

Paper Outline

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of Kwa-Nsibidi, advocating for a standardized neography that captures the essence of the Nsibidi script. The discussion delves into the origins of Nsibidi, its unique characteristics as an "Action-Writing" system, and the historical use of Ukara cloth as a medium for documenting actions and ideas. Drawing parallels with other square-based writing systems, the paper introduces the logographic and morpho-graphic aspects of Nsibidi. The Neo-Nsibidi Project, particularly Chiadikobi Nwaubani's contributions, are highlighted, leading to the proposal of Kwa-Nsibidi as a people's script with a focus on cultural and ritual morphographism. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of simplifying characters for mass adaptation, envisioning a future where Nsibidi follows specific guidelines for broader accessibility.

Introduction

We will explore a newfound concept called Kwa-Nsibidi, outlining an argument advocating for a standardized neography that encapsulates the essence of Nsibidi. The concept of Kwa stems from various linguistic inspirations in the Niger-Volta area. Kwa being mix or weave in Igbo, kwa kwa being a lot or many in Efik-Ibibio and Kwa (Qua) is a personhood in Ejagham-Ekoi culture. It incorporates diverse multi-ethnic linguistic influences in its aims to be a people's script with a focus on cultural and ritual morpho-graphism.

Origins of Nsibidi - An Idiok Origin Mythos

This section provides a brief overview of Nsibidi's origins, touching upon its roots in pantomimed actions and setting the stage for a deeper exploration of Nsibidi as an "Action-Writing" system.

- Idiok Origins

- Idiok Nsibidi Pantomime

- Idiok in Literature

TP: Idiok mythos provides a context that Nsibidi is of divine origin used for mimicking actions and ideas into written form. Nnedi Okoroafor expands on this mythos with the concept of the Dark Market and the use of Nsibidi by the Idiok to read the spirits of an individual in her book *Zahrah the Windseeker*.

Nsibidi as "Action-Writing"

The paper expands on the concept of Nsibidi as "Action-Writing," discussing its unique characteristics and how its "captures" actions through symbolic representation remarkably similar to photography.

-What is Action

-What is writing

-What is Action-Writing

-Ngbe Pantomime

TP: Arguing the origins of writing as actions conveying symbols and ideas and writing conveying actions. Nsibidi is a form of writing used to capture visual components into symbolic writing representations of abstract ideas, objects, and actions akin to archaic photography.

Before the Camera, there was Ukara: Cloth as Documentation of Actions and Ideas

This section explores the historical use of Ukara cloth as a medium for documenting actions and ideas within the Nsibidi tradition, highlighting the significance of this pre-photographic documentation method.

-Ukara cloth and its origins

-Ukara and its ritual use

-An analysis of Ukara cloth

-Comparison with Afro-American quilting

TP: An analysis of Ukara cloth through cultural and aesthetic lenses. An analysis of the Ukara leads to the evidence of actions and pictorial concepts being recorded within a square motif for identification and interpretation.

Captured within a Square

Drawing parallels from Ukara square Nsibidi writing motifs with other writing systems such as Mayan Hieroglyphs and Chinese seal scripts, this section discusses the use of square writing in Nsibidi and its implications for the script's modern visual structure.

-Actions captured within a square

-Ukara cloth within a square

-Chinese seal script and modern calligraphy in a square

-Maya Hieroglyphs within a square

-Egyptian Quadrat square writing

TP: Allusion of Ukara square motifs similarities to other ritual writing systems (Mayan, Chinese and Egyptian) and their cultural aesthetic of fitting actions within blocks for communication. Alluding to the timeless and ancient use of visual communication captured within a square.

Nsibidi as a Logographic System

This section explains the logographic nature of Nsibidi, introducing the concepts of pictographs, ideographs, and logographs, and demonstrating their use within the script.

-What is a pictograph?

-What is an ideograph?

-What is a logograph?

TP: An analysis of pre-colonial and modern Nsibidi writing and defining different elements of the script and clarifying misconceptions surrounding Nsibidi.

Nsibidi as a Morpho-graphic System

Building on the logographic aspect, this section introduces the morpho-graphic nature of Nsibidi, explaining the role of morphemes and how they contribute to the script's structure.

-What is a morpheme?

-What is morphography?

TP: The cultural analysis of Nsibidi being used by multiple ethnic groups within West Africa and its potential use for modern morpho-graphism. Nsibidi was used in multiple ethnic institutions and trade guilds for cross-cultural and multi-ethnic communication alluding to a morpho-graphic past remarkably similar to the Japanese use of Kanji imported from China as well as its use in Vietnam, Korea, and Malaysia.

Neo-Nsibidi Project

This section highlights the work of Chiadikobi Nwaubani in the Neo-Nsibidi Project, emphasizing the contemporary efforts to revive and adapt Nsibidi for modern usage.

-Transforming complex Nsibidi graphemes representing abstract ideas and actions into simplified graphemes called radicals.

-Simplified public concepts of complex and sacred Nsibidi graphemes unique to the Ekpe

-Neo-Nsibidi is used to convey an array of diverse ideas and actions recreated through the use of graphemes called radicals. Radicals are combined to suggest a person, place, thing, or idea. These are formed into characters framed within a square.

-These modern characters are to be adapted by various cultures and ethnic groups.

TP: Praising the work and project created by Chiadikobi Nwaubani and its initial goals for Nsibidi writing for the public sphere. Highlighting inspirations and aspirations within Chiadikobi's work one can get a clear idea of a modern standard of writing for Nsibidi writing and education.

Kwa-Nsibidi: The People's Nsibidi

This section introduces Kwa-Nsibidi as a people's script, emphasizing cultural and ritual morphographism as key elements that differentiate it from other writing systems.

Cultural Morphographism

Expanding on the cultural aspect, this subsection discusses how Kwa-Nsibidi incorporates cultural elements into its morphographism making it a unique expression of identity for multiple cultures at once.

-Multiple cultures can utilize the characters and radicals within Nsibidi to represent their own culture and identity.

TP: Arguing a cross cultural communication system for the public with native origins in place of colonial English. Highlighting the script potential and use by multiple ethnic groups both within the continent and its diverse diaspora.

Ritual Morphographism

This subsection explores the ritualistic aspects of Kwa-Nsibidi, demonstrating how the script is intertwined with various ceremonial practices and spiritual beliefs.

-Multiple cultural rites identified with modern Nsibidi characters

-Multiple religious rites within the characters themselves

-Use of Nsibidi by native traditional cultures alongside Christianity

TP: Highlighting the flexibility and versatility of modern Nsibidi allows for religious and cultural diversity to be expressed through the writing. In hopes to combat tribalism and ethnic pride, Nsibidi could foster cross-cultural awareness and literacy in modern Nigeria and its diaspora. The script can also be used in a diverse religious context both traditional and Abrahamic.

Simplifications of Characters – a Public Standard

Emphasizing the need for mass adaptation, this section discusses the importance of simplifying characters within Kwa-Nsibidi to facilitate broader accessibility and understanding.

- Proportions of written characters

- Placement of character components

- Simplifying characters for daily use but still preserving an element of culture

Conclusion

The paper concludes by summarizing the key points and advocating for specific guidelines to be followed in the future development and adoption of Nsibidi, envisioning a future where it becomes a widely accepted and utilized script.

Works Cited

- Macgregor, J. K. "Some Notes on Nsibidi." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 39, 1909, pp. 209–19.
- Nicklin, Keith, and Jill Salmons. "Cross River Art Styles." *African Arts*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1984, pp. 28–94.
- Burnett, Joshua Yu. "'Vine Head,' 'Snake Lady,' 'Swamp Witch': Racialized Othering in Nnedi Okorafor's *Zahrah the Windseeker*." *Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction*, edited by MEGHAN GILBERT-HICKEY and MIRANDA A. GREEN-BARTEET, University Press of Mississippi, 2021, pp. 187–203.
- PRATTEN, DAVID. "INLAWS AND OUTLAWS, 1946." *The Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, pp. 208–60.
- THOMPSON, ROBERT FARRIS. "Nsibidi/Action Writing." *Symposium of the Whole: A Range of Discourse Toward an Ethnopoetics*, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg, 1st ed., University of California Press, 1983, pp. 285–90.
- Ozah, Marie Agatha. "*Moninkim*: A Symbiotic Performance of Ritual, Music, and Dance by the Ejagham People of Nigeria and Cameroon." *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2015, pp. 421–49.
- Jabar Al-Atabi, Akram. (2020). What is Writing? 10.13140/RG.2.2.35570.53440.
- Onyile, Onyile Bassey, and Christopher Slogar. "Nobody Can Harm You, Nobody Can Charm You: Efik Nnabo Society Masquerades of Calabar, Nigeria." *African Arts*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2016, pp. 70–77.
- Ajibade, Babson & Ekpe, Esther & Etim, Theodora. (2012). More than Fabric Motifs: Changed Meaning of Nsibidi on the Efik Ukara Cloth. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 3. 297-303.
- Igbo. *Wrapper (Ukara)*. cotton and indigo, second half 20th century. Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Shop Fund
- Woven Fabric*. cloth, raffia, 1983.
- Ekpuk, Victor. "My Sources," *Glendora review*. Vol. 1 No. 2 (1995)
- "Ukara: Ritual Cloth of the Ekpe Secret Society." *Hood Museum*, 5 Feb. 2021,
- Brooklyn Museum. (n.d.). <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/125936>
- Joseph, Marietta B. "West African Indigo Cloth." *African Arts*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1978, pp. 34–95.
- Wahlman, Maude Southwell. "African Symbolism in Afro-American Quilts." *African Arts*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1986, pp. 68–99.
- Bai, Qianshen, and John Finlay. "The World within a Square Inch: Modern Developments in Chinese Seal Carving." *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, 1993, pp. 26–63.
- Li, Wendan. "The Development of Chinese Calligraphy I: The Seal Scripts." *Chinese Writing and Calligraphy*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, pp. 100–14.

STRICKMANN, MICHEL. "The Seal of the Law: A Ritual Implement and the Origins of Printing." *Asia Major*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1993, pp. 1–83.

Justeson, John S. "The Origin of Writing Systems: Preclassic Mesoamerica." *World Archaeology*, vol. 17, no. 3, 1986, pp. 437–58.

TEDLOCK, D. (2010). Early Mayan Writing. In *2000 Years of Mayan Literature* (1st ed., pp. 25–30). University of California Press.

Stross, Brian. "Maya Hieroglyphic Writing and Mixe-Zoquean." *Anthropological Linguistics*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1982, pp. 73–134.

Hieroglyphic Stairway, Step No. 2. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology; Collection: Carnegie Institution of Washington

Hieroglyphic Step #1. Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology; Collection: Carnegie Institution of Washington

Mayan Relief Carving from the Second Temple of the Cross Group at Palenque. gelatin silver prints, ca. 1895-ca. 1935 (photograph). Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library

Elkins, James. "Conclusion: Ghosts and Natural Images." *The Domain of Images*, Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 236–52

A. Glass, I. Hafemann, M.-J. Nederhof, S. Polis, B. Richmond, S. Rosmorduc, and S. Schweitzer. "A method for encoding Egyptian quadrats in Unicode." 2017.

Houston, Stephen, and Andréas Stauder. "What Is a Hieroglyph ?" *L'Homme*, no. 233, 2020, pp. 9–44.

Miller, Hugh T. "The Ideographic Individual." *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2004, pp. 469–88.

Creel, Herrlee Glessner. "On the Nature of Chinese Ideography." *T'oung Pao*, vol. 32, no. 2/3, 1936, pp. 85–161.

Houston, Stephen D. "Archaeology and Maya Writing." *Journal of World Prehistory*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1989, pp. 1–32.

TEDLOCK, DENNIS. "Learning to Read." *2000 Years of Mayan Literature*, 1st ed., University of California Press, 2010, pp. 13–24.

TEDLOCK, DENNIS. "Drawing and Designing with Words." *2000 Years of Mayan Literature*, 1st ed., University of California Press, 2010, pp. 113–19.

Jacka, Brian. "The Effect on Achievement of Interaction between Self-Concept and Instructional Method." *The Journal of Experimental Education*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1983, pp. 172–76.

Crowley, Dale P. "The Occurrence and Function of Chinese Characters in Modern Japanese Orthography." *The Journal-Newsletter of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1968, pp. 1–9.

Koekkoek, B. J. *Language*, vol. 70, no. 1, 1994, pp. 213–14.

Leong, C. K. "ANOTHER VIEW OF COMPLEX AND SIMPLIFIED CHINESE CHARACTERS."
Journal of Chinese Linguistics, vol. 5, no. 2, 1977, pp. 342–46.

Chiadikobi Nwaubani," Ikpo Nsibidi Ohuru 1, Akwukwo di n'Igbo na Beekee (对字新1 葉延宮運敵
beekee)", 2015 (unpublished)

Chiadikobi Nwaubani," Nsibidi Workbook" (unpublished)