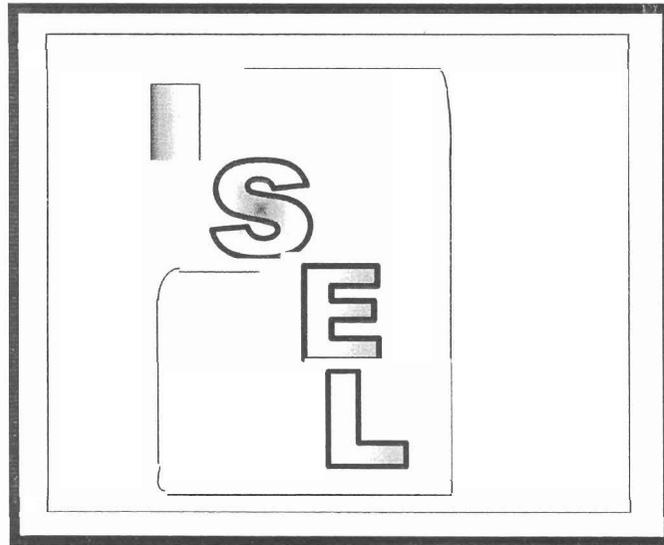


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Ethnography of Meaning Cues in Nonverbal Communication in South-western Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is a survey of nonverbal communication cues in the south-western Nigerian socio-cultural context. The paper's aim is to elicit features of nonverbal communication with unique cultural meanings in the context. The method of participant observation, often used by ethnographers of communication was employed for data collection and assigning of meaning cues to them. The writer, who resides in the Lagos metropolis, compiled a catalogue of nonverbal cues by observing the social and linguistic behaviours of the people in the area over a period of time. Categories and concepts of nonverbal communication such as kinesics, proxemics and chronemics were employed for the analysis of the data. It was discovered that, while several nonverbal cues observed have universal meanings, several examples have unique cultural meanings. It was also observed that nonverbal cues are frequently used both as complement to verbal communication and as alternatives to speech in the socio-cultural milieu studied.

Key words: *emblem, oculosics, haptics, kinesics, proxemics, chronemics.*

1. Introduction

The ability to communicate is probably the most precious gift given to man by the Creator, after life itself. Of course, human beings are not the only creatures with the ability to communicate. Although governed more by instinct, animals also have some remarkable forms of communication, which include varieties of sounds, such as the ritual of hooting at each other, attention grabbing colours, flashing lights and complex scents. Incredible though it may seem, botanists have proved beyond doubt that plants not only communicate with one another, but that they engage in it with certain animals and insects. The aim of this paper is to elicit some peculiar features of nonverbal communication with unique cultural meaning in south-western Nigeria.

An attempt to define communication in a single sentence can be daunting, most especially as the concept is already an everyday word. We often talk of communication or lack of it in relationships such as marriage and other

interpersonal bonds. Communication is about information and its transmission; it could be verbal or nonverbal, shared or concealed, direct or indirect, clear or coded, favourable or unfavourable, true or false and private or public. Interpersonal communication takes place through a system of arbitrary signs: oral language, written language, everyday gestures such as beckoning, elaborate sign language (developed for persons with severe hearing impairment), Morse code, to name but a few. As already stated above, nonverbal cues can be used to complement the spoken word or used just by themselves. They are more effective than words in expressing love or dislike; selflessness or selfishness; sorrow or joy, and a myriad of other human emotions.

Communication permeates the whole of life; hence it is vital to the web of life. The life of a human being would have been meaningless without communication because there is always a need to interact with other human beings to get along and to realise one's life ambition. Some scholars maintain that non-verbally transmitted meanings contribute as much as 80% to our interpretation of other people's behaviour (Mehrabian and Farris 1967). This is clearly an exaggeration, as both verbal and nonverbal dimensions of communication play equal roles in arriving at the correct interpretation of a message.

2. Data Base of Study

Ethnographers of communication are concerned with the holistic explanation of meaning behaviour in a wider framework of beliefs, actions and norms. They are interested in how meanings and behaviours need to be understood in an analytical framework in which comparisons establish, not only what is unique (the 'particularities') in different cultures, but also what is potentially the same (the 'generalities') (Schiffrin 1994: 140). One major method of analysing communicative patterns is through the use of participant-observation method by the analyst. Ethnographers seek to analyse patterns of communication as part of cultural knowledge and behaviour which are integrated in what we know and do as members of a particular culture. An ethnographic approach, therefore, views language as just a part of a complex pattern of actions and beliefs that give

meaning to people's lives. This approach builds a single framework in which communication has a central role in both anthropological and linguistic studies (Hymes 1974).

Consistent with this assumption is a focus on the goals, setting, and participants and other acts that constitute nonverbal communication in South-western Nigeria. The predominant culture in south-western Nigeria is Yoruba. The researcher is a member of this culture; he is thus an active participant in the nonverbal communicative acts under review. The analyst has compiled a catalogue of significant communicative acts, especially the 'particularities' (to borrow Schifffrin's 1994 term), and has described the meaning cues ascribed to each nonverbal communicative act in the South-western Nigerian socio-cultural setting.

3. Perspectives on Non-verbal Communication

Dressing, facial expressions and gestures are frequently employed by humans to communicate with one another. In demonstrating the relevance of nonverbal communication in counselling therapy, Makinde (1985) established that psychoanalysts often arrive at correct diagnoses of patients' problems through a combination of what patients tell them and the nonverbal cues they observe. Nonverbal cues are instinctively employed by human beings for persuasion, agreement, denial, show of cooperation, expression of intimacy and so on. "The mouth speaks and so does the rest of the body" (ibid: 9). Consequently, positive or negative facial expressions and body movements assist a decoder in the interpretation of past, present and future behaviours of a person. Even silence (Malinowski 1923, Mehrabian 1981) can be employed for communication as much wisdom has been found in the famous sayings that "silence means consent" or "silence is the best answer for a fool."

Non-verbal communication could be used just by itself or as a complement to verbal communication. A youth's mode of dressing, hairstyle and style of walking, for instance, speak volumes about the personality of the individual. Just as we do with words, it is possible to deceive with nonverbal clues as well. Human beings are notorious for "faking it" or telling "white lies", but it is not possible for

them to do it at all times. Words are sometimes used deceptively, but nonverbal cues can play an important role in a more accurate interpretation of human communication. If we look more closely beneath the surface, we would discover a great deal of resources that can be tapped for a better understanding of social interactions and the interpretation of mass communication in our immediate and wider community.

DeFleur et al. (2005: 66) define nonverbal communication as: “deliberate or unintentional use of objects, actions, sounds, time and space so as to arouse meaning in others.” They identify four fundamental uses of nonverbal cues, viz. to complement verbal message, to regulate verbal interaction, to substitute action for words, and to contradict verbal meaning. It can be seen from the above that nonverbal signs can alter, amplify, or limit people’s understanding of the words we use in everyday interaction.

Deception, according to Goffman (1959), is central to everyday social interaction; we often pay insincere compliments to our acquaintances, not because we are bald face liars, but because the truth might be painfully bitter, embarrassing or inappropriate in some situations. For instance, when one’s hostess has spent the whole day preparing a dinner that turns out to be an unappetizing one (Berger 2005), the polite thing to say is: “*Thanks for the nice dinner,*” as saying the stark truth may be uncharitable to a nice lady who just happens to be a lousy cook. Nonverbal cues such as the manner in which the guest picks at the food, the slow and laborious chewing and the limited quantity consumed by the one that pays the compliment should be sufficient to pass on the correct message to the hostess. This is a sense in which nonverbal cues can be used to contradict verbal message (DeFleur et al. 2005).

Experts have observed that an individual’s facial expression, posture and eye movements reveal more veracious meanings than his speech (Knapp 1978; Navararrow and Schaffer 2001). Our posture often expresses our view of ourselves and it affects the view that others have of us. Posture can give away one’s position in the organisation as either a superior officer or a subordinate. The way we sit or stand often says to the interlocutor that *I hang on your every word* or that *I am*

clever and eager to learn or Just finish what you are saying and stop wasting everyone's time.

Kinesics is an aspect of semiology which centres on the use of body movements as a signalling system (Birdwhistell 1955, Fast 1970). The term is used by communication experts to refer to the study of body movements such as gestures, postures and facial expressions. The posture of the body can betray one's emotion. Fidgeting, shaking of the hands or jumpy behaviour may reveal nervousness or instability on the part of the speaker. Unsteady steps or avoidance of eye contact are often interpreted as an admission of guilt or hiding of the truth, but such interpretations are not always correct. Smiles, according to Makinde (1985: 10), are associated all over the world with the emotion of happiness or joy, but he distinguishes between the broad and the upper lip smiles which may convey different meanings. Other aspects of kinesics include paleness or blushing, movement of the head, dropping of the shoulders, folding of the arms, perspiration of the palms, the position of the legs and so on.

Gestures have often been used to achieve remarkable effects of single mindedness and unity of purpose in History. Germany's Adolf Hitler, for instance, used the nefarious "hail Hitler" salute to rally and galvanise ordinary Germans at that time to his racial superiority doctrine that led to the Second World War. Likewise, the Black Consciousness movement in America during the dark days of segregation used the "black power" salute of a raised fist as a rallying call for the oppressed black people to unite under a single umbrella. Gestures can be cultural as can be observed in the language of the deaf and dumb, or registered, as observed in the waving of the hands by music conductors, traffic wardens and referees. Football referees do not usually use words to communicate on the field of play for obvious reasons. In addition to whistle blowing, they gesticulate unambiguously to indicate infringements of the rules of the game as well as the penalty for such contraventions.

Adapters (DeFleur, et al. 2005) refer to aspects of kinesics in which the hand, arm, leg or other parts of the body move unintentionally. These frequently happen in tense or anxious moments. Common examples are nail biting, shaking of

the legs, pacing, hair pulling, etc. In south-western Nigeria, for instance, school children, young persons or social inferiors almost always bow or curtsy unconsciously when giving or receiving something from their teacher, older people or social superiors.

Oculesics refers to the study of the use of the eyes for communication (Burgeon and Saine 1978). Eye contact and pupil dilation in face-to-face communication is very significant for meaning (Manzur, et al. 1980). Good communicators often exploit the advantages of eye contact, especially when engaged in business discussions. The position of the eyes and eyebrows manifested by squinting of the eyes, raising/shrouding of the eyebrows, staring or gazing persistently, winking or blinking, communicate special meanings that are often situationally or culturally determined.

Makinde (1985: 11) writes that while Anglo-Americans use eye contact as a way of determining attentiveness, Mexican-American, Japanese, African-Americans and Africans avoid contact as a form of respect. Indeed, in many Nigerian cultures, it is often perceived as a sign of rudeness for a young person to meet the gaze of an elderly person or social superior. Young wives for instance are not expected to stare directly into the eyes of their husbands as a demonstration of submission. Likewise subordinates are expected to show respect by looking at their feet when they are being addressed by a social superior and not necessarily out of guilt.

Proxemics borders on the use of social, environmental and personal space (Hall 1966). It is the study of the nonverbal cues communicated through space and distance. In their description of proxemics, DeFleur et al. (2005) refer to 'territoriality' and 'personal space'. The term, in simple everyday language, refers to the physical closeness that is observed to exist or lacking between people. Haptics, a logical extension of proxemics in many respects, is a feature of nonverbal communication cue used by communication scholars to cover the study of touch as a channel of nonverbal communication (Montagu 1971). DeFleur et al. (ibid.), citing Hall (1959), recognise four distinct zones of personal space, viz.:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| a) Intimate zone | 0 – 18 inches |
| b) Casual personal zone | 18 inches – 4 feet |
| c) Socio-consultative zone | 4 feet – 8 feet |
| d) Public zone | 8 feet and beyond |

Psychologists claim that we are still territorial animals and resent any invasion of our privacy by others, hence we guard our space jealously. Makinde (1985: 14) observes that many people are possessive not only of their belongings and property, but also of the space where they have some measure of authority or ownership. Examples of proxemics include barging into another's office without knocking, sitting at the edge of another's desk, back slapping, light hugs and holding of hands. When a person is attracted to another, chances are that she will always have reasons to be in close proximity with the person to whom she is attracted. The opposite is the case when the attraction wanes, e.g. when the same persons fall out of love.

We form opinions when we see people together or when people we used to see together are no longer seen together – and we are almost always right about such conclusions. Likewise, coming too close to a colleague at work can seriously unsettle that person and may even be construed as sexual harassment. We can easily understand why some people spend too much time or too little time at their working place – it is either because they do not want to lose their jobs on the one hand, or they do not care about losing such jobs, on the other hand.

Chronemics deals with the significance of time and timing in communication. We often hear people say *Time is money*. Timing is of the essence in all things, especially in communication. The Bible tells of *A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; A time to love, And a time to hate;* and so on (Eccl. 3: 1-8 *NKJV*). Punctuality and lateness have specific universal connotations in business. Appointments, meetings, seminars and workshops, product adverts, trade fairs, news broadcasts, newspaper reports, annual general meetings (AGM) and so on are all anchored on time.

4. Nonverbal Meaning Cues in South-western Nigeria

Cultural and situational variables play a significant part in the correct interpretation of discourse (see Heslin and Alper 1983, Burgeon and Saine 1978). Ignorance of these situational variables often leads to dissonance in communication. For instance, among the Yoruba (the dominant ethnic group in south-western Nigeria), males prostrate when greeting an elderly person or anyone perceived as a social superior. This show of respect and mark of good breeding may be misconstrued by a visiting dignitary who is unfamiliar with the Yoruba cultural context. The consequence may be an inappropriate feedback which may negate the purpose of the nonverbal communicative act. The data for this study is from south-western Nigeria, an area comprising mainly the Yoruba speaking group and representatives of most other Nigerian nationalities.

i) Emblems of Raw Power and Oppression

Emblems, according to Efron (1941), are nonverbal cues that have direct verbal translations that are widely understood in the society. The term has been extended in this study to comprise nonverbal cues with fixed meanings or understanding in the society. Excessive show of raw power and affluence is a social aberration that is remarkably tolerated by the majority of Nigerians. People in power live in luxurious government mansions; they dress flamboyantly; and many actually get physically bloated through overindulgence. Such people often engage in the widespread practice known as 'spraying' (profligate spending of crisp currency notes) at parties. The rich and powerful try to outdo one another at parties by 'spraying' musicians, dancers and sometimes members of the public at such functions. Signs of self-aggrandisement and excessive show of affluence are some nonverbal emblems of power and oppression in the region. It is interesting to observe that the people do not complain; they actually applaud such profligacy as an appropriate way of honouring the dancer or celebrant.

Sirens and flashing blue lights are hardly ever used in south-western Nigeria by ambulances and fire engines. Instead, they are frequently used by top public officers and 'VIPs' who are ferried from one part of the city to another in limousines that do not display license plates. Another deviant use of sirens and

flashing blue lights is by bullion vans. These two groups of deviant users of public facility drive so recklessly that they sometimes leave in their wake, mangled limbs and wrecked vehicles.

Too many members of the public appear to be exempted from displaying the mandatory vehicle number plate. This is a carryover from the dark days of military dictatorship. The consequence is that most traditional rulers and chiefs simply display their coat of arms in front of their Mercedes and tinted four wheelers causing other road users to stare endlessly. In south-western Nigeria, powerful people are not expected to be driven along the roads in a single car. Many would not leave their homes unless a retinue of up to four or five cars have been assembled, at public expense of course. While there is so much misery in the land, the rulers display breathtaking affluence.

Another notorious example of oppressive nonverbal communication act in south-western Nigeria can be found in the activities of policemen on the roads. In Lagos, for instance, transport fares double in the evenings because the commercial mini-bus operators have to pay unofficial tolls (bribe) at several road-blocks (mostly illegal) mounted by policemen. Any driver who fails to comply risks untold consequences; hence it is very rare indeed to encounter an uncooperative driver. The Lagos policeman, generally speaking, stops only vehicles with potential financial benefits for him and his co-travellers and not necessarily for security checks. Commercial motorcycles, taxis, buses and heavy goods vehicles are almost always seen parked up by the roadsides while the drivers pleadingly negotiate their unofficial fines for both imaginary and real offences.

ii) Looking the Part

Dressing accessories reveal a lot about the individual. There is a Yoruba saying, "The way you present yourself is the way you will be honoured". If a young schoolgirl dons an expensive and flamboyant dress to school instead of the usual school uniform, an observer is likely to conclude rightly that it is her birthday. In the Yoruba culture, for instance, if a woman is always seen in black, she is likely

Table 1: The Meaning of Some Dress Codes in South-western Nigeria.

	Situational/ Cultural Context	Description of Non-verbal Communicative Act	Local Meaning Cues
1.	Social Events e.g. weddings and funerals	Wearing of uniform head wear or attires by celebrants, relatives and well-wishers	Shows solidarity, unity, celebration and affluence
2.	Home entrance	Removal of shoes at the entrance to another's home (a common practice)	Shows respect for the owner of the house
3.	Social outing by a married couple	Wearing of identical/uniform attires by husband and wife (common among young couples)	Shows love and marital oneness
4	Protest: public or family	Women sometimes strip themselves naked as a last resort to demonstrate their seriousness over a vital issue	It is a taboo to see a woman's nakedness in public. They usually get what they want after such act.
5.	Religious: Christian and Islamic in particular	Compulsory covering of the head and other parts of the body such as the ears, neck, shoulders and arms by women. Christian men must bare their heads when in the church, while Moslem men are not expected to bare their heads when in the mosque	Women are not expected to leave their heads uncovered in most churches. Likewise Moslem women never enter a mosque without covering their heads.
6.	General	Non-use of trinkets, ornaments and makeup by women	Religious belief (Christian/Islamic)
7.	Ordinary everyday	Wearing of trousers and skimpy blouses by young women	Often perceived as signs of loose morals by the society
8.	Social: chieftaincy, monarchy and political	Wearing of aso oke, colourful and elaborately embroidered flowing garments. Many political leaders do not allow themselves to be caught in the same apparel more than a couple of times	Celebration of wealth and affluence
9.	Deviation from the norm	Hair plaiting by males, Rastafarian hairstyle, wearing of earrings by men.	Rebellion/homosexuality, show biz, juvenile delinquency, possession of prophetic powers, etc.
10.	Physical appearance	Making one's skin lighter through artificial means is known as bleaching in Nigeria and it is common among females.	It is either perceived as beauty or vanity depending on the beholder's opinion

to be a widow. Such a woman is generally expected to dress in this colour for up to one year. Smart dressing sets one apart from the crowd and it can have a positive effect on one's business. In the same token, shabby or inappropriate dressing can repel the people we meet and consequently bring about loss of business opportunities. For instance, a Rastafarian hairstyle does not always blend with the traditional interview suit. Table 1 above contains descriptions of some nonverbal communicative acts and the meaning cues embedded in them.

In the Nigerian society of today, expensive and excessively embroidered apparels known as 'agbada' or 'babanriga' is the hallmark of the successful businessman or politician. The qualities of one's dresses, cars, home, etc. are examples of 'communication with artefacts' (DeFleur 2005). Simplicity is often wrongly perceived as worthlessness; hence it is not uncommon to see ordinary people don expensive garments during festive occasions (which are quite common in south-western Nigeria) to attract some measure of importance to themselves.

iii) Kinesics and Oculistics

Observations have revealed that it is almost impossible to speak without employing gestures, shrugging, pointing, waving, bowing and lots more. Gestures are used to support or reinforce speech. Some gestures have specific meanings in most human societies. During the third republic in Nigeria, for instance, raising one's forefinger in the air indicated membership or support for the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), while making the 'V' sign with two fingers signified membership or support for a rival party, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN).

iv) Proxemics and Haptics

Open plan offices and crowded workspaces are prime sites for arguments over proxemics. The more senior you are in an organisation, the more likelihood of your desk being placed farther away from junior workers. Even when you are in an open plan office, your desk is likely to be placed at a place with a better view than the other officers in the office and visitors notice this nonverbal cue and respond appropriately. Like many other parts, senior officers in south-western Nigerian establishments are more likely to be

Table 2: Illustrations of Kinesics and Adapters in South-western Nigeria.

	Situational/ Cultural Context	Description of Nonverbal Communicative Act	Local Meaning Cues
11.	Informal	Cracking of knuckles or shifting of the feet	Nervousness
12.	Bereavement	Placing of both hands on the head (often accompanied with stamping of feet on the ground) ... rolling on the ground	Profound expression of sorrow (sometimes done insincerely)
13.	Physical appearance	Protruding belly by males and rotundity by married females	Good health and material well being
14.	Intra-personal communication	Clicking of one's fingers repeatedly over one's head (often accompanied by shaking of the head and mouth pouting)	"God forbid", may it never happen
15.	Greetings, pleas and appreciation.	(a) kneeling (by females), (b) prostration (by males), (c) crouching, (d) bowing and (e) curtseying often accompany verbal expressions to senior or superior participants in the communication act.	Expression of humility and respect
16.	Informal	Hissing and pouting of the mouth (this is common among women).	Expression of anger or disappointment
17.	Abusive	Casting of all five fingers of a hand into another's face (comparable to sticking up two fingers in the air in the UK).	Very serious insult against the other person's another
18.	Interpersonal relationship	Clicking of the fingers in another's face	Means "you'll see" (indicates revenge at a later date)
19.	Interpersonal relationship	Taking of a visitor's handbag	Sign of welcome and respect
20	Interpersonal relationship	Offering of water to a guest (kolanuts or soft drinks are often offered to visitors)	Hospitality

installed in private offices and visitors may have to pass through secretaries and personal assistants before they can get close to such an officer.

Examples of haptics in south-western Nigeria include: handshake, holding of hands, robbing of a child’s head or patting someone lightly on the back as a compliment. Kissing in public is regarded as an aberration and people who engage in it are often frowned at. Of course, a small minority who has imbibed Western culture can sometimes be found engaging in this nonverbal communicative act in cities such as Lagos.

Table 3: Examples of proxemics and haptics in south-western Nigeria

	Situational/ Cultural Context	Description of Nonverbal Communicative Act	Local Meaning Cues
21.	Interpersonal	Offer of handshake (this is often the prerogative of an elder or a superior participant in the communication act)	(a) agreement (b) greeting(c) commendation(d) fellowship/welcome gesture(like anywhere else)
22.	Interpersonal	Carrying of a new baby (guests to a new mother are expected to request to carry the baby for a while)	This is to identify with the family’s good fortune
23.	Child Nurture	Bearing of babies on the back (women who push their babies in pushchairs are often frowned at)	Show of love and motherliness
24.	Intimacy	Kissing in public (Lovers are not expected to show too much intimacy in public)	Indecorum and lack of breeding
25.	Superstitious situation	Avoidance of handshake or touching of parts of the body such as the chest or the head	Fear of shrinking or disappearance of a person’s genitals.

v) Chronemics in the African Context

The perception of time in southwestern Nigeria, like many other African parts, differs markedly from the Western notion of it. Even with the introduction of the Greenwich Meridian, many educated Nigerians do not pay attention to the finer

details such as minutes and seconds in their perception of time. When you ask for the time, you often hear: ‘after five’ or ‘to one’ and never ‘ten minutes after five’ or ‘twenty-two minutes to one’. Other examples include: eight days ago, the day before yesterday, next tomorrow, month end, weekend, etc. A convenient alternative to the Greenwich Meridian is the Muslim prayer hour:

5.00 a.m. – Subhi

2.00 p.m. – Zuhri

4.00 p.m. – Ashri

7.00 p.m. – Maghrib

8.00 p.m. – Ishai

Instead of the conventional clock time, people talk of seeing someone before or after Asubah, Maghrib, and so on. In areas where there are sizable Muslims (not necessarily dominant) call to prayers at 5.00 a.m. signals the beginning of the day while the last prayer call at 8.00 p.m. signals the end of the day.

People pejoratively use the term ‘African time’ to refer to laxity in relation to time in the African cultural context, but African chronemics in this study refers to the culturally determined system of referring to time as a nonverbal cue in south-western Nigeria. This is demonstrated in Table 4 below:

5. Conclusion

Like language, nonverbal cues have universal meanings on the one hand and unique cultural and situational meanings on the other hand, as we have already demonstrated in this study. Nonverbal cues, in addition to being a complement to verbal communication, are frequently used to communicate just by themselves. Children acquire them the same way they acquire language, hence anyone who arrives in a new cultural environment and does not pay attention to the prevalent nonverbal cues, risks dissonance in communication or negative feedback in many communicative situations.

Table 4: Examples of chronemics in south-western Nigeria.

	Situational/ Cultural Context	Description of Nonverbal Communicative Act	Local Meaning Cues
26.	Funeral rites	The 8 th day, 40 th day and first year are significant for marking funeral rites of departed loved ones. Many also observe 10 th , 20 th or 25 th anniversary of death.	Family bond and religious belief of life after death.
27.	Birthday Celebrations	1 st , 5 th , 10 th , 21 st , 40 th , 50 th 60 th 70 th and 100 th birthday anniversaries are often marked elaborately.	Thanksgiving and demonstration of affluence.
28.	At dawn	Cockcrow at dawn	Many Nigerians still rely on rooster's alarm system to rouse them daily
29.	Socio-cultural	Observance of annual town day, festivals and masquerade seasons (e.g.: "Olojo Day" in Ile-Ife)	Such festivals mark the beginning of a new year for many.
30.	Socio-economic	Market days are significant events for socio economic activities	It marks the week's beginning for many.
31.	Market indicators	Arrival of fresh maize and new yam in the market	Implies tumbling in foodstuffs' prices
32.	Agrarian setting	Cocoa harvest season	Implies financial buoyancy in the town

A study of what obtains in south-western Nigeria draws attention to semiotic significance of nonverbal cues in the study of human communication. We would like to observe that while much of what has been identified as features of nonverbal communication in south-western Nigeria can be said to be true of south-eastern or south-south Nigeria, the same cannot be said for northern Nigeria. This is because the region has its own particular blend of religious, cultural and situational contexts which determine the inhabitant's attribution of meaning subtleties to universal and unique nonverbal symbols and actions.

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