmity with it because you must cross it to your destination 2. it does not discriminate what it receives as objects (food). 3. he who urinates into it will drink his urine
7.	fire	oku	1. he who urinates into it will drink his urine 2. burns the tortoise in his shell, it will consume the fowl that carries tinder 3. t may be dull but it melts the yam all the same 4. t does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream. 5. ould be used for a curse by a parent, usually the mother.
8.	saliva	asou	1. sweet talk if it is described as parrot's.
9.	young palm frond	omu	1. used for prohibition 2. used for injunction 3. used to indicate what is sacred 4. used for summon
10.	dry- leaf	akwukwuo	1. used to signify lightless 2. used to describe an aging person
11.	silk cotton tree	akpu	1. trees near it receive its due 2. abode of witches and wizards
12.	oil bean seed	ugba	1. suggests the uncertainty of one's domicile in life 2. suggests choice of settlement
13.	oil bean tree	ukpaka	1. present at every local market square 2. suggests hardness
14.	periwinkle	isam	1. in-subordination 2. tiny size
15.	tortoise	mbe	1. long life 2. cleverness 3. craftiness
16.	the owl	huikui	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 2. evil
17.	cock	oke okuko	1. autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. pride for beauty of feathers.
18.	dove	nduri	1. peace, 2. gentleness
19.	parrot	rchoku	1. tale bearing
20.	snake	agwuo	1. danger 2. guile 3. deceit 4. fetish totem
21.	wallgecko	agulo	1. harmlessness 2. sloth because of unadventure
22.	the bat	usu	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 3. ambivalence
23.	cat	nwamba	1. agility
24.	rat	oke	1. stealing
25.	lamb	nwaturu	1. gentleness 2. innocence 3. uncomplaining
26.	goat	ewu	1. foolishness
27.	lizard	ngwere	1. boasts; that it dose not feed on excreter 2. says he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
28.	dog	nkita	1. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
29.	weaverbird	ahio	1. destructiveness 2. a good omen when it nests at a homestead
30.	termite	nkpo	1. suggests destructiveness 2. ts flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire 3. hows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).

Table 5 shows that the Igbo people use 100% of the semiotic items listed in communication in the same ways as Ibibio. White chalk symbolizes joy and peace in both ethnic groups. The goat in both ethnic groups is a metaphor for foolishness and stubbornness. Therefore apart from their being contiguous to each other, the two ethnic groups have rich semiotic items in common in their different languages.

**Table 6: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Ijo and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	tori	1. symbolizes joy 2. symbolizes peace 3. igboannouncing happy news
2.	charcoal	angila	1. used by masquerades to disguise
3.	cam wood	isele	1. used in traditional medicine 2. used to decorate maidens 3. used to rub chicken to fool the hawk.
4.	sand	youn	1. used to show poverty
5.	air	eferu	1. invisibility
6.	river or sea	(i) toru (ii) abadi	1. it does not discriminate what it receives as objects (food).
7.	fire	fini	it burns the tortoise in his shell, it will consume the fowl that carries tinder it may be dull but it melts the yam all the same it does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream. could be used for a curse by a parent, usually the mother.
8.	saliva	fula	2. sweet talk if it is described as parrot's.
9.	young palm frond	ulaibu-beri	1. used for prohibition 2. used to indicate what is sacred
10.	dry- leaf	tim-beri	1. used to signify lightless
11.	silk cotton tree	zei-tin-beri	1. abode of witches and wizards
12.	periwinkle	nsisagha tin	1. tiny size
13.	tortoise	isami ikaki	1. long life 2. cleverness 3. craftiness
14.	the owl	okurukuru	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 2. evil
15.	cock	oweï-ofini	autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. pride for beauty of feathers.
16.	dove	alukpukpu	1. peace, 2. gentleness
17.	parrot	okolobi	tale bearing
18.	snake	kiriwei	1. danger 2. guile 3. deceit 4. fetish totem
19.	wallgecko	warikoru	1. harmlessness 2. sloth because of unadventurs
20.	the bat	peu	1. weirdness 2. witchcraft 3. ambivalence
21.	cat	okogbo	1. agility
22.	rat	oke	1. insincerity 2. stealing
23.	lamb	kala-onaria	1. gentleness, 2. innocence 3. uncomplaining
24.	goat	obori	1. foolishness
25.	lizard	akpoko	1. boasts; that it dose not feed on excreter says he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
26.	dog	obiri	1. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing
27.	termite		eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits 1. suggests destructiveness its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).

Table 6 shows that the Ijo people use 27 out of the 30 semiotic items (about 90%) in the same way with the Ibibio. White chalk to them symbolizes joy and peace as it does to the Ibibio. The young palm frond is used for prohibition and for marking what is considered sacred, etc. It is important to note the similarities in Ibibio/Ijo words for lizard okpok/akpoko and tortoise “ikid” “ikaki”; indeed, the Ibibio idiom for one who behaves like tortoise is “ikaki”.

## *Cross-Ethnic Literary Semiotics in Nigerian Languages*

**Table 7: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Yoruba and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	white chalk	efum	1. symbolizes joy 2. symbolizes peace
2.	charcoal	edu	1. used to rub thieves to make them ashamed 2. used by masquerades to disguise
3.			
4.	sand	iyepe	1. used for making a curse 2. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
5.	air	ategun	1. invisibility
6.	river or sea	odo or okun respectively	you do not keep enmity with it because you must cross it to your destination
7.	fire	inan	it does not burn the stream, though it may turn the bush bordering on the stream.
8.	saliva	ito	1. sweet talk if it is described as parrot's.
9.	dry- leaf	ewe-gbigbe	1. used to signify lightless
10.	silk cotton tree	owu	1. abode of witches and wizards
11.	tortoise	ijapa	1. cleverness 2. craftiness
12.	the owl	owiwi	1. witchcraft 2. evil
13.	cock	ako adiyé or akuko	autonomy since two do not crow under one roof 2. pride for beauty of feathers.
14.	dove		1. peace, 2. gentleness
15.	parrot	ariye koko	tale bearing
16.	snake	ejo	1. danger
17.	wallgecko	omo-onile	1. harmlessness
18.	the bat	adan	1. witchcraft 2. wickedness.
19.	cat	ologbo	1. agility
20.	rat	eku	1. stealing
21.	lamb	aguntan	1. gentleness 2. innocence
22.	goat	ewure	1. stubbornness
23.	lizard	alangba	1. boasts that it does not feed on excreter says he can detect the enemy from his (enemy's) eyes
24.	dog	aja	sexual promiscuity
25.	termite	ikan	1. suggests destructiveness

Table 7 shows that  $\frac{25}{30}$  of the items representing about 83% are used in similar ways by Ibibio and Yoruba people. This score is significant, showing that the two ethnic groups have a lot in common regarding the semiotic contents of their languages.

**Table 8: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to Urhobo and Ibibio.**

SN	Item in English	Local Name	Meaning or Symbolism
1.	the owl	orukugho	weirdness, witchcraft; evil; mystical powers, etc.
2.	the cock	ugho	proclamation of dawn; pride for beauty of feathers; autonomy since "two do not crow under one roof:.
3.	the dove	erhurhe	peace, gentleness; quietness, etc.
4.	the parrot	omoko	tale bearing
5.	the snake	orodeko	danger; guile, deceit, sacred totem.
6.	the wall gecko	crarhuheyen	harmlessness; unadventurous
7.	the tortoise	ogbeyen	everness; tale bearing, insincerity; stealing
8.	the bat	adjah	weirdness; witch craft; wickedness; ambivalence, etc.
9.	the cat	clogbo	theft; cleverness
10.	the rat	erawoyen	cleverness, craftiness
11.	the lamb	ogegede	peace; gentleness; quietness
12.	the goat	evwe	foolishness, wiser than the sheep.

**Luke Eyoh**

The table shows hundred percent (100%) similarities in the meaning assigned to the listed semiotic items by the Urhobo and Ibibio. All 12 items have been ticked by the informant as having the same symbolic meanings in Ubroho as in Ibibio.

This table is adapted from previous recently published research as earlier indicated.

**Table 9: Showing Meanings of Semiotic Items Common to all 8 Ethnic Groups in the Study.1.**

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4.	1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show poverty 3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
5.	1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air? 2. invisibility , 3. lightness, not heavy.
10.	1. used to signify lightless, 2. used to describe an aging person
11.	1. trees near it receive its due, 2. abode of witches and wizards
16.	1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil
18.	1 peace, 2. gentleness
20.	1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem
21.	1. harmlessness, 2. sloth because of unadventure
23.	1. agility
24.	1. stealing
25.	1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining
26.	1. foolishness
28.	sexual promiscuity 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
30.	suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire 3. shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).

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**2.**

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4.	1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
5.	1. invisibility, 2. lightness, not heavy.
10.	1. used to describe one who has no courage
11.	1. abode of witches and wizards
16.	1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil
18.	1 peace, 2. gentleness
20.	1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem
21.	1. harmlessness, 2. sloth because of unadventure
23.	1. cleanliness, 2. agility, 3. good habits: it buries its faeces
24.	1. insincerity, 2. stealing
25.	1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining
26.	1. foolishness, 2. stubbornness
28.	sexual promiscuity, 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
30.	1. suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire 3. shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier). it shows organization, 5. it shows the principle of monarchy

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**3.**

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4. 1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show poverty  
3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
  5. 1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air? 2. invisibility , 3. lightness, not heavy.
  10. 1. used to signify lightless, 2. used to describe an aging person
  11. 1. trees near it receive its due, 2. abode of witches and wizards
  16. 1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil
  18. 1 peace, 2. gentleness
  20. 1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem
  21. 1. harmlessness, 2. sloth because of unadventure
  23. 1. agility
  24. 1. stealing
  25. 1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining
  26. 1. foolishness
  28. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
  30. 1. suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire  
shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).
- 

**4.**

- 
4. 1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show poverty  
3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
  5. 1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air?  
2. invisibility , 3. lightness, not heavy.
  10. 1. used to signify lightless, 2. used to describe an aging person
  11. 1. trees near it receive its due, 2. abode of witches and wizards
  16. 1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil
  18. 1 peace, 2. gentleness
  20. 1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem
  21. 1. harmlessness, 2. sloth because of unadventure
  23. 1. agility
  24. 1. stealing
  25. 1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining
  26. 1. foolishness
  28. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
  30. suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire  
3. shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).
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**Luke Eyoh**

**5.**

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- 4. 1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show poverty  
3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
  - 5. 1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air?  
2. invisibility , 3. lightness, not heavy.
  - 10. 1. used to signify lightless, 2. used to describe an aging person
  - 11. 1. trees near it receive its due, 2. abode of witches and wizards
  - 16. 1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil
  - 18. 1 peace, 2. gentleness
  - 20. 1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem
  - 21. 1. harmless, 2. sloth because of unadventure
  - 23. 1. agility
  - 24. 1. stealing
  - 25. 1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining
  - 26. 1. foolishness
  - 28. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
  - 30. 1. suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).
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**6.**

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- 4. 1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show poverty  
3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand
  - 5. 1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air?, 2. invisibility , 3. lightness, not heavy.
  - 10. 1. used to signify lightless, 2. used to describe an aging person
  - 11. 1. trees near it receive its due, 2. abode of witches and wizards
  - 16. 1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil
  - 18. 1 peace, 2. gentleness
  - 20. 1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem
  - 21. 1. harmless, 2. sloth because of unadventure
  - 23. 1. agility
  - 24. 1. stealing
  - 25. 1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining
  - 26. 1. foolishness
  - 28. sexual promiscuity 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits
  - 30. 1. suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier).
-

7.

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- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 4.  | 1. used for making a curse, 2. used to show poverty<br>3. used to show defeat or ruin if a person is said to eat sand                            |
| 5.  | 1. used to describe starvation; am i to drink air?<br>2. invisibility , 3. lightness, not heavy.   |
| 10. | 1. used to signify lightless, 2. used to describe an aging person  |
| 11. | 1. trees near it receive its due, 2. abode of witches and wizards  |
| 16. | 1. weirdness, 2. witchcraft, 2. evil   |
| 18. | 1 peace, 2. gentleness   |
| 20. | 1. danger, 2. guile, 3. deceit, 4. fetish totem  |
| 21. | 1. harmlessness, 2. sloth because of unadventure   |
| 23. | 1. agility   |
| 24. | 1. stealing  |
| 25. | 1. gentleness, 2. innocence, 3. uncomplaining  |
| 26. | 1. foolishness   |
| 28. | sexual promiscuity 2. stealing, 3. eating back its vomit, it stands for one who returns to forsaken habits                                       |
| 30. | 1. suggests destructiveness, 2. its flying species suggests foolish anger; it flies into fire shows ingenuity in protecting it queen (mouthier). |
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This table shows the overall percentage of similarity of meanings assigned by all 8 ethnic groups to the listed semiotic items as  $\frac{14}{30}$  or about 47%. This is significant considering the gaps which some informants left blank as a result of their unfamiliarity with the items in issue.

V

**Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations**

The foregoing tables show clearly that the 8 ethnic groups in Nigeria have a lot in common in the area of semiotics. The paper therefore concludes that the different ethnic groups in Nigeria have a lot in common in various aspects of their cultures as exemplified by this study on cross-ethnic semiotics. The paper therefore makes the following recommendations towards national unity in Nigeria:

1. That ethnic semiotics and other aspects of our oral literatures be taught in our schools including unity schools and as part of General Studies in our universities.
2. That as much as possible, the teaching and learning of semiotics and other aspects of oral tradition across ethnic frontiers be encouraged.
3. That writers of our national literatures should project our oral tradition in their works to enable its preservation and propagation
4. That conferences be organized occasionally on semiotics and other aspects of our culture to promote scholarship in our culture and foster national unity through academics.



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