

## Nigeria 2015 Presidential Election: A Multimodal Discourse Interpretations of Selected Cartoons of TELL's News-Magazine

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### Abstract

This paper analysed some selected cartoons from TELL news-magazines. The purpose was to describe the visual components and communicative devices employed by the cartoonist to send his message to the viewer/readers. The cartoons essentially were used to satirise represented phenomenon that arose through intrigues that characterised Nigeria 2015 Presidential elections. Data for the study were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The main data for the study comprised 3 colour cartoons purposively selected from different editions of TELL news-magazines published in 2015. The selection of the cartoons was predicated upon the subject under consideration. Analysis of the data is based on multimodal discourse analysis as explicated by Gunter Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2001). The result showed that semiotic resources such as colour, image, symbols and icons, gaze and posture enhance the semantic quality of the cartoons. This study revealed very strongly and established the potentials of visual images to convey meaning beyond the verbal language in any human society.

**Key words:** satire, multimodal discourse analysis, semantic quality, semiotic resources.

### 1. Introduction

2015 presidential election in Nigeria was indeed a tug of war between the two major contestants; the former President Goodluck Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the former military head of state, General Muhammadu Buhari of the opposition Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). The political space in Nigeria was already heavily saturated and has been turned into a theatre of war. The scenario was laced with probable tension as a result of hate speech, campaign of calumny, destructive propaganda, death wishes on opposition among others.

Nigerians watched with bated breath and keen interest as political jobbers took their campaigns to different parts of the country. Most of these campaign rallies were laced with unprecedented violence and thuggery.

The government political party then has ruled the country since the inception of democratic dispensation in 1999 after series of military dictatorship. For the first time after about 15 years, the ruling party, the PDP, was facing a very stiff opposition from the APC which is a merger of different political parties. The APC was describing the former President Goodluck Jonathan, the

sitting President then as clueless, inept, inefficient and bereft of productive ideas to lead the nation. The APC appeared hell-bent on wresting power from the ruling party. As it seemed, it did not look easy. Hence, the intriguing scenario being witnessed everyday as the election drew nearer.

The independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on its part was not helping the matter. It has shifted the election hitherto scheduled for February, 14th and 28th to March 28th and April 14th. The APC accused the ruling government of allegedly masterminding the shift. INEC on its part claimed that the security reports received from Defence Chiefs did not favour the conduct of the election. In the report, the Defence Chiefs have claimed that their officers were dissipating a lot of energy in the fight against the insurgent group, Boko Haram in the North East of the country. Consequently, they might not have the capability of providing adequate security for the polls. The INEC Chairman, Prof. Atahiru Jega banked his claim of election shift primarily on this. In addition, the chairman claimed that the shift would allow reasonable number of voters to collect their Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCS).

The media was also not left out in the political intrigue. There was different propagandist reportage on the presidential election campaigns. A close look at the different media revealed that almost all has taken sides, either with the ruling government or the opposition. One of the few media that have appeared neutral at least to a large extent is TELL News-magazine. Hence, this is the reason for the choice of the magazine for this study.

The job of a cartoonist is to engage in satirical comparison of phenomena although very cautiously and discreetly. The cartoonist tries vigorously to use the platform of satire to

constructively criticize a phenomenon. The cartoonists of TELL News-magazines have done exactly this job. The represented phenomenon in all the cartoons selected is the presidential election. Efforts are vigorously made by the cartoonists satirically critique some of the incidents of the presidential election. Tell News-magazine in their column, 'cartoon extra' makes satirical representations of the campaign of calumny, unpreparedness of INEC and other issues associated with the presidential election.

## 2. A Survey of Literature

Many researchers have written many papers on using the framework of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Most of these analyses works essentially deal with the visual components. Linda (2005, p. 45) is a critical studies of advertisements of Hong Kong charity organizations. She discovers a vast difference between charity organizations and those of commercial companies. Those who deal with the former were without any intention of receiving anything in return for their donation. The latter was engaged in primarily for profit making.

Also, Xiong and Quex (2006, p. 353) study hand and motion frequency properties using multimodal discourse analysis. They concluded that while speech carries the major symbolic presentation, gesture provides the imagistic content. They establish the dominant role of hand motions in "carrying" this image content.

Moreover, O'Donohoe (2007, p. 18) studies the nature of the relationship between image and text in a visual work by artists Hans Haacke and Jenny Holzer which emphasised a strong relationship between visual and visible language, and the physical contexts in which it operates. He concluded that systemic-functional semiotics operates in the production of meaning in image-text works.

Meanwhile, O'Halloram (2008, p. 444) studies the systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis (SF-MDA), ideational meaning, using language and visual imagery. His major concern is the theory and practice of analysing meaning arising from the use of multiple semiotic resources in discourses which range from written, printed and electronic texts to material lived-in reality. The study reveals how metaphorical constructions of meaning (i.e. semiotic metaphors) take place across linguistic and visual elements.

In the same vein, Jooma (2009, p. ii) analysed the images created on the front covers of youth magazines to determine how the culture of viewing has been affected by societal modes occasioned by various changes in South Africa between 1994 and 2008. The study enlists the numerous presentations that most Magazines covers within his analysis project regarding identity issues which include class, race, sexuality and gender.

Ariyo (2014) conducted an analysis of selected Panorama pictures sourced from TELL News-magazine. His analysis was based on multimodal study. Ariyo discovered that such pictures and their various backgrounds are rich in visual information. These are employed by the producers of the magazine as veritable means of passing information to the reading public. Most information that is not readily available in the texts are foregrounded through the deployment of these visual resources. Further discussion by Ariyo (2014, p.309) projects some features of semiotic resources. These are clearly visible in the producers' use of colours, dresses, etc.

Furthermore, Aroge (2012, pp. 99-100) conducted a study of using selected advertisement of orthodox pharmaceutical companies. She engaged her study from the standpoint of

multimodal discourse analysis. She found out such semiotic resources as images, pictures, colours and signs are ready tools for communication in the hands of advertisers. These semiotic tools are used by advertisers to pass information seamlessly to the target audience. She also found out that both grammatical texts and the visual components play complementary roles in revealing the intended message of the producers to their target audience.

Finally, Olowu (2012, p. 98) engaged in multimodal discourse analysis of selected editions of Christian Women Mirror magazines. He focused on the use of the magazine as a medium of evangelism. He discovered that in an attempt to bring people to Jesus Christ in deep conviction of their sins, the producers made use of semiotic resources very lavishly. Such resources include colour, symbols, and icon better than verbal anchorages.

### 3. Data Analysis



**Text One**

Text One is a cartoon published by Tell's news-magazine on 9th March, 2015. In the image before us is a man who carries a coffin. On the coffin is an inscription "Death wish". There is also a wreath on the coffin. The inscription on the carrier is 'Fayose'. In front of the coffin, we see a man labelled 'GMB'. There are also two personalities standing and watching the drama as it unfolds. There is an exclamation from one of

the men. The exclamation is the only verbal anchorage in the image. It reads 'Kai! See wahala.... From naija to London, all because of politics'.

This image is satirical. Satire is a mockery of an important subject. All the objects on the image are signifiers. The whole cartoon itself is a signifier of an earlier event that happened. In this image, the man carrying coffin signifies the Ekiti State governor, Mr. Ayo Fayose. The coffin is a signifier of death. The man labelled 'GMB' signifies president Muhammadu Buhari while the two people witnessing the event signify the citizens of Nigeria.

During the 2015 presidential campaign, the Ekiti state governor, Mr Ayo Fayose was a known die-hard supporter of the then People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate and incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. On several occasions, he had attacked the opposition presidential candidate, President Muhammadu Buhari of the Action Congress of Nigeria (APC). His argument was that the man was too old and sickly and consequently could die anytime. He likened him to the former and late Nigeria president, Umaru Musa Yaradua. He contested and won the presidential election in April, 2007. But he was terribly incapacitated by ill-health. He eventually died after spending only two years as president. Fayose maintained that if Buhari was elected, same fate will befall him. Although the governor had to contend with many criticisms from many notable Nigerians, he was undeterred in his opinion that Buhari will soon die.

Around January, 2015, president Buhari travelled to London to attend a debate in Charttam house in London. Governor Ayo Fayose still maintained his unpopular stance that the president had travelled for medical reasons and that he may die in London. Hence, this cartoonist captures the

phenomenon succinctly. Here, Fayose is seen carrying a coffin and following President Buhari to London. The verbal anchorage exposes the thinking of Nigerian citizens.



### Text Two

There are just two personalities in the cartoon. The first is labelled 'Nigeria' while the other person is labelled 'INEC'. INEC refers to Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria. This is an electoral body saddled with the responsibility of conducting the 2015 presidential election. INEC at this time was the only hope Nigerians had to deliver credible election in 2015.

Just as the inscriptions suggest, the first personality signifies all Nigerian citizens who ostensibly are watching with keen interest the whole electoral process. The other personality signifies Independent Electoral Commission of Nigeria headed by Professor Atahiru Jega. As stated earlier, INEC has the duty of conducting credible elections both at the state level and federal levels. Those elections include gubernatorial, assembly and presidential.

In the case of 2015 elections, there were many controversies. The general elections were initially scheduled to hold both on February 14th and 28th but were later re-scheduled to March 28th and April 11th. This shift in election dates brought many scathing criticisms from Nigerians who

believed that INEC appeared unfit for the assignment of conducting credible elections. Truly, Professor Atahiru Jega and his INEC were fighting the crisis of confidence generated by certain defects in the commission's planning towards the elections. The major reasons given for the shift in elections dates was inability to finish the permanent voters' card (PVC) distribution to electorates and the inability of the security officers to guarantee security at that time. The electoral commission argued that the PVCS were printed abroad and the contractors failed to deliver on time. This obviously got Nigerians angry. The reason for the anger was not far-fetched. Many thought the incumbent government was playing for time to perfect the rigging of the elections.

This cartoonist inarguably captured the election imbroglio in this cartoon. In this image, we can see Nigerians pursuing INEC terribly towards the precipice. Just in front of them, we see the inscription 'PVC wahala'. The two personalities are obviously racing down a dangerous cliff. The 'PVC wahala' is rolling down the cliff. While INEC was trying to catch up with the rolling PVC, Nigerians were busy pursuing INEC. We can see disillusionment in this cartoon. The whole environment is pervaded with uncertainty. In the mind of the cartoonist, the election might never hold. The verbal anchorage is more revealing. It says 'Haba! Jega four years of preparation?' this is a sign of negativity and pessimism.



### Text Three

The setting of this cartoon is a petrol station (gas station). There are just two people in the cartoon. The first is the man on a motorcycle. A close look at the motorcycle is both signifying and hilarious. He carries a big tank on the motorcycle. There are other kegs hung on the motorcycle. The other personality here is a petrol attendant. She holds the fuel nozzle with her left hand ready to sell petrol. We can also see a fuel dispensing pump at the background. There is an inscription on the pump which reads 'Now N 87 per litre'

During the 2015 presidential campaign, the then incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan had announced the reduction of fuel pump price from N97 to N87. The N10 reduction was actually a campaign strategy to win the heart of Nigerians. But instead of praising the president, some political pundits especially from the opposition had argued that the president had not done enough. They said the N10 reduction was quite insignificant and consequently had no effect on the suffering masses.

The cartoon succinctly captures the insincerity and inconsistencies of the government. Just as expressed in the utterance of the motorcyclist, "please fill my tank Grrr.... I don't trust our government. After elections, they might raise it again", the government's insincerity is exposed. Undoubtedly, the reduction was precipitated by

the urge and strong desire to win the presidential election at all cost. Just as suggested by the motorcyclist, the relief may not last after the election.

Also the phenomenon here is a signifier of the dishonesty and lack of credibility and trust the government is known for. The coming to the filling station with such big tank on motorcycle is a mockery of the decision of government. The cartoon is an expression of government's insincere, dishonest and oppressive tendencies. It shows the citizens' lack of trust and confidence in their leaders. It is instructive to note that the cartoonist is a prophet of sort. Today indeed after the presidential election of 2015, a litre of fuel is sold for N145. This further justifies the fears of the motorcyclist in our cartoon.

#### 4.0 Analysis of other Visual Elements

##### 4.1 Graphology

According to Olaosun (2001), as cited in Olowu (2012), the graphological features of written texts are carriers of their phonological information of meaning. Hence, some aspects of linguistics in the verbal anchorage shall be foregrounded in this section with the aim of seeing how they have been employed by the cartoonists to communicate their messages to the viewing/reading audience

In text A, the words 'kai', 'wahala' and 'naija' were written in bold letters. This is done deliberately by the cartoonist to attach some semantic importance to these words. The word 'kai' is a sort of exclamation. 'wahala' means trouble and Naija is a short and local way of referring to Nigeria. All these words as used here have semantic implications.

Also Text B has some graphological presentations. The word written on the dispensing pump, "Now N87 per litre" has a

semantic implication. This means that before the time (then) the price was not N87. So anybody who sees this will understand that fuel is now N87 per litre. This was done by the incumbent government (then) to appeal to the psyche of electorates thereby gaining votes from them. So, the cartoonist puts those words on bold letters to catch the attention of fuel buyers and to reveal the import of the cartoon.

##### 4.2 Gaze and posture

The image of the coffin in text A is horrifying. This clearly states the intent of the carrier of the coffin. The central image here is the coffin. The interpersonal system of centrality functioning at the level of relation between sections established the integrity of the image. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) when discussing the issue of centrality of image suggest that 'for something to be presented as the central means it is presented as a nucleus of the information which all other elements are in some sense subservient. This is true of text A.

Also the look on the faces of those men standing is that of bewilderment. They found it incomprehensible while the governor could still be wishing the presidential candidate dead in faraway London. The posture of GMB (General Mohamadu Buhari) in this image is also significant. He appears to be running away from the coffin.

The gaze of the petrol attendant in text C is that of surprise. She appears lost and unable to take a decision. Although, she may be aware of government's insincerity about the sudden reduction in the fuel pump price, she does not understand the reason behind the motorcyclist unusual behaviour. She could not take a decision whether to sell or not. The posture of the motorcyclist reveals a man who is in haste. He

could not dress properly before he hit the road to buy fuel at the announcement of the reduction.

The posture of 'Nigerians' and INEC in text B makes much demand from the reader/ viewer. They appear to be racing down a cliff. Ostensibly, they are heading towards a precipice. This refers to the danger ahead of these general elections.

#### 4.3 Use of Symbols and Icons

In text A, the coffin is a symbol. It is an iconic symbol of death. Coffin is usually associated with death. Dead bodies are usually buried in coffins. The choice of coffin therefore agrees with the motif of the cartoonist. Also, the type of dress of 'GMB' is also a symbol. This dress is called 'agbada' in local parlance. The Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria associate 'agbada' with democracy. This is the reason the Yorubas refer to democracy as 'Ijoba Alagbada'. That type of dress is also known with politicians. Hence, here it becomes an iconic symbol of politicians. When a man is dressed in that type of attire, it's needless to ask whether he is a politician.

In text two, there are two symbols. The first is an exclamation mark! This reveals the amazement of Nigerians to the fact that INEC was not able to organize hitch free general elections after four years of preparation. The other symbol in the image is that of the doves flying ahead. Generally, doves are peaceful. This could mean that after initial hitches and problems, the elections may be peaceful at the end.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study has used the framework of multimodal discourse analysis to account for the visual and verbal components of our selected cartoons. We have seen how TELL News-magazine cartoonists have deployed various semiotic resources to satirise and lampoon the intrigues that characterised Nigeria 2015 Presidential election.

However, it is instructive that images are interpreted variously by viewers. Hence, interpretation of images is by nature subjective. These depend on a wide range of factors relating to the viewers such as culture, education, gender etc.

TELL cartoonists are known to always satirically criticise phenomena that are too repulsive to be stated in words. More so, Nigeria government is not tolerant of media criticisms; hence, surreptitious ways are engaged to bring out some lapses in government. This study therefore emphasises the importance of visual elements as vital communication tools in modern print media.

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