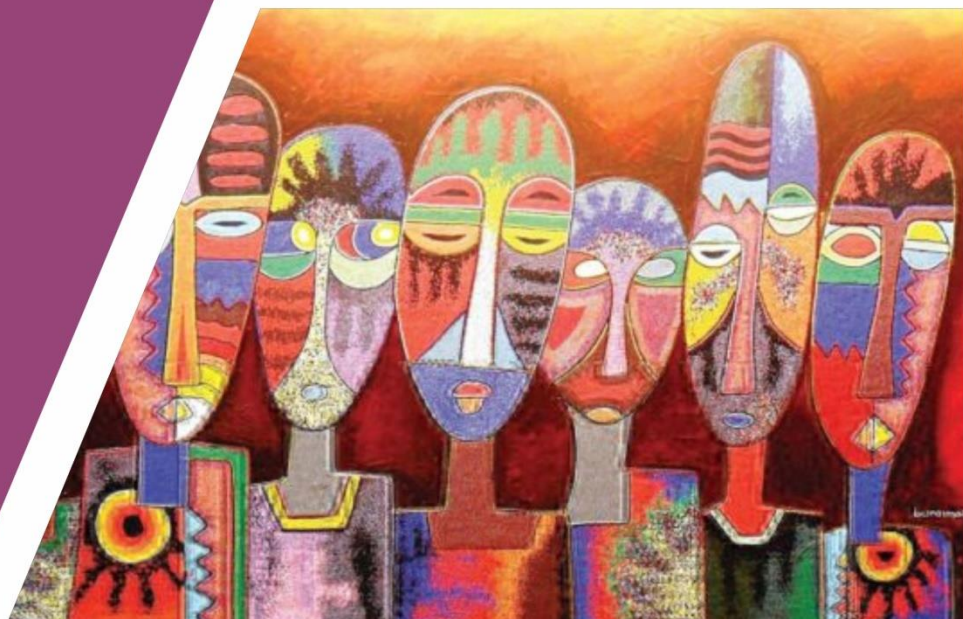


NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

ECE 311



Introduction to Cultural and
Creative Arts
Module 1

ECE 311 Introduction to Cultural and Creative Arts Module I

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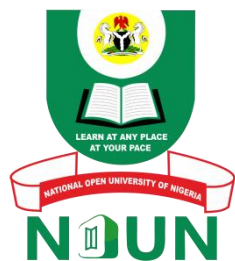
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Module I

Unit I Introduction to Culture

1.0 Introduction

Culture is a term that is quite commonly used. In fact it is almost impossible to live in an African setting without an idea of what culture is. You must have heard it being used at some point to refer to some kind of clothes and dressing, song, dance or government ministry. In this unit we will examine the definition of the term culture and what it really means as a foundation for the understanding of the rest of the course.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define culture in your own words
- identify concepts associated with culture
- describe the characteristics of culture
- describe the various categories of culture.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 What is Culture?

If we are going to look seriously at culture, we had best commence with some definitions of the word. The term *culture* actually came into use during the middle Ages. It is derived from the Latin word “*cultura*” which means “*tillage*” for cultivation, as in the practice of nurturing domesticated plants in gardens. Thus, the word originally referred to people’s role in controlling nature.

British anthropologist, Edward B. Tyler gave one of the first complete definitions of culture in his book titled: *Primitive Culture* (published in 1871). According to his definition, culture includes socially acquired knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs and habits (Microsoft Encarta, 2009).

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary defines culture as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group [of people].” On his own part, Bodley (2008) defines culture as “the patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in social groups learn, create, and share.” As he rightly noted, culture is what distinguishes one human group from the other.

I would like you to take note of the difference between culture and society. Keesing (1975) states that *Culture* refers to the idea, meaning and knowledge (conscious and unconscious) that people share; while *society*, consist of the groupings and arrangements of people.

From the above definitions we can deduce that the culture of a people include all of the following: Their beliefs, how they behave, the language they speak, the rituals they observe, the type of art and technology they possess, their mode of dressing, how they produce and cook their food, the religion they practice, and the political and economic systems they operate.

Sociologists have shown that in nature, the survival of any specie depends on its ability to adjust successfully to the challenges of the environment and competition from other organisms of the same or different species.

In doing so, some organisms developed some biological features of adaptation, while others deal with these challenges by forming alliance with other organisms of the same or other species. In these alliances, each member of the group learns to co-exist and collaborate with other members of the group. This is referred to as Social Behaviour.

Humans are called social animals because they live in societies. Human beings are not the only species that live in societies; some species of animals do also. Some examples are termite and bee colonies, fish schools, cattle herds, wolf packs and flock of birds. However, only the human society evolves culture, which differs from the less complicated, innate types of thinking and behaviour that govern the lives of many animals.

It is pertinent for you to note that while other animals can live in societies only human beings have cultures. Why is this so? The answer is that the development of culture is inseparably linked with the evolution of the human species (or *Homo sapiens* as humans are also referred to).

Scientists inform us that the ability of people to possess culture comes largely from their physical features such as large, complex brains; an upright posture, free hands that can grasp and manipulate small objects, and a vocal tract that can produce and articulate a wide range of sounds. In other animals, all these are either under-developed or totally absent.

Culture is basically the result of man's distinctive ability to think complex thoughts and communicate these thoughts and knowledge through his ability to use language and other symbolic forms of representation, to other people from one generation to another.

Self-Assessment Exercise I

Can you identify some common features in the definitions of culture presented above?

3.2 The Characteristics of Culture

Culture has several characteristics which makes us ascribe the term to humans alone. These distinguishing traits are as follows:

- Culture is symbolic
- Culture is learned
- Culture is shared
- Culture is adaptive.

In the following texts, I shall discuss each of these characteristics in order for you to have a better understanding of what these attributes actually mean.

3.2.1 Culture is Symbolic

As was noted above, culture is essentially the result of man's ability to develop and exchange complex thoughts and ideas with others, through the understanding and use of language and other forms of symbolic communication. You would want to know what the term symbol means. Symbols are abstract ways of referring to and understanding ideas, objects, feelings, or behaviours. This ability of man allows him to create, explain and record new ideas and information.

Cultures worldwide are sustained by the ability of its people to create and manipulate symbols while symbolism is the art of creating symbols. Symbolism is what differentiates humans from the lower animals. Symbols, as Beckwith (1993) notes are, "the signifying devices, which provide the communicative context through which social worlds are imagined, invented and changed."

Two categories make up the dominant symbols in any culture, namely, visual and verbal symbols. Verbal symbolism can be described as a selection of decibels of sounds which signify something arbitrary. On the other hand, as Vansina (1984) explains, visual symbols (art objects) are, "physical images which are the materialization of mental images that are associated with definite meanings." In both cases, as we are told, there may be an existing natural bond between the signifier and the signified or this relationship may be non-existent.

A symbol may have an indirect or no connection with the object, idea, feeling, or behaviour to which it refers. For instance, most people in Nigeria understand the combination of the colours green, white and green of our flag as signifying the concept of patriotism and nationality. But those colors themselves have nothing to do with these concepts; hence for someone of another country or nation, these same colours would not evoke the same feelings and meaning.

People constantly invent new symbols to convey new ideas, such as for mathematical formulas. In addition, people may use one symbol, such as a single word, to represent many different ideas, feelings, or values. Thus, symbols provide a flexible way for people to communicate even very complex thoughts with each other.

For example, only through symbols can architects, engineers, and construction workers communicate the information necessary to construct buildings or bridges. Symbols are useful in many ways, for example, Ebeigbe (2004) states that many societies in Nigeria (for example, the people of Benin) eruditely employ the use of verbal and visual symbols to underscore their religious beliefs and the cultural values which give them their identity as an ethnic reality. They embellish their artforms with meaningful visual symbols and their language is steep in figurative expressions with multiplicity of intrinsic meanings.

People have the capacity at birth to construct, understand, and communicate through symbols, primarily by using language. The human vocal tract can create and articulate a wide variety of sounds to create millions of distinct words. In fact, each human language uses only a fraction of the sounds humans can make. The human brain also contains areas concerned with the production and interpretation of speech, which other animals' lack.

This brings us to the issue of language. What is language? Ukoyen (1978) states that, to the lay man, language is "a system of intelligible sounds, amenable to symbolic representation, by

means of which a human community apprehends reality and interacts within itself.” He adds that to the linguist, language is “a set of principles relating meanings and phonetic sequence.”

The linguist also sees language as “a type of pattern human behaviour.”

Simply put, language means verbal communication, speech or lingo. People of different cultures have different languages. Language provides a means to store, process, and communicate amounts of information that greatly surpass the capabilities of other animals. Grammar (or syntax) is crucial for communicating complex thoughts. Only humans have the ability to use grammar.

You are aware that there are differences between the language spoken in your area of origin and other ethnic groups. Disparities in languages, according to Ukoyen (1978) arise from three major sources, namely, actual differences of experience (as a result of geographical location); diverse forms of experience and varied analysis of experience. He explains further that: the first two factors may be physico-cultural in nature and embrace environmental differences (such as different land and weather conditions, different flora and fauna), different items of food and clothing, as well as non-correspondence or non-existence of certain colour words, moral, legal, political matters, etc.

3.2.2 Culture is Learned

In contrast to the many physical traits and behavioral instincts that people inherit biologically, culture is actually socially inherited. By this, we mean that people are not born with culture; they have to learn culture from other people in a society. For example, people must learn to speak and understand a language and to abide by the rules of a society. In most societies, members must learn the skills needed for self-preservation, they must learn how to survive and provide for themselves. Take, for example, the dominant rituals in a society.

By rituals I mean, as Blier (1988) describes them, “the prescribed systems of proceeding in religious or other spheres.” Such rituals, which, as she notes are “markers of life” that help those who perform them to create a “reality” that gives life a sense of order, are of key importance and as such are passed down from one generation to another. They have to be learnt by citizens of the society where they exist.

Usually children learn culture from adults of the society, a process known as *enculturation*, or *cultural transmission*.

Enculturation is a protracted process that occurs in every society. Just learning the intricacies of a human language, which is a major part of enculturation, for instance takes many years. In African cultures, especially in pre-colonial times, the family, especially the parents, and community played an important role in the development and integration, especially the moral education of the young.

It is the family and community that give the young members of the community a steady initiation to life and society and instill in them African values. The young are taught many moral values such as the consequences of bringing shame on the family, friends, colleagues or community. They are also made to understand that violators of societal laws must face different sanctions such as public disgrace, denial of certain privileges in the society and family rejection, et cetera.

In Africa, families commonly protect and enculturate children in the households of their birth for 15 years or more. It is only after the successful completion of this process that children are allowed to leave the family and establish their own households. People also keep on learning throughout their existence. If you take a moment to reflect you will see that you are still learning even today. It is for this reason that societies revere their elders; they have learnt the prevailing cultural values in their societies for an entire lifetime and are the custodians of values. They are therefore responsible for imparting the knowledge to the younger generation.

It will interest you to know that humans are not the only animals with the ability to learn behaviours. Psychologists (experts who study behavior and intelligence in animals and people) have drawn attention to the ability of some animals to learn and master certain tricks. But, as they are quick to add, the trait should not be interpreted as intelligence in the animals as it is often erroneously thought.

Rather, such behaviours are merely conditioned responses. Foremost amongst the animals that have such traits are chimpanzees. Researchers tell us that members of a group of chimpanzees they studied were able to learn how to use a unique source of food or to fashion some simple tools, behaviours that might distinguish them from other chimpanzee groups.

All the same, one should bear in mind that such distinctive traits are trivial in comparison to the amount and complexity of the rich way of life that distinguish different human societies. Lacking speech, animals are very limited in what they can learn and communicate to others or pass on to their young ones.

3.2.3 Culture is Shared

Culture is also shared. A single person cannot constitute a culture. Culture is an upshot of people living collectively in the same society. A society consists of people of both gender with different characters and of different ages living together in a particular geographical location. To live together peacefully and purposefully, people in a society adopt common behaviours and ways of thinking to help moderate individual differences.

This is why it is said, as you may have heard, that all the people of a society jointly create and maintain culture. Societies preserve culture for much longer than the life span of any one person. People are born, they live their lives and die, but, culture continues and outlives people. The reason why cultures live on is because people sustain them. Culture is preserved in the form of knowledge, such as scientific discoveries; culture is preserved in objects, such as works of art; and in traditions, such as the observance of festivals and ceremonies which are passed down from generation to generation.

People living together in a community often share a common language, dress in similar styles, and eat many of the same foods, et cetera. This is what gives them their identity as a people. It is what makes it possible to differentiate one society from another.

People of different cultures have established patterns of actions (referred to as value systems) that they recognise as the permissible standard of ethics that govern their society. Each society is structured predominantly on what the entire society has accepted as the way its members should conduct themselves. These values that are culturally defined (sacred or

secular) are fundamental to the continued existence of the people. They are the principal means through which security, peace, progress, social stability and cohesion in the society are maintained.

As a result, they are not only treasured, perpetuated and preserved by the people; they are also shared (transmitted).

Members of each society are taught in various ways to uphold the social rules that are dominant in their society as sacred, and concerted efforts are made to transmit them from one generation to another. Definite policies are also adopted by those in authority, to promote values that are beneficial to their society, while anti-social acts that are inimical to the survival of the society are prohibited.

No society simply set up rules and values without making provision for how they will be transmitted, learned and shared. This is important if the laid-down rules are not to disappear at the demise of their initiators. Hence, they must be preserved and passed on to others who also recognize, sanction and welcome them. This is very true in Nigerian communities.

Besides, culture is not only shared within a society; sharing also occurs between societies. Since no human society exists in complete isolation, different societies also exchange and share culture. In fact, all societies have some interactions with others, both out of curiosity and because even highly self-sufficient societies sometimes need assistance from their neighbours.

Today, for instance, many people around the world use similar kinds of technology, such as cars, telephones, and televisions. Commercial trade and communication technologies, such as computer networks, have created a form of global culture. Therefore, it has become increasingly hard to find culture that is shared within only a single society. This phenomenon is what is referred to as Cross-cultural exchange.

3.2.4 Culture is Adaptive

As we mentioned initially while tracing the origins of culture, the evolution of society and ultimately culture in the case of humans was an adaptive reaction to the challenges posed by the forces of nature. Culture helps human societies continue to exist and not be obliterated in times of changing of the natural environment. It is cultural adaptation that has made humans one of the most successful species on earth.

The key to this success is man's ability to know how to discriminate, that is, how to assess critically and eliminate those bad habits which would bring destruction to the human race. Man has the ability to encourage those values that are sound and beneficial to the society, while discouraging those that are inimical to the survival of his society.

Today, Africa has met with progress which is taking her onwards to new forms of life made available by science and technology. For instance, people now take greater advantage of major developments in technology, medicine, and nutrition. These developments have improved the quality of their lives.

In addition, many customs and rites, once considered to be integral parts of various social systems, are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as bizarre and unnecessary and as such they have been discarded.

Let me take one example to illustrate the point I am making here. You will recall that in the past twins were considered evil and as such they were killed at birth in some parts of our country. Today, the custom and some others not mentioned here have been obliterated. On the other hand, some other traditional values which have been handed down from the past have been modified to give them new meaning and new expression in the face of modern civilization. From these two examples, I will be correct to assume that you now have a good idea of what is meant by cultural adaptation.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Describe (with examples) the characteristics of culture.

3.3 Categories of Culture

Anthropologists have described a number of different categories of culture. For instance, in 1930, an American anthropologist in the person of George P. Murdock listed 637 major sub-divisions of culture. He also developed an elaborate coding system, known as the Human Relation Area Files. He used the system to identify and categorize hundreds of distinctive cultural variations that could be used to compare different cultures.

A common and simpler practice today is to divide all of culture into three broad categories, namely: material, social, and ideological. The arts, which has characteristics of both material and ideological culture, is a fourth category.

3.3.1 Material Culture

This includes all man-made human objects. All societies produce and exchange material goods so that people can feed, clothe, have shelter, and generally provide for themselves. This system is commonly known as an economy. Material culture is sub-divided into several aspects which include: pattern of subsistence, forms of exchange (trade) and technology, manufacture and effect on the environment. For you to understand these points better, let us examine them in detail.

Pattern of Subsistence

This refers to the various ways by which people obtain or produce food. Some of the methods are listed below:

Foraging is one method of getting food. It is a method used by people in band societies who live as hunter-gatherers, collecting plants and taking animals from their environment. Such people are also known as foragers.

Horticulture (gardening) and pastoralist (animal herding) are other methods. The horticulturists plant gardens and after about three years, they move from their planting zone to another area of the forest. Horticulture is commonly practiced by people living in ethnic groups or chiefdoms. Pastoralists, such as the Fulani in Northern Nigeria, may also grow food in small gardens to supplement their diets of milk, meat and blood.

Many people who live in larger societies, such as the Yoruba in the South Western part of Nigeria, practice manual (sometimes called extensive) agriculture and produce surpluses of food and other goods. They sell some of the excess to generate wealth, while keeping some in storage for use in times of need. In societies where production is in excess, some members have to work in *non-subsistence* (not food-producing) activities. People not involved in food production may work, for example, as artisans, religious functionaries, or political administrators.

Agriculture in non-industrialised societies relies on systems of irrigation operated from natural waterways, animal-powered plowing, and natural methods of fertilisation, such as the use of putrefied vegetation to enrich the soil. Animal-powered plough agriculture and irrigation are more time-consuming, energy-intensive, and require more material inputs than are required in gardening, pastoralism, or hunting and gathering.

In large industrial and commerce-based societies (such as the United States and Western Europe), food production depends on expensive machinery and the vast supplies of fossil fuels to power those machinery, automated irrigation systems, and great quantities of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This form of production, known as intensive agriculture, is more expensive than any other, but produces quantities of food huge enough to allow most people to work in non-subsistence activities.

Forms of Exchange (Trade)

The ways in which people exchange goods and services differ from one society to another. The earliest form of exchange is the barter method whereby people exchange their goods and services for what they need. Later valuable materials such as precious metals and stones were used as means of exchange.

As was the case in many ethnic groups in Africa, De Negri (1969) reports that cowries and manilas were the units of exchange in ancient times. Money as is used today was introduced much later. Money is a means adopted and accepted by a particular society as a means of exchange. For this reason, different societies have different currencies which are part of the cultural identity of the people.

Technology and Manufacture

One way that human beings usually respond to the challenges of nature and survival is through the development of tools, equipment and structures. This ability to fashion and use tools and equipment, build structures and the knowledge to do so is referred to as technology. Each culture has its distinctive technology and how they produce things, whether it is food, clothes or art. It also includes how they build their houses.

Effect of Human Activities on the Environment

In a bid to survive, man engages in many different activities either for economic purposes (like in farming, hunting, and mining) or for developmental purposes like in urbanization, pollution, et cetera. The activities of man usually have their effect on his immediate environment as exemplified in the various environmental pollutions (oil spillages, depletion of the Ozone layer, and the like) that are being witnessed today.

3.3.2 Social Culture

This pertains to how people in a society interact and organize themselves in groups. People in all types of societies usually organize themselves in relation to each other for work and other duties, and to structure their interactions. Important factors in family, work, and political relations include age and gender (behaviours and roles associated with men and women).

People commonly organize themselves according to (i) work duties and economic position, (ii) bonds by kinship and marriage and (iii) political position. You need to find more about these various factors, and this you can do by reading this section:

Work Duties and Economic Position

This simply refers to the different positions that people hold in the societies (for instance, kings, chiefs, priests, and so on.) Also the jobs members of the societies are expected to perform (such as teaching, nursing, tailoring, and so on.)

Bonds of kinship and marriage

This refers to people who are related to each other either by family ties (by blood) or by marriage. Each culture and society determine different aspects of relationships among kindred such as the level that marriage is permissible, as well as other aspects (I have discussed these aspects in detail in unit four of module one).

Leadership and Political Power

Some societies have no formal leadership. In such societies, all members make collective decisions. Most decision-making in ethnic groups occur within households. Occasionally, most or all members of lineages or clans convene to make important decisions regarding matters in their communities, such as how they will relate with neighbouring ethnic groups, common laws, et cetera. Descent groups may also standardise access to crucial resources, such as favoured farming areas, and selection of where people will reside. A good example is the early Igbo communities of South Eastern Nigeria.

In most Nigerian communities, all groups commonly have about equal status. Since every person belongs to a descent group, no one person ranks too far above or below another. However, in some ethnic groups, certain people might be accorded a higher status and respect than others either through inheritance or for personal outstanding achievements.

In the past, chiefdoms, which existed in a great number of Nigerian societies, were the first societies to have positions of defined, permanent leadership. Chiefdoms consist of at least two very large descent groups organised under rulers known as chiefs, who are born into their positions of leadership. They live as full-time rulers who may not have to work at productive duties. In Chiefdoms, Chiefs have the sanction to collect a quantity of the goods people produce, such as food, and redistribute them in times of need or use them in ceremonies.

Political structures that have powerful autonomous bodies of authority managed by formal bureaucracies are formally known as states. Some of the first major state societies existed in the area known as Mesopotamia, in what is now Iraq, and in ancient Egypt.

A state has many privileges such as claims of ownership of all its territory and resources, as well as, the right to wage wars against other nations. Important families may rule states for several generations, though this was more rampant in the past. But all states have distinct social and economic classes, and higher classes have greater political influence or power than the lower classes.

Families still rule in some states, sometimes as royalty and sometimes as elected aristocracies (aristocracies are small groups, often families, deemed by citizens as qualified to rule). Many states today have elected governments not based on family lines. The citizens of these states share a common identity based on language, ideals, shared rituals, and other cultural bonds. This form of state is known as a nation.

Nations are ruled by governments and many national governments serve the interests of business and commerce as well as those of individuals and families. For instance, in addition to other functions, governments in developed nations are responsible for economic support by providing social welfare for people who cannot earn sufficient income.

In many cases commercial corporations (businesses created through legal sanctions) create a great deal of political influence. Corporations and large economic market exchanges control the production and distribution of goods and services, and they are in charge of money transfers.

3.3.3 Ideological Culture

Perhaps you ever wondered, as other persons do sometimes, what binds people in a society together in their behaviour. A key factor is the culturally distinctive ways of thinking about the world, that is, their shared ideology. Anthropologists refer to the body of ideas that people share as ideology and they inform us that ideology can be divided into at least three specific categories.

These are beliefs, values, and ideals. People's beliefs give them an understanding of how the world works and how they should respond to the actions of others and their environments. Specific beliefs closely intertwine with the daily concerns of domestic life, such as making a living, health and sickness, happiness and sadness, interpersonal relationships, and death.

The dominant cultural values (social and moral) in a society enlighten the people about the differences between right and wrong or good and bad. As I have noted earlier, people of different cultures have established patterns of actions known as value systems that they hold as the acceptable standard of ethics that govern their society. These values that are culturally defined (sacred or secular) are fundamental to the continued existence of the people and they are the primary means for the maintenance of security, peace, progress, social stability and cohesion in the society.

The ideals of a people constitute another aspect of their ideology. Ideals serve as models (paradigms) for what people hope to accomplish in life. Leaders often put in place various plans to be followed in order for them to achieve their set goals.

Many people rely on religion to shape their values and ideals and to influence their behaviour. Beliefs, values, and ideals also come from observations of the natural world. Anthropologists commonly refer to this practice as secularism.

In my discussion above, I mentioned two key words: religion and secularism. What exactly do we mean by religion and secularism? To get the answers to this question, you have to read the subsequent texts.

Religion

Different scholars of varying hues have proffered a number of nuances of meanings, and all of them have established one fact, that all forms of religion share a belief in a supernatural power (or powers) to which supplications are made, directly or indirectly, through acknowledged intermediaries.

Idowu (1963), for instance, asserts that religion in its essence is, "the means by which God as a spirit and man's essential self-communicate." On his part, Orubu (2001) informs us that the basic reason why humans worship is to enable them "cope with the intransigence of the natural environment and its dynamic effects on human activities."

Religion allows people to know about and communicate with supernatural beings such as spirits, gods, and spirits of their dead ancestors. Religion often helps people cope with the things they cannot understand or control, for instance, death and the forces of nature.

The constant and general foundation of African tradition is the spiritual view of life. Many societies believe in the existence of supernatural beings or forces which control and regulate the affairs of man and all other creatures (animate or inanimate). The general belief in such societies is that when offended these beings punish the offender or society with severe calamities, but, would bless them with good fortune when they are appeased, pleased and satisfied.

Religion helps adherents to avoid divine wrath and punishment, and obtain the favours and protection of these supernatural beings for the well-being of each individual or group in the society. To achieve these objectives, adherents perform specific rites and rituals.

For instance, to African traditionalists, their traditional religion is their effort to reconnect with the spiritual realm, and, their religious values and beliefs were conceived to ensure a harmonious relationship between themselves and the other-worldly entities.

This is in a bid to cope with the ecological perils and spiritual belligerence. They express their perception of communication to these and seek an essential link with the supernatural world through their religious observances. The rituals they perform afford them the opportunity to propitiate and supplicate the various supernatural entities, which they recognize as indispensable in their daily existence.

In spite of their belief in several supernatural beings (polytheism) the idea of God, as the first or ultimate cause of all things is a strong belief of the African traditional religionists. This concept, perceived rather than analysed, lived rather than reflected on, is expressed in very diverse ways from culture to culture. Regardless of the mode of worship of God adopted in different ethnic groups, the fact remains that the presence of God permeates African life, as the presence of a higher being, personal and mysterious.

To the Nigerian religious traditionalists, God is real and His preeminence is incontrovertible. He is also associated with diverse attributes – *Omnipresence*, *Omnipotent*, *Omniscient*, *Immortality* and *Justice*. Just as Oduoye (2001) rightly notes, these attributes are implicit in

the names that are ascribed to Him in the different ethnic groups. The traditional worshippers recognize the Creator God as the originator of the universe and all therein. He is approached and worshipped through the numerous deities that the people consider as intermediaries between them and their creator. As devotees claim, the deities were created by God to assist him in running the affairs of the universe and to help humans in their daily existence.

In many societies in Nigeria, as in other parts of the African continent, priests, priestesses, visionaries and healers exist. They are persons credited the power to commune with supernatural beings and forces. With these powers they guide and instruct the other members of the societies on how to act and what to do. They also officiate in rituals when necessary and are usually held in high esteem in their societies.

Secularism

A simple way to understand what secularism means is to view the term as the opposite of religion, which as I have described above, is a system of belief in the supernatural things beyond the natural world. In recent times, with the flourish of science, and its use in the explanation of many of the phenomena hitherto attributed to the gods and spirits, some societies have turned to the observation of the natural world to shape their beliefs, values and ideals and to influence their behavior. Such societies are referred to as secular societies.

3.3.4 Art as a Form of Culture

You will learn more about art in the units devoted to the subject in the other modules. However, the subject will be considered briefly, so that you can know its relevance to culture. Art is a distinctly human production. Many people consider art as the definitive form of culture because it can have the quality of pure expression that is entirely separate from basic human needs.

But some anthropologists actually regard artistic expression as a basic human need that is as fundamental as food and water. Some art take the form of material production, and many utilitarian items have artistic qualities. Other forms of art, such as music or acting, reside in the mind and body and take expression as performance. The material arts include painting, pottery, sculpture, textile, clothing and cookery. Non-material arts include music, dance, drama and dramatic arts, storytelling, and written narratives.

As Adams (1999) reports, anthropologists have been able to show us that people had begun making art 30,000 years ago, by painting stylised animal figures and abstract symbols (referred to as cave paintings) on the walls of the caves that served as their dwelling places.

For thousands of years people have also used forms of artistic expression to establish their personal and group identity. There are different forms of art for these purposes such as body adornment, (stylised body scarifications, body paintings using pigments and the use of body ornamentations, such as jewelry), ceremonial costumes and dances, or group symbols. For example, many Nigerian cultures have distinctive ethnic marks, costumes and regalia for their kings (Obas, Obis, Emirs, et cetera), titled men, priests and people of importance.

Generally, two distinctions are made of art, namely, “art for art sake” and “art for life.” The former exist in some societies, as in the Western world, where art is done purely for

decoration, while “art for life” means such art forms that have a functional bent such as the ethnic arts of African origin. A look at the nature of such creative objectifications, as Egonwa (2005) describes them shows that they are multifaceted and intricately interwoven with all dimensions of life; they are intertwined mutually with the basic spiritual and material concerns for survival.

Smaller societies also use art as a primary form of documenting and replicating their culture. Ceremonial dances and performances, for example, generally narrated legends of creation, stories about ancestors, or moral tales containing edifying lessons. Many people also use art as a vehicle for spiritual expression or to solicit divine help from the spiritual world. For instance, the ancestral figures and masks of most cultures in Nigeria are produced and used for this purpose.

In large societies, leaders may hire artisans to produce works which they in turn use to underscore their political status and authority, and to perpetuate themselves in power. For example, in Benin (Nigeria), the Oba has various royal guilds that produce the famous royal court arts of the empire. These royal items display insignia that indicate his royal status, as they are reserved for the exclusive use of the Oba and those to whom he bestows the honour. In some cultures such as Yoruba and Benin, the Oba, in the past as Ezra (1992) reports, also had exclusive right to use certain materials such as bronze, coral beads and ivory, and only he could grant deserving citizens in his kingdom the right to use such materials.

In contemporary large societies, many people produce art for commercial and political purposes in addition to social, personal, and spiritual reasons. A great number of artists make a living by working for corporate businesses that use art to advertise commercial products.

Art and art products are very important to both the creators and the society. Hence, most large societies today have copyright laws that protect the content of artworks such as books, films, songs, dances, and paintings as intellectual property, which people own and can put up for sale. In Nigeria, such laws exist also, the Nigerian Copyright Council (NCC), the body responsible for enforcing the laws was established in 1988 under the Nigerian Copyright Decree. The decree, now promulgated into legal acts was enacted as chapter 68 of the 1990 edition of the laws of the Federation of Nigeria.

4.0 Conclusion

From all that I have said above, you will see that culture is a very broad subject which encompasses every aspect of human life. So what we have tried to do as much as possible in this unit is to develop a basic foundation essential for the understanding and better appreciation of what culture denotes.

If you recall all that I have said in the foregone texts, you will realize that it is important to preserve carefully our culture and roots. Our culture is rich as exemplified in our cultural values: respect for life, family solidarity and support for relatives, respect for the old, having sense of hospitality, honesty, maintaining peace, law and order, et cetera. I believe you know them and are proud of them and would desire to uphold the values of your culture.

5.0 Summary

Culture as we have seen in this unit is the way of life of a people; we have also learnt that culture is symbolic, learned, shared and adaptive. We have also looked at its various aspects which are: material, social, ideological and Art. In the next chapter we shall be looking at some major cultures in Nigeria and the people of such societies.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Define the term culture and state its characteristics.
2. Write on the various categories of culture identified above.

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Unit 2 The Cultures of the Nigerian People

1.0 Introduction

In the previous unit we discussed the general concept of culture. In this unit, we will be looking into the diverse cultures of Nigeria. We have chosen just a few examples. We shall be treating some of the major and we hope it spurs you to do further study on the cultural diversity of the Country. We shall also be looking at their history.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- identify some cultural groups in Nigeria
- identify and appreciate the cultural diversity of the country
- discuss briefly the history of some Nigerian cultures
- relate your previous lesson on culture with some Nigerian cultures.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Ethnic Classifications in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country which has diverse cultural groups (Fig. 1.1). Experts have identified over three hundred (300) cultural groups with about four hundred (400) native Nigerian languages. The three largest ethnic groups are: the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Jointly, they make up about 70% of the population, and they have several distinct regional dialects. About 10% of the total population consists of several other groups numbering more than one million each, including the Kanuri, Edo, Nupe, Efik, Ijo, Tiv, and Ibibio.



Fig.1: A Map of Nigeria

Source: Microsoft Encarta

More than 300 smaller ethnic groups account for the remaining 20 percent of the population, in regions such as the Niger Delta, Jos Plateau and surrounding middle belt. Hundreds of small groups make for wide linguistic variations across short distances.

However, as in most of Africa, ethnic designations in Nigeria are often indefinite, obscuring differences within groups and similarities among groups.

Due to the vast number of ethnic groups in Nigeria, three major groups, namely, the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo, will be examined first and later, two examples (the Kanuri and the people of Benin) will be selected for study from amongst the minor groups.

3.2 The Major Ethnic Groups and their History

3.2.1 The Hausa-Fulani

The largest ethnic group in Nigeria is the Hausa who are concentrated in the far north and in the neighboring Republic of Niger. A good number of Hausa people are Muslims. They engage in agriculture, commerce and small-scale industry. Most of the Hausa people live in smaller towns and villages and others occupy several larger indigenous cities.

Many people of non-Hausa origin have become assimilated into the Hausa nation through intermarriage and acculturation. One of such groups is the Fulani who are traditionally a semi-nomadic livestock-herding people. Many Fulani have settled in Hausa cities and towns and have become part of the Hausa community. Other Fulani have cultural autonomy, they continue to depend on their livestock and have retained their own language known as *Fulfulde*.

The Hausa cultures, which as early as the 7th century ad were smelting iron ore, arose in what is today northwestern and north central Nigeria, to Borno west. Although the origin of these cultures is a mystery; however, legend holds that Bayajidda, a traveler from the Middle East, married the Queen of Daura, from who came seven sons. Each son was reputed to have founded one of the seven Hausa kingdoms: Kano, Rano, Katsina, Zazzau (Zaria), Gobir, Kebbi, and Auyo.

Various Nigerian groups have similar legends which attempt to explain their origins in similar tales involving migrations southward across the Sahara or from the east or west through the savannas, followed by intermarriage and acculturation. These legends serve to highlight the importance of such interchanges in the cultural, economic, and political development of many Nigerian societies.

Regardless of how they were founded, the seven city-states developed as strong trading centers, typically surrounded by walls and with an economy based on intensive farming, cattle-raising, craft-making, and later slave trading. In each Hausa state, a monarch, probably elected, ruled over a network of feudal lords, most of whom had embraced Islam by the 14th century. The states maintained continual rivalries, which at times made them easy prey to the expansion of Bornu and other kingdoms.

Perhaps, a greater and more subtle threat to the Hausa kingdoms, were the immigration of Fulani pastoralists. They migrated from the west to make a home in the Nigerian savanna and over several centuries filtered into large areas of Hausaland. In 1804, a Fulani scholar named Usman dan Fodio, was said to have declared a *jihad* (holy war) against the Hausa states, whose rulers he accused of allowing Islamic practices to deteriorate.

Local Fulani leaders, motivated by both spiritual and local political concerns, received Usman's blessing to overthrow the Hausa rulers. With their superior cavalry and cohesion, the Fulani overthrew the Hausa rulers and also conquered areas beyond Hausaland, including Adamawa to the east, Nupe and Ilorin to the south.

After the war, a loose federation of thirty emirates emerged with each one acknowledging the supremacy of the sultan of Sokoto, who resides in what is now far northwestern Nigeria. After the death of Usman, the first sultan of Sokoto in 1817, he was succeeded by his son, Muhammad Bello. Militarily and commercially powerful, the Sokoto caliphate dominated the region throughout the 19th century.

3.2.2 The Yoruba

Yoruba people live primarily in southwest Nigeria. The Yorubas are predominantly town dwellers who practice hoe agriculture and are well known for their trading and craft. They are basically animistic and they worship numerous gods (polytheism).

The first well-documented kingdom in what is now southwestern Nigeria was centred at Ife, which was established as the first of the Yoruba kingdoms in the 11th or 12th century. Over the next few centuries, the people of Ife spread their political and spiritual influence beyond the borders of the small city-state. Ife artisans were highly skilled, producing, among other things, bronze castings of heads in a highly naturalistic style. Terra-cotta, wood, and ivory were also common media favoured by the Ife artisans.

Another major Yoruba city-state is Oyo, which is situated northwest of Ife. Oyo used its powerful cavalry to replace Ife as Yorubaland's political centre. Ife, however, continued to serve as the spiritual centre of Yorubaland. At the time the Portuguese first arrived in Yorubaland in the late 15th century, Oyo was already a flourishing state in the region between Dahomey and the Niger River; so naturally, the people were in control of trade with the Portuguese. They traded first in goods such as pepper, which they secured from the northern interior lands and transferred to the southern coast, and later in slaves.

In Oyo, as elsewhere throughout coastal West Africa, the traffic in slaves had disastrous results on those traded (who were largely from the interior) and on the traders. As African nations vied for the lucrative commerce, conflicts increased, and other forms of advancement, both agricultural and economic, declined. As a result, when Britain banned the slave trade in the early 19th century, Oyo was hard-pressed to maintain its prosperity.

The Oyo state of Ilorin broke away from the empire in 1796 and joined the northern Sokoto caliphate in 1831, after Fulani residing in Ilorin seized power. The Oyo Empire collapsed, plunging all of Yorubaland (Oyo, Ife, and other areas) into a bloody civil war that lasted for decades. By the first half of the 19th century, Oyo had disintegrated into numerous small kingdoms. Toward the end of the 19th century the Yoruba came under British control. At present, they number about 27 million and make up one-fifth of the population of Nigeria, living both in the rural areas and the cities of their homeland.

3.2.3 The Igbo

The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria traditionally live in small, independent villages. Each village had an elected council instead of a Chief. Such democratic institutions notwithstanding, Igbo

society is highly stratified along lines of wealth, achievement, and social rank. Overcrowding and degraded soil have forced many Igbo to migrate to nearby cities and other parts of Nigeria.

In southeastern Nigeria, archaeological sites confirm sophisticated civilizations dating from at least ad 900, when fine bronze statues were crafted by predecessors of the modern-day Igbo people. These early peoples, who almost certainly had well-developed trade links, were followed by the Nri of northern Igbo land. With these exceptions, Igbo land did not have the large, centralized kingdoms that characterized other parts of Nigeria.

A few clans maintained power, perhaps the strongest of which was the Aro. The people of Aro lived west of the Cross River, near present-day Nigeria's southeastern border. They rose to prominence in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Aro were oracular priests for the region who used their role to secure large numbers of slaves. The slaves were sold in coastal ports controlled by other groups such as the Ijaws.

3.3 Some Other Ethnic Groups and their History

Other large ethnic groups in Nigeria as noted above include the Kanuri, centered in Borno State; the Tiv, from the Benue Valley near Makurdi; the Ibibio and Efik in the Calabar area; the Edo from the Benin region; and the Nupe, centered in the Bida area. Although small by Nigerian standards, these lesser groups have more members than most other African ethnicities.

3.3.1 The Kanuri/Kanem- Borno

The northern region's first well-documented state was the kingdom of Kanem, which emerged east of Lake Chad in what is now southwestern Chad by the 9th century ad. Kanem profited from trade ties with North Africa and the Nile Valley, from which it also received Islam. The Saifawas, Kanem's ruling dynasty, periodically enlarged their holdings by conquest and marriage into the ruling families of vassal states.

The empire, however, failed to sustain lasting peace, and during one conflict-ridden period sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries, the Saifawas were forced to move across Lake Chad into Bornu, in what is now far northeastern Nigeria. There, the Kanem inter-married with the native peoples, and the new group became known as the Kanuri. The Kanuri state was first located in Kanem and then Bornu, known as the Kanem-Bornu Empire, later referred to as Borno.

The Kanuri eventually returned to Chad and conquered the empire lost by the Saifawas. Its dominance thus assured, Bornu became a flourishing centre of Islamic culture that rivaled Mali to the far west. The kingdom also grew rich in trade, which focused on salt from the Sahara and locally produced textiles. In the late 16th century, the Bornu king, Idris Alooma expanded the kingdom during his reign, and although the full extent of the expansion is not clear, Bornu exerted considerable political influence over Hausa land to the west. In the mid- and late 18th century, severe droughts and famines weakened the kingdom, but in the early 19th century Bornu enjoyed a brief revival under Al-Kanemi, a shrewd military leader who resisted a Fulani revolution that swept over much of Nigeria. Al-Kanemi's descendants continue as traditional rulers within Borno State. The Kanem-Bornu Empire ceased to exist in 1846 when it was absorbed into the Wadai sultanate to the east.

3.3.2 The Edos and Benin Kingdom

The Benin kingdom, flourished from the 15th to the 17th century. Its capital was Benin City, as it still is in present-day Nigeria. Founded by the Edo or Benin people in the 12th century, it was ruled by a line of kings referred to as Obas. They were originally war leaders, but later assumed a more religious character. The extent of the kingdom is uncertain, but it probably controlled most of southern Nigeria at the zenith of its power.

According to Egharevba, the Benins migrated from Egypt making a brief stop in Sudan before they arrived at their present location. Another version of the origin of Benin holds that shortly after the rise of Ife, the kingdom of Benin emerged to the east. Although it was separate from the Yoruba kingdoms, it is said that the kingdom's first rulers were descended from Oduduwa, an Ife prince.

By the 15th century, Benin was a large, well-designed city sustained by trade (both within the region and, later, with Europe). Its cultural legacy includes a wealth of elaborate bronze plaques and statues recording the kingdom's history and glorifying its rulers.

One of the most influential Obas of Benin was Ewuare, who ruled the kingdom from approximately 1440 to 1470. Ewuare dramatically increased the territory controlled by the kingdom, strengthened the central government, and established a system of primogeniture under which the title of Oba would pass from father to son. He is also thought to have commissioned a series of fortifications surrounding the capital city.

During the reign of Ewuare's son, Oba Ozolua, who reigned as Oba from about 1480 to 1504, Benin developed mutually beneficial commercial and diplomatic relations with Portugal. Some evidence suggests that Ozolua's son and successor, Esigie, may have spoken and read Portuguese.

From the 16th through the 18th century the kingdom traded with European merchants in palm oil, ivory, pepper, and textiles. Benin also took part in the slave trade, although after the early 16th century the king allowed only female slaves to be exported. In the 18th century, French, Portuguese, and Dutch traders opened ports and trading posts along the Beninese coast and they exchanged weapons for slaves.

The Oba of Benin is a divine king whose reign is also divinely sanctioned. As Ezra (1992) rightly notes, the Oba is "the central figure in the kingdom, combining vast spiritual powers that result from his divine ancestry with enormous political clout and expertise." The Oba's divine ancestry endows him with mystical powers. He is believed, not only to have control over the forces that affect the wellbeing of his kingdom, but, he is also considered as possessing the potent power (**ase**) of making things happen as he utters and decrees them to be.

This mystical power, as the people of Benin aver, intensifies his blessings and curses. This divine ancestry (amongst other factors), ensures the stability of the Benin kingship institution and establishes the monarchy on a very firm foundation. Thus, the Benin adage: "**A i gu Oba sinmwi ogie**," that is, "**one does not contest rulership with the Oba**."

The Oba exemplifies the spirit and essence of the state. He is the embodiment of the people, their ethos and worldview. Till date, the Benins recognize the monarchy as relevant to their existence because through the institution, societal norms and practices are to a

large extent preserved. It is no surprise, therefore, that his loyal subjects hold their Oba in high esteem and fondly regard him as “**the glory of Benin**” (“**Oba o re uyi Edo**”).

The Obas of Benin have always been patrons of the arts. They sponsor the creation of some of Benin’s most famous art works in diverse media such as bronze, terra-cotta, wood and ivory. Benin visual traditions exist to serve either aesthetic, spiritual or symbolic purposes. It tends to subscribe to the compartmentalization proposed by Trowell (1964) for African sculpture generally. The three categories which she identified, namely, man-regarding art, spirit-regarding art and art of ritual display, apply appositely to the kind of art produced by the Benins.

Brass bas reliefs, which originally hung on the palace walls, depict scenes of life at the court of the Obas. Traditional bronze ceremonial jewelry from the kingdom, which was hand-cast and highly detailed, is considered to be one of the finest achievements of African art.

As a traditional ruler, the Oba’s functions and activities are numerous (both traditional and modern). Apart from his socio-political obligations, he performs many religious functions as stipulated and endorsed by the Benin tradition. By virtue of his position, he is the custodian of Benin custom and tradition, he is required to be a patron of the royal and communal gods and the various traditional religious institutions in Benin. He is subject to the sacred laws of his land and tradition compels him to observe regularly several sacred taboos.

The Oba is the spiritual guardian of his people and he facilitates the religious activities in his domain. The Oba is the conciliator between his people and the divine powers that collectively engender the kingdom’s opulence. Thus, he performs requisite rites and ceremonies dedicated to his ancestors and the royal deities at specified periods within the palace. Prominent amongst these rites are the annual rituals of **Ugie (Igwe)** festival. He also worships personally at the communal shrines when necessary, while appropriate functionaries in various parts of Benin carry out a range of religious functions on royal authority.



Fig. 2: Uku Akpolokpolo, Omo N'Oba Erediauwa

Source: *The Benin Traditional Council (B.T.C).*

There is a plurality of religion in Benin kingdom, like in other parts of Nigeria. The traditional religion thrives in Benin, but there are also Islam and Christianity amongst others. The latter, as Aisien (2002) reports, first came to Benin five hundred years ago, to mention only two of the major religions flourishing in Benin. The people of Benin practice polytheism.

A look at Benin traditional religious beliefs and practices reveals it as being in accord with known facts about the belief systems indigenous to Africa generally. Whether viewed as animism, fetishism or paganism as it is often termed, simply put, this religion is overly concerned with the veneration of the supernatural entities through the representation of such objects of worship by inanimate and animate objects.

The power of the Kingdom of Benin declined in the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite these changes, the Obas still performed administrative and ceremonial functions into the 21st century. One of the innovations brought to Benin by the present monarch Omo N'Oba Erediauwa (CFR), is the change of designation for the land, the people and their language from "Bini" (as used to be the case) to "Benin" as he decreed shortly after his coronation in 1979.

4.0 Conclusion

We have looked at the historical, social and cultural characteristics of some of the major groups in the country as a sample of the rich diversity of the cultures in Nigeria. The essence of this analysis is to develop your interest in the various cultures in our country, which should help to foster better appreciation of our shared heritage as a national entity.

5.0 Summary

In this unit we have looked at the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa cultures, some of their customs and their history. We also looked at the Edo and Kanuri cultures as well.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Describe the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria.
2. Write brief notes on two traditional rulers in Nigeria.
3. Discuss the prevalent religion amongst the Hausa, the Benin and Igbo people.

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Unit 3 Language as a Tool for Culture

1.0 Introduction

One of the principal aspects of culture is language. It is so important that in some cases the culture of the people is identified by its language and named as such. For instance, the three main cultures in Nigeria discussed in the previous unit are identified and named by their languages. In this unit, we shall be looking at the role of language in cultural formation and transmission.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- define Language
- discuss some terminologies associated with language
- highlight some functions and features of language
- describe the acquisition of language.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Definition of Language

Simply put, language means verbal communication, speech or lingo. Language is the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another. In the lay man's parlance, as Ukoyen (1978) states, language is "a system of intelligible sounds, amenable to symbolic representation, by means of which a human community apprehends reality and interacts within itself." He adds that to the linguist, language is "a set of principles relating meanings and phonetic sequence." The linguist, he adds also, sees language principally as "a type of patterned human behaviour."

Language provides a means to store, process, and communicate amounts of information that significantly exceed the capabilities of other animals. Grammar or syntax (the structure of phrases and sentences) is crucial for communicating complex thoughts and only humans have the ability to use grammar.



Fig. 3: A Yoruba Girl
Source: *Nigerian Magazine*

As it is with a symbol, the relation between a linguistic sign and its meaning is arbitrary. For instance, there is no reason other than convention among speakers of English that a dog should be called *dog*. In fact, other languages have different names for the animal, for example, the Spanish name for dog is *perro*. Russians call it *sobaka* and Japanese *inu*. Here in Nigeria, Yorubas call a dog *Aja*, Igbos refer to it as *Nkita*, the Benins call it *Ekita*, et cetera.

Humans are the only specie that have and use language in the true sense of the word. They use language to discuss a wide range of topics. You may have heard people talk of “animal language” and wonder what the expression really means. We all know that animals do not talk; what is actually meant by the expression is the form of non-verbal communication between animals.

Animals can communicate by smell, sound or they simply pass signals to one another and the signals produce responses from the animals. For example, the honey bees use their “dance” to communicate the location of food sources. A vulture can give a piercing call when it sees food and other vultures will flock to the spot to share in it. You may have noticed this yourself. So you can see that though there is communication among animals, it is not verbal. The characteristic that distinguishes human language from animal communication is that it is spoken.

We cannot discuss language without dealing with a related term, that is, linguistics. We will, therefore, direct attention now to discussing it, albeit, briefly.

3.2 Linguistics

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. There are sub-fields of linguistics that are concerned with the major components of language that you need to be acquainted with. Some of them that will be discussed at this point include: phonetics, phonology, morphology and semantics.

Phonetics is concerned with the sounds of languages.

Phonology focuses on the way sounds are used in individual languages.

Morphology deals with the structure of words.

Syntax has to do with the structure of phrases and sentences.

Semantics is the study of meaning.

There are other major sub-fields of linguistics that are equally important. First is pragmatics, which is the study of the interaction between language and the contexts in which it is utilized. Secondly, there is synchronic linguistics, which studies a language's form at a fixed time in history (past or present). Thirdly, we have diachronic or historical linguistics, which investigates the way a language, alters over time.

A number of linguistic fields study the connections between language and the subject matter of related academic disciplines, such as socio-linguistics (sociology and language) and psycholinguistics (psychology and language). In principle, applied linguistics is any use of linguistic techniques or results to proffer solution to problems connected to language, but in practice, it tends to be confined to second-language instruction.

A person must learn a language (consciously or unconsciously) to be able to speak it. It is not inborn in a person, it is acquired. A good question to ask is how do people learn language? For instance, how does a Cross –River person learn to speak Efik (Fig.4). Have you ever reflected on how people learn the language or languages they speak? This happens actually as described below. Taking some time to talk about this now will be helpful.



Fig. 4: A Cross-River Maiden.

Source: *Nigerian Magazine.*

3.3 Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is a major field of linguistic study. It is the process by which people (children and adults) learn a language or languages. A person can learn to speak more than one language. The first language he or she learns is referred to as first-language acquisition, and the second is known as second-language acquisition.

3.3.1 First-Language Acquisition

First-language acquisition is an intricate process. Even the linguists only partly understand the process. However, researches have established that young children have certain innate characteristics that influence them to learn language. These characteristics include the structure of the vocal tract, which enables children to make the sounds used in language.

Another is the ability to understand a number of general grammatical principles, such as the hierarchical nature of the structure of phrases and sentences (syntax). The characteristics mentioned above, however, do not influence children to learn only one particular language; consequently, children acquire whatsoever language is spoken around them, even if their parents speak a different language entirely. An interesting feature of early language acquisition is that children seem to depend more on semantics (meaning) than on syntax when speaking.

3.3.2 Second Language Acquisition

Although second-language acquisition literally refers to learning a language after having acquired a first language, the term is frequently used to describe the acquisition of a second language after a person has reached puberty. Experts inform us that generally, people expend greater effort learning a second language and that they often achieve lower levels of competence in that language. Unlike adults, children experience little difficulty in acquiring more than one language after puberty.

It is easier for people to gain knowledge of second languages more successfully when they become immersed in the cultures of the communities that speak those languages. Learning second languages is more successful in cultures in which acquiring a second language is expected, as in most African countries, than they do in cultures in which second-language proficiency is considered unusual, as in most English-speaking countries.

Have you noticed that some people speak more than one language fluently? Linguists have terms for this, namely, bilingualism and multilingualism. Are you sure of the meaning of these terms? You can learn more about them here.

Self-Assessment Exercise I

Discuss briefly how the first and second languages are acquired.

3.4 Bilingualism and Multilingualism

Bilingualism is the ability to master the use of two languages, and multilingualism is the ability to master the use of more than two languages. People in many parts of the country have mastered two or more indigenous languages.

Bilingualism and multilingualism often involve different degrees of competence in the languages involved. A person may manage one language better than another, or a person might have mastered two different languages better for different purposes. For example a person may use one language for speaking and another for writing.

Another fact you need to note is that languages change continually and when this happens, different varieties of the languages develop.

The changes that occur may be so profound that the people may find it a little difficult to understand themselves. This point can be illustrated with the case of the Yoruba language. There are many variations of the Yoruba language as evident in the differences in the way people from different ethnic groups in Yoruba land (Ijebu, Lagos, Ondo, et cetera) speak.

I am sure you have heard people talk about dialects. A dialect is a variety of a language spoken by an identifiable sub-group of people. Traditionally, linguists have applied the term (dialect) to geographically distinct language varieties, but in current usage the term can include speech varieties typical of other socially definable groups.

In everyday usage, the term dialect signifies a variety of a language that is distinct from what is considered the standard form of that language. Linguists, however, consider the standard language to be simply one dialect of a language.

Dialects develop primarily as a result of limited communication between different parts of a community that share one language. Under such circumstances, changes that take place in the language of one part of the community do not diffuse elsewhere.

As a result, the speech varieties become more distinct from one another. If contact continues to be limited for a long enough period, sufficient changes will build up to make the speech varieties mutually unintelligible. When this occurs, and especially if it is accompanied by the socio-political separation of a group of speakers from the larger community, it usually leads to the recognition of separate languages.

How do we determine whether two speech varieties are dialects of the same language, or whether they have altered sufficiently to be considered distinct languages? Doing this is not an easy task and it is a debatable decision. Linguists usually allude to shared lucidity as the major criterion in making this decision. Linguists have worked out a way to solve the problem. They make this distinction in two ways.

Firstly, if the two speech varieties are not mutually intelligible, then the speech varieties are considered as different languages. Secondly, if they are mutually intelligible but differ systematically from one another, then they are taken as dialects of the same language.

There is a fundamental problem with this classification, however, because many levels of mutual intelligibility exist, and linguists must decide at what level speech varieties should no longer be considered mutually intelligible. This is hard to establish in practice. Linguists postulate that intelligibility has a large psychological component. If a speaker of one speech variety wants to understand a speaker of another speech variety, understanding is more likely than if the case is different.

In addition, chains of speech varieties exist in which contiguous speech varieties are mutually intelligible, but speech varieties farther apart in the chain are not. Moreover, socio-political factors almost inescapably interfere in the process of differentiating between dialects and languages.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Discuss briefly what you understand by the term dialect.

3.5 The Standard Language

According to Adediran (1978), the standard language is “a codified form of language, accepted by and serving as a model to a larger speech community” and can be used as a “measure of the urbanization of the culture of the speaker.” He also adds that the standard language performs three symbolic and one objective function.

The symbolic functions are: the unifying function of language whereby it serves as a link between the speakers of the different dialects. It unites then in a single speech community, the separatist function whereby it makes the speakers separate from the speakers of other languages. Another symbolic function is the function of prestige which is attached to the possession of a standard language.

As Adediran (1978) has said, “the objective function of a standard language is its role as a frame-of-reference. It is the codified norm that becomes a yardstick for correctness.”

4.0 Conclusion

As we have noted from the foregone discussion, language means verbal communication, speech or lingo. Language is an important aspect of culture. It plays a vital role in cultural formation and transmission. It is the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another. It also serves as a means of expression and is a potent tool for transmitting the cultural values of a people.

It is sometimes used to designate a group of people. The acquisition of language comes through learning and it is possible for a person to acquire more than one language.

5.0 Summary

From the various definitions of language examined, it is clear that language is one of the principal aspects of culture. Its importance is explicit in how it is used to identify, in some cases; the culture of a people. This is exemplified, for instance, in the three main cultures in Nigeria. It is also apparent from what has been said above that language plays a vital role in cultural formation and transmission.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. In your own words define the term “language.”
2. Clearly explain what linguists mean by bilingualism and multilingualism
3. Explain legibly and in an organized manner how people acquire languages?
4. Differentiate between language and linguistics.

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Unit 4 The Family as a Cultural Unit

1.0 Introduction

We are all familiar with the term family, especially those of us in Africa, where family ties are usually very strong. Families develop when two members of the opposite sex known as husband and wife go into a partnership referred to as marriage. This is a bond that binds, not just the two persons getting married, but also their families. In this unit we shall read about family and marriage, their types, functions and significance.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the terms family and marriage
- differentiate between these two concepts
- describe the different types of families
- describe the process involved in selecting a partner for marriage
- discuss the terms used to describe family members.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Family and Marriage

Family (derived from [Latin](#): *familiare*), is the basic social group of people united through bonds of kinship or marriage. It is an institution that is present in all societies. In human society no one can exist in isolation without other persons.

In most societies, the family is the principal institution for the socialization of children and a basic institution that is critical to the structure of society. Ideally, the family provides its members with protection, companionship, security, and socialization. Family and marriage are two closely related terms. Thus, we shall take a brief look at the meaning of the word marriage later.

Sociologists have identified different types of families. They are the nuclear family and the extended family. We will now examine them in the following texts.

3.2 Types of Families

The structure of the family and the needs that the family fulfills vary from society to society. Basically there are two types of family, the nuclear family and the extended family.

3.2.1 The Nuclear Family

This is the basic family unit from which the extended family emanates. It usually comprises of parents and their children. The structure of this type of family may differ from society to society and it may take either of the following forms:

Monogamous family

In many societies tradition dictate that marriages are monogamous, that is, an individual is married to only one other person. This form of marriage exists in all cultures and is the most common form, even in places where other arrangements are recognised.

People in monogamous cultures may not have more than one marriage partner at a time. However, if a marriage ends due to the death of a partner or divorce (legal termination of marriage), re-marriage is permitted. Thus, people in monogamous cultures may have more than one spouse during their lifetimes.

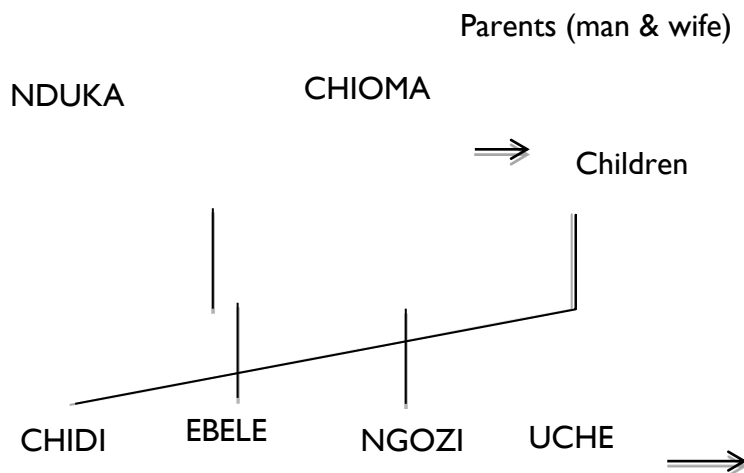


Fig. 5: A Diagram Showing a Monogamous Family

Source: Illustration by Valentine Omem

This diagram illustrates the marriage between Nduka, who is the husband and Chioma, who is the wife. The marriage has produced four children, namely: Chidi, Ebele, Ngozi and Uche who are siblings. As you can see in the diagram, no member of the extended family is included because it is a purely monogamous marriage. People in monogamous cultures normally do not have more than one marriage partner at a time.

Polygamous family

Where polygamy exists, in almost all cases it means polygyny is practiced. In many African societies and in Islamic cultures, where a man may legally have as many as four wives, polygyny is also practiced. Even where polygyny is an approved form of marriage, it is a relatively rare occurrence.

In reality, most men cannot afford more than one wife. Anthropologists believe that polygyny reflects the male desire for prestige and paternity (fatherhood) rather than the sex drive. It is generally practiced in societies in which wealth, status, and even immortality depend on having many children.

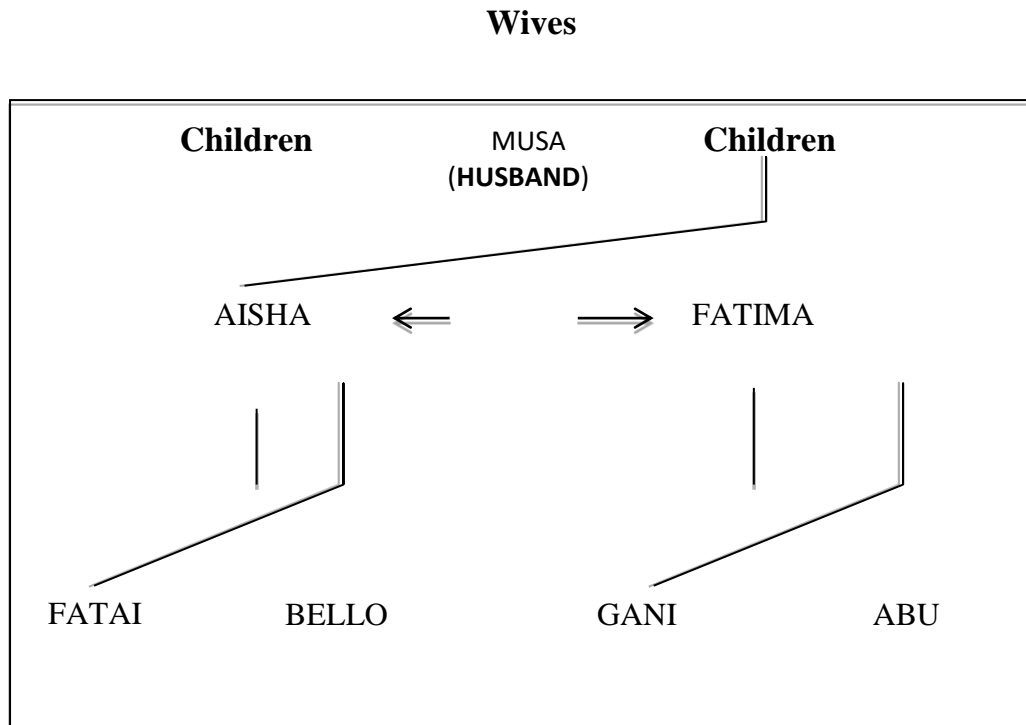


Figure 6: An Illustration of a Polygamous Family

Source: Illustration by Valentine Omem

The diagram above shows that Musa is married to two wives and each wife bore him two children. The children of the two wives are siblings or step-brothers and step-sister while the wives are co-wives or mates.

Polyandry is the practice where a woman is allowed to marry more than one man. It is extremely rare. Where it does exist, it seems to be associated with groups who live in extremely impoverished environments. Polyandry is rife in areas where there is a shortage of women in comparison to men.

3.2.2 Extended Family

The term extended family has many distinct meanings. Firstly, it is used synonymously with consanguineous family or joint family. Secondly, in societies dominated by the conjugal family or [nuclear family](#), it is used to describe kindred who do not belong to the conjugal family.

In other words, the extended family is an extension of a nuclear family sharing the same lineage. It could spread across several generations which comprise of members of a family (husband and wife) with their own children, their separate parents and siblings, and their siblings' children, as well as their children's and siblings' children's children in some cases.

Members of an extended family living together may feel a greater sense of security and belonging. This is one of the advantages of extended type of family because it contains more members to depend on during crisis and would serve as role models to the younger family members.

Table 1: Categories in a Family

Family		
S/N	Immediate Family	Spouse (Husband and Wife), Parent (Father and Mother), Child (Son and Daughter and, Sibling (Brother and Sister).
	Extended Family	Grandparent, Uncle, Aunt, Cousin, Nephew, Niece, and Common Ancestor.
	Family -In-Law	Father -In-Law, Mother -In-Law, Brother -In-La w and , Sister -In-Law
	Kinship	Consanguinity, Affinity, Fictive Kingship, Marriage, Adoption, Divorce and Disownment
	Lineage	Genealogy, Patrilineality, Matrilineality, Bilateral Descent, Family Tree, Pedigree, Family Name, Heredity, Inheritance and Heirloom
	Relationships	Familial Love, Parental Love, Marital Love, Brotherly Love, Filial, Piety and Veneration

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extended_family

Self-Assessment Exercise I

1. Distinguish between the different types of families.
2. Using your ethnic group as an example, describe what type of family is more common.

3.3 Kinship Terminology (The Family Tree)

The Family tree is a diagrammatic representation of the family showing the relationship of each person in the family. To better understand this, it will be necessary to know the meaning of the terms used to refer to members of the nuclear family which are as follows:

Father: a male parent

Mother: a female parent

Son: a male child of the parent(s)

Daughter: a female child of the parent(s)

Brother: a male child of the same parent(s)

Sister: a female child of the same parent(s)

In some families, the man may have children with more than one woman or the woman may have children with more than one man, in which case, the children sharing only one parent with each other are referred to as "half-brothers" or "half-sisters." For children who do not share biological father or mother, or who are adopted, the term "step" is used in relation to the members of the family.

Hence you have "stepbrother" or "stepsister" in respect of the children or "stepmother" or "stepfather." The same terms generally apply to children adopted into a family as to children born into the family.

Typically, societies with conjugal families also favor neolocal residence; thus upon marriage a person separates from the nuclear family of their childhood (family of orientation) and forms a new nuclear family (family of procreation). However, in the western society the single parent family has been growing more accepted and has begun to truly make an impact on culture. The majority of single parent families are more commonly single mother families than single father.

These families face many difficult issues besides the fact that they have to rear their children on their own, but also have to deal with issues related to low income. Many single parents struggle with low incomes and must cope with other issues, including rent, child care, and other necessities required in maintaining a healthy and safe home. In the extended family, members of the nuclear families of members of one's own (former) nuclear family may class as lineal or as collateral. Kin who regard them as lineal refer to them in terms that build on the terms used within the nuclear family:

Grandparents

These are the grandfather who is a parent's father and the Grandmother, who is a parent's mother.

Grandchildren

These are the grandson, that is, a child's son and the granddaughter, that is, a child's daughter.

For collateral relatives, more classificatory terms come into play, terms that do not build on the terms used within the nuclear family:

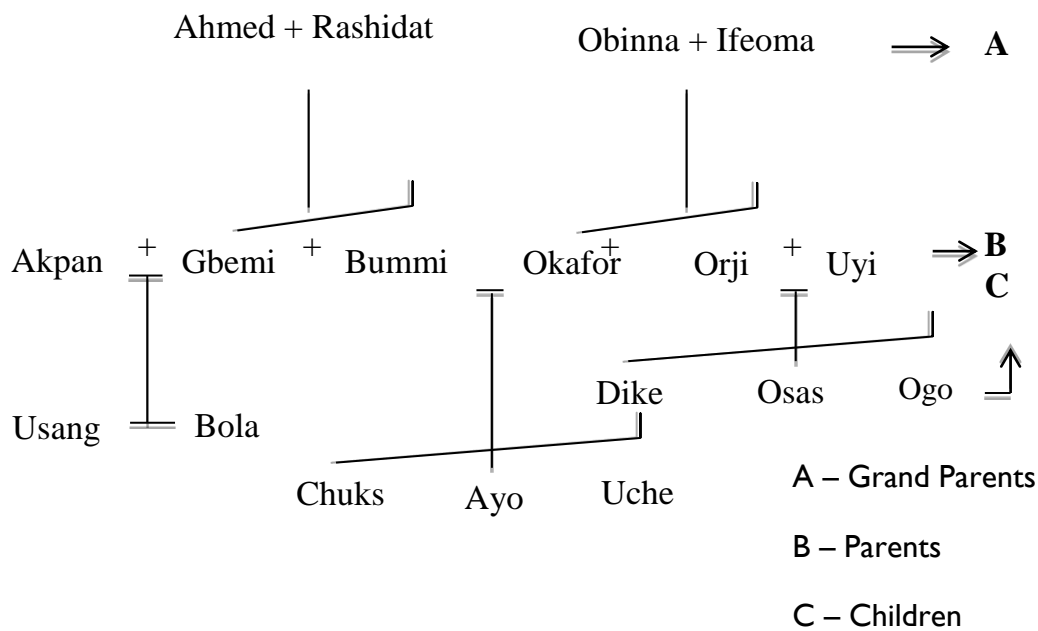
Uncle: father's brother, mother's brother, father's/mother's sister's husband

Aunt: father's sister, mother's sister, father's/mother's brother's wife

Nephew: sister's son, brother's son, wife's brother's son, wife's sister's son,

Niece: sister's daughter, brother's daughter, wife's brother's daughter, wife's

When additional generations intervene (in other words, when one's collateral relatives belong to the same generation as one's grandparents or grandchildren), the prefixes “great-” or “grand-” modifies these terms. Also, as with grandparents and grandchildren, as more and more generations intervene the prefix becomes “great grand-”, adding an additional “great-” for each additional generation. Most collateral relatives have never had membership of the nuclear family of the members of one's own nuclear family.

**Fig. 7: Ayo's Family Tree****Source:** Illustration by Valentine Omem

Cousin: the most classificatory term; the children of aunts or uncles. One can further distinguish cousins by degrees of co laterality and by generation. Two persons of the same generation who share a grandparent count as "first cousins" (one degree of co laterality); if they share a great-grandparent they count as "second cousins" (two degrees of co laterality) and so on.

If two persons share an ancestor, one as a grandchild and the other as a great-grandchild of that individual, then the two descendants class as "first cousins once removed" (removed by one generation); if they share ancestor figures as the grandparent of one individual and the great-great-grandparent of the other, the individuals class as "first cousins twice removed" (removed by two generations), and so on.

Similarly, if they share ancestor figures as the great-grandparent of one person and the great-great-grandparent of the other, the individuals class as "second cousins once removed." Hence one can refer to a "third cousin once removed upwards."

Cousins of an older generation (in other words, one's parents' first cousins), although technically first cousins once removed, are often classified as "aunts" and "uncles". Similarly, a person may refer to close friends of one's parents as "aunt" or "uncle", or may refer to close friends as "brother" or "sister", using the practice of fictive kinship. English-speakers mark relationships by marriage (except for wife/husband) with the tag "-in-law".

The mother and father of one's spouse become one's mother-in-law and father-in-law; the female spouse of one's son becomes one's daughter-in-law and the male spouse of one's daughter becomes one's son-in-law. The term "sister-in-law" refers to three essentially different relationships, either the wife of one's sibling, or the sister of one's spouse, or, in some uses, the wife of one's spouse's sibling. "Brother-In-law" expresses a similar ambiguity.

No special terms exist for the rest of one's spouse's family. The terms "half-brother" and "half-sister" indicate siblings who share only one biological or adoptive parent.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Using the knowledge you have gained from the discussion above, draw your own family tree.

3.4 Marriage as a Social Institution

Marriage is commonly defined as a partnership between two members of the opposite sex known as husband and wife. The usual roles and responsibilities of the husband and wife include living together, having sexual relations only with one another, sharing economic resources, and being recognized as the parents of their children.



Fig. 8: A Couple during their Traditional Marriage Ceremony

Source: Photograph by Dr. Sweet U. Ebeigbe

Marriage is both a public institution and a private, personal relationship. On the one hand, marriage involves an emotional and sexual relationship between particular human beings. At the same time, marriage is an institution that transcends the particular individuals involved in it and unites two families. In some cultures, as in Nigeria, marriage unites two families in a composite set of property connections involving land, labour and other resources.

It is not just the extended family that share interest in children the couple may have, the society does also. Furthermore, the legal and religious definitions of marriage and the laws that surround it, usually represent the symbolic expression of core cultural norms and values.

In addition to being a personal relationship between two people, marriage is one of society's most important and basic institution. Marriage and family serve as tools for ensuring social reproduction. Social reproduction includes providing food, clothing and shelter for family members, raising and socializing children, and caring for the sick and elderly. In families and

societies in which wealth, property, or a hereditary title is to be passed on from one generation to the next, inheritance and the production of legitimate heirs are major concern in marriage.

However, in contemporary industrialized societies, marriage functions less as a social institution and more as a source of intimacy for the individuals involved.

3.4.1 Marriage Practices

Marriage is the socially recognized and approved union between individuals who make a commitment to one another with the anticipation of a stable and enduring intimate relationship. It begins with a ceremony known as a wedding, which formally unites the marriage partners.



Fig. 9: Signing the Marriage Register at the Marriage Registry

Source: Photograph by Dr. Sweet U. Ebeigbe

A marital relationship usually involves some kind of contract, either written or specified by tradition, which defines the partners' rights and obligations to each other, to any children they may have and to their relatives. In most contemporary societies, marriage is certified by the government.

In Nigeria, couples usually contract marriage in different ways, namely: Traditional method, Legal (Registry), the Christian method and the Islamic method, et cetera. Couples may choose to use either one or more of these methods. Marriage is generally accepted as being an institution ordained by God almighty and is believed to be as old as mankind.



Fig. 10: A Couple who performed a Christian Marriage

Source: Photograph by Dr. Sweet U. Ebeigbe

3.4.2 Selecting a Partner

Although practices vary from one culture to another, all societies have rules about who is eligible to marry whom, which individuals are forbidden to marry one another, and the process of selecting a mate. In Benin, like in most Nigerian societies where family ties are very strong, the parents, of the prospective marriage partners search and select the marriage partners.

As Emovon (2003) reports, it is in accord with the obligation and duties of the parents to find a wife or husband for their children. He adds that in such situations, the family of the suitor woos a girl-child of the other family that it sees as meeting their criteria for good health, character and satisfactory social and economic class.

This is a common practice because, as we noted earlier, marriage is considered not just as a union of two individuals, but the bonding of two families. However, many societies have gradually changed and now permit more freedom of choice for the couple and a greater emphasis on love as the basis for marriage. There are two distinct stages of marriage, namely choice of partner and the marriage ceremony. We will now consider how individuals who choose their partners themselves go about it before they finally get married.

3.4.3 Dating, Courtship and Engagement

In societies in which individuals choose their own partners, young people typically date prior to marriage. Dating is the process of spending time with prospective partners to become acquainted. Dates may take place in groups or between just two individuals.

Western-style dating is not common in rural areas, but it is practiced by some young people in urban areas, especially the educated ones. When dating becomes more serious it may be referred to as courtship. Courtship implies a deeper intensity of commitment than dating does. During courtship the individuals specifically contemplate marriage, rather than merely enjoying one another's company for the time being.

Courtship may lead to engagement (also known as betrothal). The engagement is the formal agreement to marry. Couples usually spend some period of time being engaged before they actually marry. They are expected to use the period, especially to learn more about each other, their families and to make arrangements for their on-coming marriage ceremony. There is actually no fixed duration for the engagement stage. This would depend on the couple involved; usually they take their time to choose a convenient date for the marriage ceremony. It could take days, weeks, months or even years.

A woman who is engaged is known as the man's fiancée, and the man is known as the woman's fiancé. Men characteristically give an engagement ring to their fiancée as a symbol of the agreement to marry.



Fig.11: A Lady Receiving Her Engagement Ring

Source: Photograph by Dr. S.U. Ebeigbe.

In general, people tend to date and marry people with whom they are compatible, that is, with persons with whom they share common characteristics. Thus, mate selection normally results in homogamous marriage, in which the partners are similar in a variety of ways. Characteristics that couples tend to share include race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, age, and the level of prestige of their parents.

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Enumerate the stages involved in the selection of a marriage partner.

3.5 Marriage and Family Practices in Nigeria

Marriage in Nigerian society varies greatly between urban and rural areas, across ethnic and religious borders, and with levels of education. Most Nigerians share a strong attachment to family especially to children, from clearly differentiated roles for men and women, to a hierarchical social structure, and the dominance of religion in shaping community values.

Nigerian society functions in a highly patriarchal fashion, with men exerting broad control over the lives of women, who are typically less educated and have limited access to health and social services. Women work far longer hours than men. They perform virtually all housework and child care, as well as (for most women) many hours of income-earning work, especially farming.

The exceptions are in some southern states, where women are more active in trade and exert considerable political influence. In northern Muslim communities, especially cities, women are confined to the home according to *purdah* (the seclusion of women from public view). Many women in *purdah* participate, using children as couriers, in a concealed trade in craft articles, prepared foodstuffs, and other goods.

Polygyny is widely practiced among Muslims, among adherents of traditional religions, and among Christians who belong to independent African churches. Among northern Muslims and in many other traditional societies, most girls enter family-arranged marriages near the age of puberty. The daughters of more educated populations, particularly in the south, tend to marry when they are in their late teens or early twenties. Men usually marry at a later age, especially if they come from impoverished families that are unable to afford the high cost of weddings and *bride-price* (payment given to the bride's family by or on behalf of the future husband).

Although specific details of the family structure vary from one ethnic group to another, Nigerian families are generally male dominated. Polygamy is practiced, but its popularity varies according to region, ethnic group, and education. Educated, Christian women living in urban centers, for example, are less likely to marry a man with other wives than other women might be.

While the status of Muslim women in Nigeria is similar to that in other Islamic countries, most other women enjoy a great degree of freedom. They influence family decisions, engage in open trade at the marketplace, and account for about a third of the labor force. Large families traditionally share the workload at home. Nigerians have deep respect for their elders.

Some cultures have peculiar practices associated with marriage. For example, in Kanuri marriages, the breaking of the virginity is usually heralded by clapping of pans and tins by the bridesmaids in the early hours of the morning. The group would dance round the town stopping at the residences of the bride's and bridegroom's relatives. The occasion, according to Imam (1969), is a great honour to the parents of the bride, "bearing excellent testimony of their rigidity of discipline in bringing up the young bride as a virgin- conventionally a sacred duty on every Muslim parent."

World-wide, marriage customs vary, but the payment of a dowry is common to most cultures. In some cultures in Nigeria, for example, the groom is expected to give money,

property, or service to the family of the bride. In some cases, a groom is expected to spend unspecified periods of time helping his future father-in-law in his farm.

In most parts of Nigeria (Yoruba, Edo and Igbo), the family of the groom is expected to present the family of his bride with a number of items as part of the ceremony. The kind of items and their quantity vary from culture to culture and from family to family. But, generally, the gifts include food produce, kola nuts and assorted drinks.



Fig. 12: Gifts by the Groom's Family to the Bride's Family at a Traditional Marriage Ceremony

Source: Photograph by Dr. Sweet U. Ebeigbe.

Although there is really no specified age for people to get married, however, women usually marry by the time they are 20 years old and men marry in their mid-20s. In some parts of Nigeria, especially in the northern parts, adolescents marry. Marriage is often considered a process rather than an event, so couples may live together before, or instead of, a formal marriage ceremony. Many couples simply find a wedding to be too expensive.

4.0 Conclusion

The family institution is a key unit of culture. Its very existence ensures not just the physical continuity of man but his cultural and social continuity as well. Families are formed because people marry and give out their own children in marriage to other persons outside their own families. This arrangement, which is as old as mankind ensures that the human race is perpetuated, sustained and preserved.

5.0 Summary

In this unit we have looked at the family which is the basic unit of the society. Since a person usually becomes a member of a family either by kinship or by marriage, hence, we learnt also about marriage, an institution that binds a married couple and their families. Furthermore, our analysis considered the types of family and the terms used to describe the relationships of members of a family. With this last unit, we conclude the first module in this course.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Using examples of marriages in your culture, identify the major differences between family and marriage?
2. Marriage practices involve the selection of a partner by person intending to go into matrimony. How is this done in your locality?
3. With the aid of diagrams discuss the meaning of the family tree.
4. Identify and write short notes on the different types of families?

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