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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Christian Advertising on Selected Signboards, Banners and Pamphlets Joel Iyiola Olaleye, Ph.D & Prof. Sola Timothy Babatunde	1-15 ✓
A Celebration of Womanhood in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's <i>Dancing Masks</i> Idaevbor Bello, PhD & Samson O. Eguavoen	16-29
Towards an Integrative Approach to Literacy Development in Nigerian ESL Classrooms: Implications for L2 Teaching Abdur-Rasheed Olayiwola Ayuba & Isa Asabe Raheenat	30-46
Satirical Elements in B.M. Dzukogi's <i>Potholes in my Dream</i> Victor B. SHIRU & Onwukah B. Orji-Mba	47-58
A Discourse Study of Ahmed Yerima's <i>Kaffir's Last Game</i> A. A. Agantiem & Martin Ogam Efadi	59-74
Cultural Variations as a Barrier to Accurate Translation: A Case Study of Hausa-English Translation Nasiru Aminu	75-83
Reflections of Corruption in the Poetry of Niyi Osundare Adigun Sunday Ayodele	84-95
Feminist Dimensions in Idoma Masquerade Performances Abdulmalik Adakole Amali	96-106
Lexical Tone in Nigerian Languages: Tiv Language in Perspective Ajim Stephen Shiaondo & Mngueshima Grace Tyooan	107-119
Oral Elements in Adamu Kyuka Usman's <i>The Village Tradesman</i> Halima Amali, PhD	120-128
Northern Nigerian Women and Mental Health: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Razinat T. Mohammed's "Something to Live for" and <i>Habiba</i> Patricia Nathan Bwai & Patience Vintse Yakubu	129-138

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Christian Advertising on Selected Signboards, Banners and Pamphlets

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Abstract

There has been enquiry to explicate how linguistic resources are deployed to encode meaning in communicative texts. The Multimodal Discourse Theory, in particular, posits that messages in texts are configured through the selection of multiple modes. However, research in language use has focused more on speech texts, with little attention on the wealth of additional information inherent in other semiotic resources like gesture, colour, proxemics, visual and aural art, image, sound, music, etc. Therefore, this study aimed to employ the macro elements of this theory to analyse selected Christian advertising discourse on signboards, banners and pamphlets garnered from Facebook posts. To achieve this aim, the study attempted to: identify the modal resources contained in the selected data; explore the functionality of the semiotic resources; and investigate how the advertisers use visual modes such as pictures to enhance vivid representations of their messages. The analysis demonstrated that three modal resources (writing, visual and colour) were mostly utilised as multimodal ensembles by the advertisers. In terms of functionality, some modes were recontextualised to identify participants, phenomena and circumstances for the furtherance of the advertisers' communicative needs and religious ideological perspectives. The analysis also reflected that visual modes such as pictures and colour realised part of the overall messages in the texts. The study concluded that within Christian community, advertisers share common values about modes with their audience and decide how the modes are mutually conceived; thereby, the recognition of such values is prerequisite for assigning correct interpretations to the texts.

Key Words: semiotic resources, multimodal discourse analysis, ensembles, Christian advertising discourse

Introduction

Human potentialities on language are conceivable in the ways people innovatively utilise linguistic resources for information packaging. Among literary and non-literary texts where creativity in language is displayed, advertising discourse is remarkably enthralling as advertisers often make an attempt to improvise their advertisements in a beguiling or spellbinding style. Rojo (2015, p.25) corroborates this view when he asserts that:

advertising discourse is a particularly rich field of study, since advertisers make great efforts to achieve their main purpose: to catch the attention of potential buyers. That is why advertising language is so persuasive, and why advertisements have to be catchy enough to attract possible consumers and persuade them to acquire the product or service which is being advertised.

Advertisement is used in every domain of human activities. It is specifically a part of religious cultures serving various purposes such as to convince the potential audience to accept a certain faith, to attract them to attend specially organised programmes, or to stimulate attendance of services, among others. Leech (1996, p.27) points out that a successful advertising language strives to fulfill the four goals of attention value, listenability or readability, memorability and selling power. Religious programmes are therefore advertised on radio, television, video, and social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. Thus, advertisement as a form of communication involves innovation on linguistic and semiotic resources to achieve its purposes.

Research in language use has focused more on speech texts, with little attention on the wealth of additional information inherent in other semiotic resources like gesture, colour, proxemics, visual and aural art, image, sound, music, etc. In recent times the emergence of Multimodal Discourse Analysis in particular in the field of linguistics has provided insights into how various semiotic resources work together as modal ensembles to realise meaning in communicative texts. With reference to the works of Knox (2007); Bateman (2008); Caple and Knox (2012) and White (2012) in particular, linguistic studies have employed elements of multimodal discourse theory to analyse different genres such as online newspapers, film and media texts. More recent works include that of Amodu and Oryila (2018) who conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of Boko Haram social media posts; and that of Olaleye and Sanusi (2018) who did a multimodal discourse analysis of pictorial depictions of Nigerian socio-political issues on Facebook, just to mention a few.

In spite of the aforementioned studies which applied multimodal discourse theory on the various socio discourses, there is the need to further investigate how modal resources are configured to construct meaning in religious domain of language use. The production of meaning on signboards, banners and pamphlets often involves intricate interaction among multiple semiotic resources. Thus, in furtherance of their communicative needs, religious ideological perspectives, and goals, the inventors of Christian advertising discourse often integrate multi-semiotic elements in their images on signboards, banners and pamphlets. Black (2006, p.1) asserts that “nowadays it is more fashionable to think that meaning is the result of interpretive processes.” Therefore, the aim of the present paper is to conduct a multimodal discourse analysis of Christian advertising discourse on selected signboards, banners and pamphlets in order to arrive at accurate inferencing of the intention of the advertisers. To achieve this aim, the study attempts to: identify the modal resources contained in the selected data; explore the functionality of the semiotic resources; and investigate how the advertisers use visual modes such as pictures to enhance vivid representations of their messages. Analysis such as this helps to gain insights into how multimodal resources are used in religious domain, especially Christianity.

Methodology

The research methodology is essentially descriptive and analytical. The data consist of seven (7) signboards indicating the names of some churches and a total number of 14 pamphlets and banners advertising some Christian programmes. Specifically, the twenty-one (21) materials were sourced from Facebook posts which posters sent for a humour purpose. The approach for the study involves the application of the macro elements (such as semiotic resources (modes), materiality, modal affordance, multimodal ensembles and meaning functions) of the Multimodal Discourse.

Theoretical Framework

The Multimodal Discourse Analysis which has advanced linguistic enquiry into how multiple modal resources are configured for the construction of meaning was introduced to the public by Kress and van Leeuwen in 2001 through their publication entitled “*Multimodal Discourse: the Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*”. The publication of “*Technology, Literacy and Learning: A Multimodal Approach*” in 2008, also made Jewitt a notable figure in the field. In this age of digitalisation there has been a growing interest in the field of Multimodality because it has a great potential application for interpreting social resources that are assembled for communication and representation of ideas. Van Leeuwen (2005, p.3) submits that Multimodal Discourse Analysis “originated in the work of Halliday who argued that the grammar of a language is

not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a resource for making meanings." Hong (2012, p.320) also corroborates this view when he asserts that "the theoretical basis of multimodal analysis theory is systemic functional linguistics developed by Michael Halliday". Thus, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar which conceives of language as a social semiotic phenomenon provides impetus to the emergence of this approach.

O'Halloran, Tan, and Smith (2011, p.68) see multimodal discourse analysis as an influential model for discourse analysis when they assert that "multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is "an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, colours, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, music and sound" therefore, the multimodal discourse theory being an interdisciplinary approach is based upon the idea that communication transcends the use of purely linguistic resources but takes place through the assembling of multiple modes which aptly convey the intended message of language users.

For its analytical techniques Multimodal Discourse Analysis therefore rests on certain pillars such mode or semiotic resource, materiality, modal affordance, multimodal ensembles and functionality. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) "mode refers to a set of socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning: a 'channel' of representation or communication". Amodu and Oryila (2018, p.55) define mode as "anything designed or created to represent a particular meaning." According to Olaleye and Sanusi (2018, p.262), "a mode is a channel (e.g. writing, posture, colour, gesture, proxemics, etc.) that is mutually shared and recognised for communication among people". van Leeuwen (2005, p. 285) asserts that "Semiotic resources are the actions, materials and artefacts we use for communicative purposes."

Following the concept of mode, materiality is also an adjoining element of multimodality. The Multimodal Discourse theory, in terms of materiality, maintains that, through a process called "transduction" every modal resource can be reshaped from one mode to another mode to realise social functions. For instance, sound is a modal material of human speech which can be reshaped to produce music. Within the tradition of the Multimodal Discourse theory, the term "modal affordance" refers to how different modes in multimodal texts have possibilities and constraints on resources for constructing meaning. For instance, a part of modal affordance of human speech is that words cannot be combined anyhow without obeying grammatical rules for words combination. The term "multimodal ensembles" concerns how several modes can be integrated to produce a message in a communicative event. Thus, the meaning potential of a message can be seen across all modes that are combined together to realise meaning. For instance, the message in a pamphlet may be simultaneously

represented through both a written mode and a visual/pictorial mode. Thus, each mode carries a different part of the message.

Within the frameworks of the Multimodal Discourse theory, the notion of “functionality” otherwise known as “meaning functions” concerns how a mode used in a text is associated with a specific purpose. For instance, the purpose of a text may be to state a fact or to evaluate a concept. The Multimodal Discourse Theory explains functionality of modes through the pivotal issue of meaning in Systemic Functional Grammar which gave impetus to its emergence. This is captured in terms of “metafunctions” namely, the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. According to Lin and Peng (2006, p.332) and Bloor and Bloor (1997, p.9), ideational metafunction or content meaning concerns how people select modal resources to represent the world and their experiences. The interpersonal metafunction relates to how modal resources are articulated for social interaction. The textual metafunction concerns how modal resources are organised to realise meaning. The various concepts are utilised for the analysis conducted in the section that follows.

Data Presentation and Data Analysis

The main purpose of the discussion in this section is to present the features of advertising discourse in selected Christian signboards, pamphlets, and handbills by unveiling different modes employed by advertisers to package their messages. The analysis is conducted in various subheadings as follows:

Multimodal Resources in Advertising Names of Churches

Taşkin and Sarioğlu(2011, p.1) assert that “the name of a product is an important factor in determining its popularity”. To appeal to a broader audience and increase memberships, churches often make an effort to package the names they brand their organisation. The analysis that follows demonstrates the multimodal devices used in branding the selected churches.

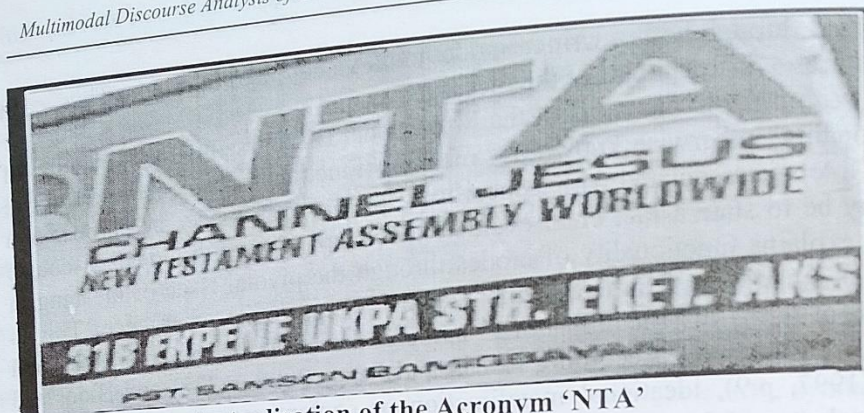


Figure 1: Recontextualisation of the Acronym 'NTA'

In Figure 1, two modal resources which work together as a multimodal ensemble to construct the message are germane to this study. First, it uses the mode of writing: the word 'NTA' used as an acronym of 'New Testament Assembly'. In terms of modal functionality, the advertiser used this referring expression to perform ideational metafunction of naming the church. Attention of the reader is secured by the advertiser through the semiotic process of Recontextualisation of the acronym which popularly refers to 'Nigerian Television Authority'. Therefore, utilising the acronym with preconceived meaning in a new context draws attention to both the source and the new site where the mode is used. Second, it uses the mode of colour. Colour purple, white and black in the advert have informative value. They are uniquely peculiar to 'Nigerian Television Authority', the source from where the new referring expression is derived.

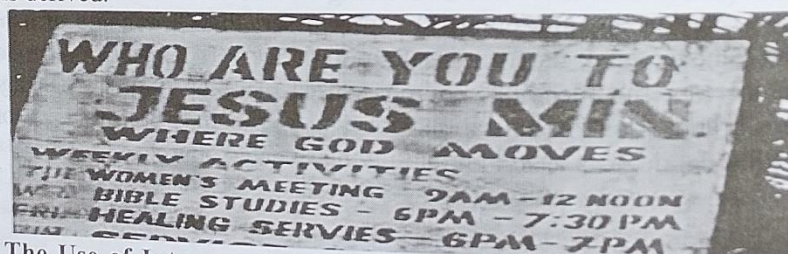


Figure 2: The Use of Interrogative in Enhancing Selling Power of Church Name

Attention is given to the mode of writing used in figure 2. Both the "attention value" and the "selling power" of the advertisement are enhanced by the use of interrogative: 'Who are you to Jesus Ministry'. In terms of modal functionality the expression realizes interpersonal metafunction because the advertiser is able to engage the audience in a social interaction by framing a question for naming purpose. It is mutually conceived among the Christians that

relationship with Jesus is the sole responsibility of believers; therefore, to attract the heavenly minded, the advertiser uses the shared cultural idea as a socio-semiotic principle to create an impression that the ministry provides a link to Jesus.

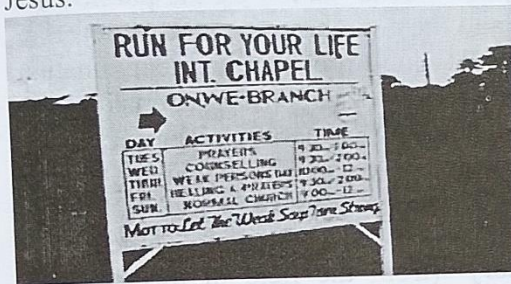


Figure 3:

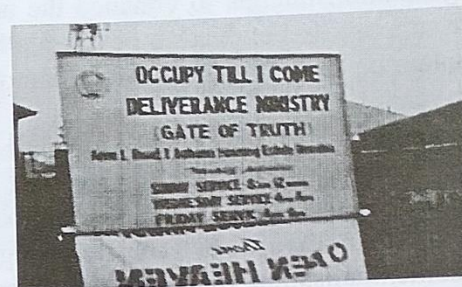


Figure 4:

The Use of Imperative as Ostensible Stimuli in Naming Church

Two modal resources which work together as a multimodal ensemble to construct the advertisement in figure 3 are mode of writing and colour. The graphic materials: 'Run for Your Life Int. Chapel', which is used as a referring expression to name the church, is imperative. The seriousness of individual salvation from eternal damnation is mutually conceived among Christians. The expression therefore persuades the audience to accept the church as a place providing eternal security. In terms of visual modes, the advertiser is conditioned by a preconceived idea to select colour red and blue which a Christian culture recognizes for specific functions. The informative value of colour red is that, it is associated with the blood of Jesus (propitiation for sin); while colour blue represents the love of God for man as manifested in Jesus. In figure 4, attention is given to the mode of writing: 'Occupy till I Come deliverance Ministry', used as a referring expression to name the church. The imperative sentence involves a recontextualisation of the expression: 'Occupy till I Come' contained in Jesus' story of servants' commitment to their master (Luke 19:12-13). The expression is employed as a modal resource to perform interpersonal metafunction of persuading and convincing the audience that among other churches, the specific distinctive feature the church is 'commitment' to deliverance programmes.

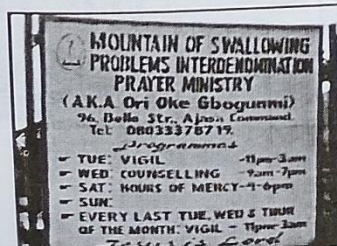


Figure 5:

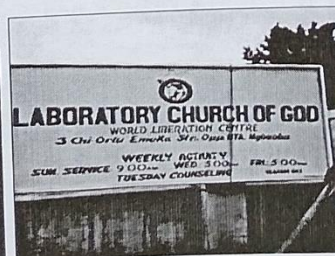


Figure 6:



Figure 7:

Reference to Personal Trials or Challenges in Branding Church

The advertisements in figures 5, 6 and 7 make indelible impression on the audience that the churches are problem-solving centres. The delineation of each organization intends to enhance the acceptance of invitation by the public who are supposedly believed to be trouble laden to the churches. The mode of writing containing the expression 'Mountain of Swallowing Problems Interdenomination Prayer Ministry' is used in figure 5. In terms of modal functionality, the expression fulfils ideational function by stating the fact that the organisation is a place where problems are dissolved through prayers. The mode of writing containing the expression 'Laboratory Church of God World Liberation Centre' is used in figure 6. The referring expression is created by process of recontextualisation of the word 'Laboratory' (from the field of medicine) to delineates the organisation as a "Spiritual Clinic Centre" to resolve health challenges. Using the word 'Laboratory', readers are tasked to redefine their semiotic connection with the word in a new context. Thus, the church which claims to possess discernment ability is presented to the public as place where ailments (physical or spiritual) are diagnosed and resolved. One of the semiotic modes used in figure 6 is writing containing the expression 'The Devil's Hunter Ministries'. The referring expression is created by recontextualising the word 'hunter' from the field of agriculture by presenting the Devil or Satan believed to be the source of all evils as a prey that can be captured. Thus, the public who are trouble laden can be set free by attending the church which has esoteric ability to defeat Satan.

Multimodal Resources in Advertising Marital Programmes

To cater for the social well-being of members, churches often organise some social programmes such as marriage seminars, Business/financial seminars, etc. This section covers the multimodal analysis of how some of such church programmes are advertised to the public.



Figure 8:



Figure 9:



Figure 10:

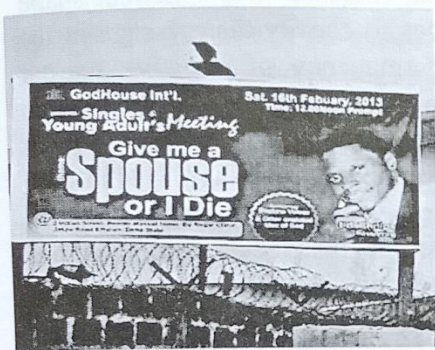


Figure 11:



figure 12:

Figures 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 are adverts targeting specific groups of people to attend the organised programmes for marital breakthrough. Among the various multimodal resources employed in figure 8, attention is specifically given to the mode of writing involving the linguistic resources: 'Single's Bonanza: I must Marry' used to configure the message. The 'selling power' of the advert lies heavily on the word 'bonanza' which has an arrow placed on its letter 'O'. Both the visual mode (arrow) and the linguistic expression (Bonanza) serve a semiotic function of pointing and representing the programme as an unhindered accessibility to innumerable numbers of marital partners. In figure 9, the linguistic resources 'My Spouse Has Gone Mad Again' which is a mode of writing specifically targeted married people experiencing marital problems. Thus, attendance of the programme is presented to the public as a step to get solutions to a problematic spouse.

In figure 10, written communication is orchestrated through the selection and configuration of the linguistic resources 'War against Delay: This beautiful sister must marry'. This modal resource performs a semiotic function of representing spinsters' delay or setback in getting marital partner as a warring issue. Thus, spinsters in this category are assured of victory over this worrisome issue. In figure 11, the expression: 'Give me a spouse or I die' involves a process of lexical substitution of the word 'Scotland' for 'Spouse' in John Knox's speech 'Give me Scotland or I die' popularly quoted in Christendom. Hence, lexical substitution improves the audience's reception of the message that the programme is designed to assist the single get their partner by spiritual force in the way John Knox 'captured' Scotland.

A prominent mode in figures 10 and 11 is visual. The pictures of the pastors handling such programmes work together with the mode of writing as semiotic ensembles to realise meaning in the texts. In figure 12, the advertised

programme is both single and married forum as enclosed in a spherical shape which works together with other modal resources to convey the message in the text. In terms of semiotic function, the impermanency of negative marital conditions is expressed in the pidgin expression: 'Oh God na like this we go dey?' This interrogative performs an interpersonal metafunction. The implicit ambiguity of this interrogative appears to be a deliberate message for the dual category of audience – single and married. The person who is single wonders whether she will remain single for life, while the married person who has challenges of various types in marriage is also challenged to desire an end to their troubles.

Multimodal Resources in Advertising Deliverance Programmes

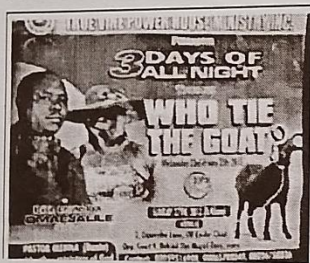


Figure 13



Figure 14

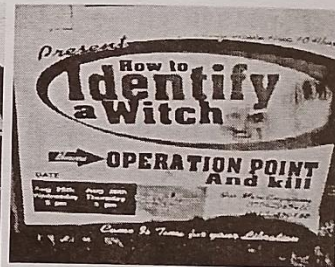


Figure 15

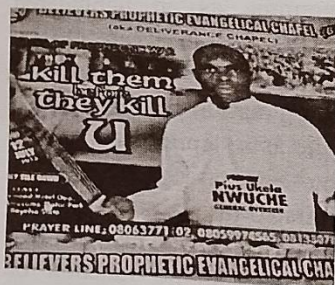


Figure 16



Figure 17

The semiotic function common to multimodal ensembles used in figures 13 to 17 is to engage their audience in creating an impression that they need deliverance from a certain force (a human agent or spiritual power) which is behind their calamity, setback, misfortune, adversity and hardship. The message is configured through the selection of two apparent multimodal ensembles which work in synergy in figure 13. These are modes of writing and visual (the picture of a goat tied down). The advertiser organises a programme titled 'Who tie the goat?' An impression is created that a tied goat is limited in space and restricted

to available resources outside the length of the rope. Therefore, people under the spell of limitation can be untied or freed by attending the programme. In figure 14, the mode of visual through the picture of a warrior fortified with weapons of warfare. This mode works together with the mode of writing: 'Breaking News: Demons Funeral Service'. The two multimodal ensembles cause the audience to believe that they will be spiritually fortified in the programme to defeat the demons (unseen forces) behind their problems and will celebrate the victory.

The message conveyed in figures 15 and 16 is similar. The texts operate within the socio-cultural context of African world-view about witchcraft which is mutually and socially shared between the advertisers and the audience. In figure 15, the message is configured through the selection of mode of writing: 'How to Identify a Witch; Operation Point and Kill'. The 'selling power' of the text is depended on the word 'witch' which creates an impression that the audience are under the manipulation of an unknown witch behind their adversity and therefore need knowledge to detect such. Figures 15, 16 and 17 create an impression that it is not only enough to pinpoint the human agents but also to kill them. The multimodal resources in figure 16 are mode of writing ('Kill them before they kill you') and the visual mode (a picture of a man holding a cutlass). The visual mode enhances the message of the text. The mode of writing in figure 17 contains a pidgin expression: 'Wetin I do you. Na you dey do me? You go die o...abi you won crays'. The message of these linguistic resources lies in the words 'kill' and 'die' which suggest that the audience are persuaded to engage in a spiritual warfare to annihilate the agent behind their troubles. Thus, the audience is influenced not to see what they do in such programmes as a crime or even as a sin. They are made to perceive the act of asking God to kill their enemies as a form of survival strategy – attack as a means of defence.

Multimodal Resources in Advertising Breakthrough Programmes

The common semiotic function of the different multimodal resources contained in the four texts below is to create impressions on the audience that attendance of the advertised programmes is a necessary step to removal of barrier to public recognition (figure 18), elevation through geographical relocation (figure 19) prosperity and material enrichment (figure 20) and material possession (figure 21).

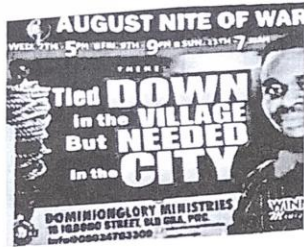


Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21

The informative value of figure 18 is configured through the selection of mode of writing: 'Tied down in the Village but needed in the City' and a visual mode (the picture of a human being rounded with a roll of rope in the left part of the text). The visual mode does not only have an 'attention value' but also works as a semiotic resource to enhance the message. Both the rope (visual mode) and the lexical items 'tied down' (linguistic resources) fulfil ideational function of identifying a barrier. The word 'village' (a linguistic resource) in terms of semiotic function identifies the location and source of the barrier. Thus, the overall message of the various multimodal ensembles is that some potential individuals are hindered in their village to flourish in the megacity and therefore invited for breakthrough.

A four-day travel programme advertised in figure 19 is entitled 'Anointing to Travel; I smell America'. Some people associate success, wealth, fame, etc. to living overseas; therefore, they have an uncontrollable desire to travel overseas. Among the multimodal resources used in the figure, the words 'anointing' (spiritual fortification) and 'America' (a rich nation overseas) embodied both the 'attention value' and 'selling power' of the advertisement. The mode of writing: 'I will not leave Lagos empty handed' fulfils part of the message in figure 20. In terms of interpersonal function, this assures the potential participants of elevation from nothingness to (physical, material, and financial) enrichment. The speaking voice (by implication, anyone who attends the programme) will be able to put themselves under an obligation to have prosperity/breakthrough. The expression also suggests that absence of will power

may have been the source of the problem. The programme is therefore presented to give them such will power. The use of first person singular also has great implications for persuasion because the audience is made to personalise the challenges to be overcome.

In figure 21, the overall message is partly realised through a mode of writing: 'Who is monitoring my life; Leave me and let me Drive my Car'. Two clauses are contained in this linguistic resource and each reflects a different mode from the other. First is interrogative while the second is an imperative. In terms of interpersonal metafunction, the interrogative is configured to challenge an unseen or unknown human agent hindering the potential audience of acquiring or possessing their car. The imperative with the force of command accentuates the intention of the advertiser; i.e. that anyone who attends the programme will be empowered to command whoever is monitoring their lives to let go. Consequently, the audience are prompted to the need of deliverance from such an agent. In terms of semiotic function, the pictures of four persons printed in figure 20 and three persons in figure 21 do not only fulfil an ideational metafunction of identifying the so-called 'powerful' figures (Pastors/Preachers) but also have a 'selling power' of building the confidence of the audience on their power to deliver them from certain forces limiting them in life.

Findings

With respect to modality choice, the analysis conducted in the preceding section has been able to identify the modal resources contained in the selected data. In particular, the advertisers have commonly employed semiotic resources such as colour, visual image, and writing to convey their messages. With reference to figures 1 and 3 in particular, colours were used as modal resources to compliment the writing mode; while in figures 13 and 16, visual images were employed to fulfil part of the overall meaning of the adverts. Thus, both semiotic and linguistic resources were employed to work together as multimodal ensembles to convey messages in the selected data.

In terms of functionality of the semiotic resources, with reference to figures 6, 15, 16 and 21 among others, the analysis has also demonstrated that some of the identified modes were reconceptualised to perform ideational metafunction by identifying participants, phenomena and circumstances contained in the situation depicted in the adverts. Interpersonal metafunction was mostly realised through linguistic resources. With reference to figures 3, 4 and 21 in particular, the employment of imperative and interrogative sentences were configured as interactive mechanism.

The analysis has also shown that the advertisers used visual modes such as pictures to enhance vivid representations of their messages. With reference to figures 13, and 14 in particular, pictures were used to make information more

vivid by the process of recontextualisation of images as modal resources. Thus, familiar images were used to enhance visual conception of messages.

Conclusion

This study is concerned with the application of the major concepts within the framework of multimodal theory to Christian advertising discourse on signboards, pamphlets, and banners. The analysis has demonstrated that three modal resources (writing, visual and colour) are mostly utilised as multimodal ensembles by the advertisers. In terms of functionality, some modes were recontextualised to identify participants, phenomena and circumstances for the furtherance of the advertisers' communicative needs and religious ideological perspectives. The analysis has also reflected that visual modes such as pictures and colour realise part of the overall messages in the texts. The various findings have demonstrated a consideration of multiple modes used for construction of meaning in such advertising discourse. The various findings have therefore shown that within the Christian community, advertisers share common social values about modes with their audience and decide how modes are mutually conceived; the identification of such values is therefore a necessary step to the interpretation of messages.

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