

STYLO-SEMIOSIS OF ENGLISH STUDIES IN NIGERIA AND BEYOND

Festschrift for Professor Victoria Adunola Alabi

Editors:

Taofiq A. Alabi

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CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL-MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CARTOONS CONNECTED WITH NIGERIA'S 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Political cartoons have long been recognised as powerful tools for social commentary and political critique. This research seeks to uncover the concealed ideologies and socio-political messages communicated through the strategic use of verbal and non-verbal semiotic elements in selected political cartoons connected with Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Drawing upon the theoretical framework of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Social Semiotics, this study undertakes a qualitative analysis of ten (10) cartoons purposively collected from two reputable media outlets in Nigeria - *Business Day* and *Vanguard* newspapers, and published between September, 2022 and April, 2023. The study reveals that verbal strategies in the cartoons, including captions, inscriptions, speech bubbles, and tags, were strategically employed to reinforce the ideologies and socio-political messages conveyed in the cartoons. The analysis also reveals that symbolic representations such as Nigerian map, race hurdles, gigantic stone, and cultural references were used to evoke specific meanings, convey power dynamics, and create associations with certain political ideologies or movements. The study concludes that cartoons effectively function as a potent platform for expressing political commentary, employing techniques such as caricature, symbolism, gestures, gaze, satire, and textual components to engage audiences, articulate political ideologies, challenge power dynamics, and convey socio-political messages.

Keywords: Political cartoons; multimodal discourse; Nigeria; 2023 general elections; social semiotics

Introduction

The communication landscape in the post-modern era has evolved into a polycentric phenomenon. This shift, according to Omosebi (2021), can be attributed to various factors, including the diverse and intricate goals of communicative discourses, the pervasive influence of technology, the widespread accessibility to media and its creation, and the dominance of multiple modes of communication within various forms of discourse. Within these multifaceted modes of communication, there is a prevalent integration of visual semiotic resources (such as images, gestures, gazes, and colors) and linguistic elements, which is commonly referred to as multimodality.

A widely embraced medium that exemplifies the use of multimodality is political cartoon. Political cartoons have long been recognised as powerful tools for social commentary and political critique. Through the strategic use of visual and verbal elements, political cartoonists can convey complex messages and ideologies that often remain hidden beneath the surface. Darmawan and Pilang (2015) submit that political cartoons portray

political events with symbols that have wide and deep meanings. They add that political cartoons embody the thoughts of the cartoonists through visual shapes; the message of which is full of criticism. These cartoons serve as a form of visual rhetoric, employing symbols, metaphors, and caricatures to communicate socio-political messages in a concise and impactful manner.

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria serve as a backdrop for this study, which seeks to uncover the concealed ideologies and socio-political messages communicated through the strategic use of verbal and non-verbal elements in selected political cartoons. By employing Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Social Semiotics framework, which provides a systematic approach to analysing visual communication, this research aims to investigate how visual representations, such as caricatures, symbols, colors, and composition, in conjunction with verbal elements, such as captions and speech bubbles, shape the meaning and influence the interpretation of political cartoons.

The research problem revolves around the following key questions: How do political cartoons employ visual and verbal semiotic resources to convey socio-political messages during Nigeria's 2023 general elections? What ideologies and hidden meanings are embedded within the selected political cartoons? How do these cartoons reflect or challenge prevailing discourses and power dynamics in Nigerian society?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to shed light on the socio-political landscape of Nigeria during the electoral period and deepen the readers' understanding of the role of visual communication in shaping public opinion and discourse. By uncovering the concealed meanings and ideologies within these cartoons, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on visual communication, political discourse analysis, and the socio-political dynamics surrounding Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The findings of this study shed light on the ways in which political cartoons can influence public perceptions, contribute to the construction of political narratives, and ultimately impact the democratic processes within a complex socio-cultural context.

Multimodality in Political Discourse

The dominance of multimodal and visual communication in the political sphere is attributed to their effectiveness in propagating ideologies, shaping perceptions of policies, ideologies, and political events, constructing notions of "others" and "self," and achieving various objectives in political campaigns (Omosebi, 2021, p. 7). Multimodality in political discourse deals with the use of multiple modes of communication, such as language, visuals, gestures, symbols, and audio, to convey political messages and influence public opinion. It recognizes that communication is not solely verbal but also involves non-verbal and visual elements that can shape and reinforce meaning (Amore & Atoloye, 2016).

The advantageous features of multimodality and visuality for political purposes are discussed by Domke, Perlmutter and Spratt (2002):

> (a) mnemonic power – that is, can be easily recalled in their general details; (b) the ability to become icons that serve as metonyms or exemplars of particular events or issues; (c) great aesthetic impact, such as striking juxtapositions or riveting happenings (typically human suffering); (d) affective or emotional power, that is the ability to 'move' us to an emotional reaction such as outrage, sympathy, or pity; and finally, (e) potentially significant political power, such as the ability to create, alter, or reinforce

elite or popular beliefs about causes and/or issues of the day and further affect government policy (p. 134).

In political discourse, multimodality is employed in various forms, including speeches, debates, political advertisements, campaign materials, social media posts, news coverage and political cartoons. The use of multimodality in political discourse aims to capture attention, enhance message comprehension, and shape public opinion (Ope-Davies & Shodipe, 2023). By employing a combination of verbal and non-verbal elements, political actors attempt to create a compelling narrative, establish credibility, and influence the perception of their ideas and policies.

Political cartoons, as multimodal texts, are "enormously rich in the complexity of their evaluative meanings, and verbal and visual resources are mobilised and deployed to construct these meanings" (Lemke, 1997, p. 3). Therefore, these cartoons combine various communicative modes –verbal and non-verbal – to convey cognitive effects intended to be captured by the readers so that they can grasp the whole meaning of the communicative act (Rivas-Carmona, 2014).

Political cartoons are referred to as multimodal texts because they are texts that "represent different semiotic components" (Amore and Atoloye, 2016, p. 29). Semiotic resources are presented in political cartoons by illustrations designed to convey a social or political message. Political cartoons "are characterised by the use of visual metaphors and caricatures to portray political situations and politicians and by the use of humorous or emotional pictures for current events" (Kulikova & Detinko, 2014). The analysis of such texts, taking into consideration their verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication, is known as multimodal discourse analysis.

Multimodal discourse analysis, therefore, analyses how several or all of the different semiotic modes intertwine to produce a unified text or communicative event. The central idea in multimodal discourse analysis is that "textual structure is realised, not [only] by linguistic means, but visually, through layout, colour, and typography both at the level of the clause and at the level of discourse" (Liu, 2013, p.1260). Hence, the focus of this study is to undertake a systemic functional-multimodal discourse analysis of some cartoons connected with Nigeria's 2023 general elections with the aim of uncovering the ideologies and socio-political messages conveyed in the cartoons.

Empirical Review

Numerous studies have investigated the intersection of multimodality and social semiotics in political cartoons. However, to the knowledge of this researcher, limited or no research has been conducted specifically on cartoons associated with the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, primarily due to the recent occurrence of the elections. Isalambo (2014) analyses rhetorical pragma-linguistic features used in political editorial cartoons of Kenyan newspapers in the portrayal of their political leaders and communication of political issues using Critical Discourse Analysis as the theoretical framework. Isalambo reveals that editorial political cartoons not only provide entertainment, information and education but also provide additional insights on first, language and power relations and second, rhetorical linguistic multimodal communication strategies used in media discourse.

Amore and Atoloye (2016) analyse some cartoons connected with Nigeria's 2015 General Elections with a view to identifying the way verbal and non-verbal meaning is communicated through them using a systemic functional approach to multimodal discourse analysis. Their study reveals that social semiotic reference is pivotal in the relationship between political discourse and ideology. Also, Alimi and Fajuyigbe (2016) undertake a thematic and contextual analysis of Boko Haram in selected editorial cartoons published in *The Nation* newspaper. The study reveals that newspaper cartoons, as a subset of visual arts, are effective at conveying vital but delicate information to the newspapers readers.

Adopting a mixed research design, Ezegwu, et al. (2022) seek to determine the types of frames used in constructing editorial cartoons in selected newspapers during EndSARS protest in Nigeria and the direction of framing of issues presented in editorial cartoons of the selected newspapers during the period under study. The findings of their research reveal that Police reform frame dominated the selected newspapers cartoons during the period of study. Additionally, Omolabi and Abiodun (2020) examine the application of social semiotic theory to analyse the utilisation of language in political cartoons, aiming to uncover the hidden implied meanings and address societal issues through clever and amusing methods. Their research demonstrates the significance of multimodality studies in preventing the loss of additional layers of meaning.

Mowafy (2022) investigates how US foreign policy during the presidency of Donald Trump is represented in the Egyptian political cartoons published in *AlAhram Weekly Newspaper* in Egypt. Based on a multimodal discourse analysis, the study finds that political cartoons reflect major global political issues as well as people's reactions towards them. This is achieved by using various means such as represented participants, objects and settings. This present research, however, makes a notable contribution to the field of multimodality and social semiotics. It achieves this by employing Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics to uncover concealed ideologies and socio-political messages communicated through the strategic use of verbal and non-verbal resources in selected cartoons related to Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Theoretical Framework: Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Social Semiotics

This study is based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Social Semiotics Theory, which falls under the framework of Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics, as proposed by O'Halloran (2008). The systemic functional approach to multimodal discourse analysis 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" (O'Halloran (2008, p.443). This statement highlights the scope and purpose of this approach. It involves examining how meaning is constructed and conveyed through the combined use of different semiotic resources, such as language, visuals, gestures, sounds, and spatial arrangements, across various forms of communication. O'Halloran (2008) refers to this model as "Systemic Functional-Multimodal Discourse Analysis" (SF-MDA).

SF-MDA is considered a viable approach for this study since it is capable of exploring the meaning arising through the use of language and visual imagery in printed texts. Moreover, the approach incorporates the metafunctional principle, which is a fundamental principle of Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics. This principle serves as an integrating ground for understanding how semiotic resources interact to create

meaning. According to O'Halloran (2008, p. 445), the principle gives room for semiotic resources to simultaneously provide the tools for constructing ideational meaning and for enacting social relations and "these meta-functions are enabled through the organisation of the discourse, which is the textual metafunction of semiosis".

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) built upon Halliday's work by introducing the notion of meaning as choice, which served as the foundation for their social semiotic approach to the visual and their interpretation of the visual as a mode. This development, as stated by Omolabi and Abiodun (2020), opened up possibilities for exploring multimodality and facilitated discussions on significant concepts such as composition, modality, and framing. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) deploy Halliday's metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) as a theoretical framework for examining semiotic ensembles. They illustrate how verbal and visual signifiers within a semiotic ensemble convey diverse meanings. In Visual Grammar, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) propose three metafunctions: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. This study therefore finds Kress and van Leeuwen's Social Semiotics, a model of MDA within the purview of Halliday's SFL, to be a potent theoretical framework as it allows for a detailed examination of the communication strategies employed in cartoons pertaining to Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

Methodology

A qualitative research design is employed for this study. A corpus of ten (10) political cartoons associated with Nigeria's 2023 general elections is collected from two reputable media outlets in Nigeria - Business Day and Vanguard newspapers. The choice of these two media houses is as a result of their wide readership and significant online presence. The cartoons were published between September, 2022 and April, 2023. The general election campaign season and the busiest time for election preparations both fall around this time. The cartoons are purposively selected to examine visual elements such as gestures, symbolic representations, facial expressions, and composition, as well as textual features such as captions, inscriptions and speech bubbles. The theoretical framework utilised is Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Social Semiotics, with the purpose of revealing the concealed ideologies and socio-political messages communicated through the strategic use of verbal and non-verbal elements in the selected political cartoons.

Cartoon 1: Business Day, 26th Sept., 2022



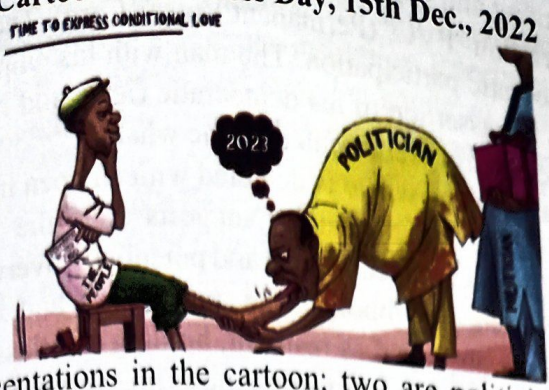
The cartoon features three persons - a man, a woman and a little boy - standing on a podium tagged "Wise Voters Group". The little boy holds a placard with the inscription; the woman also has a placard with her; while the man holds a megaphone to communicate his message.

Verbal Resources: The tagline "*Wise Voters Group*" on the podium signifies the collective identity of the family as a group of knowledgeable and discerning voters. It implies that they are not easily swayed by empty promises or manipulative tactics. The inscription "*Politicians smart Voters now smarter*" on the little boy's placard suggests a shift in power dynamics. It connotes that politicians may have been traditionally perceived as intelligent or cunning, but voters have now become more astute and aware. This message challenges the notion that voters are easily deceived or manipulated. The woman's placard carries a clear message against the practice of exchanging votes for material or immediate benefits such as food or other resources. The man's statement - "*After due considerations with my PVC and family I have decided to run as voter of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*", spoken through a megaphone, suggests a sense of empowerment and agency. By equating himself to a "voter of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," he positions himself as an active participant in the democratic process. This phrase also highlights the importance of the Permanent Voter's Card (PVC), which is necessary for casting votes, emphasising the family's commitment to participating in the electoral process.

Non-verbal Resources: The visual representation of the family on a podium symbolises their elevated status and importance. It positions them as authoritative figures, who have a platform to express their views and influence others. This visual placement suggests that the family's message should be taken seriously and considered by others. The use of placards by each family member reinforces their agency and active participation in the political discourse. The placards act as visual messages that amplify their individual stances and convey their values and concerns. The family's facial expressions and gestures exhibit confidence, determination, and a sense of unity, which further emphasises their commitment to being wise voters.

The cartoon employs semiotic resources to challenge the traditional power dynamics between politicians and voters, promotes informed decision-making, discourages vote-buying practices, and emphasises the agency and importance of individual voters. It suggests a growing awareness and active involvement of the population in Nigeria's democratic process.

Cartoon 2: Business Day, 15th Dec., 2022



There are three representations in the cartoon; two are politicians while the other one represents "the people".

Verbal Resources: The cartoon's caption "*Time to express conditional love*" sets the tone for the analysis. It suggests that politicians express love for the people conditionally, implying that their actions are driven by self-interest or the pursuit of power rather than genuine concern for the welfare of the people. The term "*conditional love*" entail that politicians only show affection or cater to the needs of the people when it benefits them politically.

Non-verbal Resources: The man representing "the people" holding his PVC and sitting on a stool portrays a relaxed and confident demeanor. This suggests that the people have a position of power in the context of the elections. The politician who is licking the feet of the man symbolises political sycophancy. It represents politicians who are willing to grovel or flatter the people for political advantage. The second politician waiting behind with a parcel of gift suggests a similar intention of seeking favor from the people. The gift symbolises an attempt to bribe or win over the support of the people. This highlights the idea that politicians often resort to tactics like offering gifts or making promises during election campaigns to secure votes.

Cartoon 3: Business Day, 12th Feb., 2023



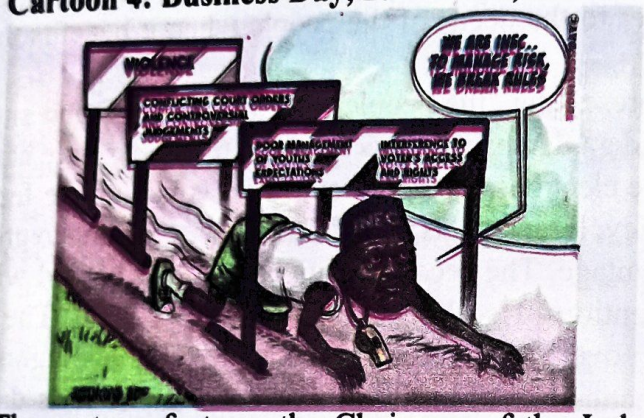
There are two representations in this cartoon - a man and a whale. The whale opens its mouth wide, looking fierce and threatening. The man looks resilient and points a cutlass at the whale.

Verbal Resources: The cartoon includes different inscriptions on the whale's body, including *"debt", "poverty", "unemployment", "poor health care", "insecurity", "corruption", "policy flipflop", "impunity", "nepotism", "inflation", "incessant strikes."* These inscriptions represent various issues and challenges prevalent in Nigeria, particularly during the general elections. They highlight socio-political problems that the man holding

a cutlass is confronting and seeks to address. The man points a cutlass towards the whale, which has the inscription "PVC" (Permanent Voter's Card). The PVC represents the power of voting and democratic participation. The man with his emphatic statement "*stop right there!*" symbolises the assertion of his democratic rights and implies that voting can be a tool to combat the challenges represented by the whale.

Non-Verbal Resources: The whale is depicted with an open mouth, appearing fierce and threatening. This visual representation suggests that the socio-political challenges mentioned in the inscriptions are enormous and potentially overwhelming. The whale's size and menacing appearance symbolise the magnitude and severity of these issues. Nonetheless, the man is portrayed as resilient, holding a cutlass and pointing it directly at the whale. His determined posture and emphatic expression convey a sense of defiance and resistance. It implies that the Nigerian citizens are ready to confront the challenges and take a stand against them. The signpost positioned above the man bears the year "2023." This serves as a temporal marker, indicating that the man's confrontation with the whale and his use of the PVC are linked to the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Cartoon 4: Business Day, 23rd Mar., 2023

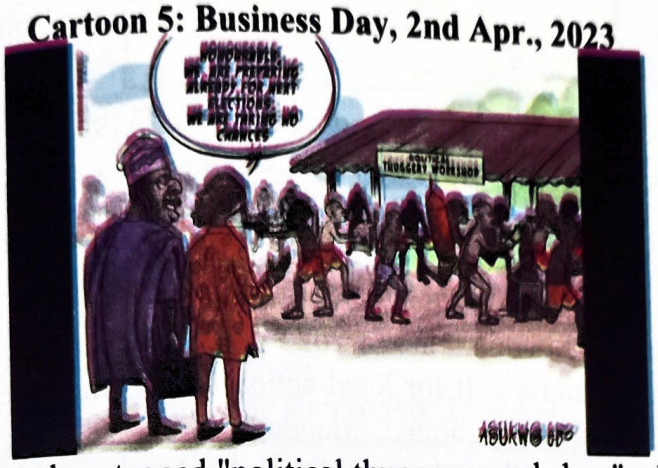


The cartoon features the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Prof. Mahmoud Yakubu who is seen crawling beneath some hurdles. Each of the three hurdles bears different inscriptions.

Verbal Resources: The verbal resources in this cartoon provide specific issues and challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during general elections in Nigeria. These issues can be seen as obstacles (or hurdles) that the INEC Chairman, Prof. Mahmoud Yakubu, is attempting to overcome. Each hurdle represents a different challenge including the prevalence of violence during elections; the legal challenges faced by the INEC due to conflicting court orders and controversial judgments; and poor management of youths' expectations and interference with voter's access and rights. These ideologies critique the INEC's ability to engage with and represent the interests of the youth, while also criticizing any interference that hampers democratic participation. INEC Chairman's statement: *"We are INEC... To manage risk, we break rules"* suggests a pragmatic approach to managing the challenges. The phrase "manage risk" implies that the INEC recognizes the existence of risks in the electoral process and adopts strategies to handle them. However, the assertion of "breaking rules" can be seen as a controversial approach to managing risk, as rules are typically meant to ensure fair and transparent elections. This statement conveys an ideology that the INEC may resort to bending or bypassing rules to navigate the obstacles faced during elections, potentially raising concerns about the integrity of the process.

Non-Verbal Resources: The visual representation of INEC Chairman crawling beneath the hurdles symbolises the challenges faced by the institution. It portrays a sense of struggle and vulnerability, indicating the difficult and complex nature of managing elections in Nigeria. The crawling posture also suggests a lack of power and gumption to overcome these obstacles. This non-verbal resource conveys an ideology that the INEC is constrained by external factors and struggles to effectively carry out its mandate. This cartoon highlights the complexities and obstacles involved in conducting free and fair elections in Nigeria, while also inviting critical reflection on the role and performance of INEC.

Cartoon 5: Business Day, 2nd Apr., 2023

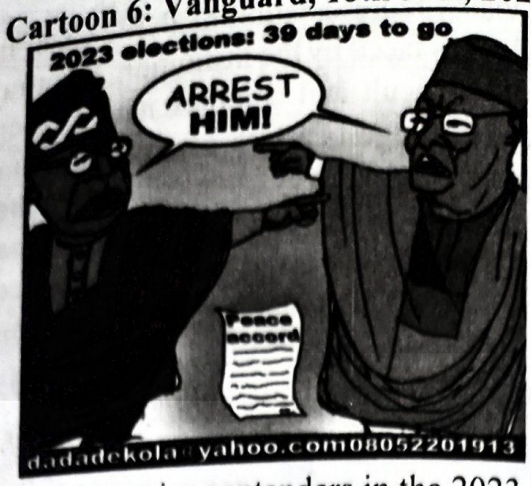


The cartoon is set in a place tagged "political thuggery workshop" where a lot of men are seen training as one preparing for a sports competition. Two men stand aloof and hold a conversation.

Verbal Resources: The use of the term "thuggery" in the phrase *"Political thuggery workshop"* suggests that the cartoon is addressing the issue of violence and intimidation associated with electoral process in Nigeria. It implies that political campaigns and elections involve the deployment of thugs to intimidate opponents or voters. The statement *"Honourable, we are preparing already for the next elections, We are taking no chances"* suggests that the training of the men in the workshop is a strategic preparation to ensure victory in the upcoming elections, hinting at the idea that political success may rely on unethical practices. The use of the term "honourable" is sarcastic, as it is often used to address Nigerian politicians.

Non-Verbal Resources: The image of men training suggests a competitive atmosphere, akin to athletes preparing for a sports competition. This portrayal highlights the notion that politics in Nigeria is seen as a contest – a do-or-die affair, where winning at any cost is prioritized over ethical considerations. The man being addressed as "honourable" is dressed as a typical Nigerian politician, wearing an Agbada (a flowing traditional gown) and a cap, while holding a briefcase. This attire and the briefcase are symbolic of political power and authority. The specific choice of clothing reflects the stereotypical image of a Nigerian politician and reinforces the notion that the cartoon is critiquing the political class in Nigeria. The cartoon serves as a commentary on the challenges and issues surrounding Nigeria's general elections and the socio-political context in which they take place.

Cartoon 6: Vanguard, 18th Jan., 2023

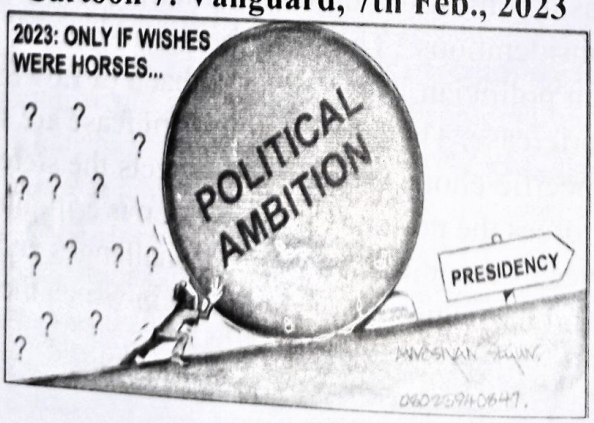


The cartoon represents two of the major contenders in the 2023 presidential election, Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar. They both look furious and point accusatory finger at each other.

Verbal Resources: The statement uttered simultaneously by both Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar, two of the major contenders in the 2023 presidential election: "Arrest Him!" suggests a strong accusation and a call for legal action against the other candidate. The repetition of the same statement by both contenders highlights the intensity of their animosity and their desire to see the other candidate held accountable. The use of the pronoun "him" implies that each candidate sees the other as the source of wrongdoing or illegal activities.

Non-Verbal Resources: The furious facial expressions of both Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar emphasise their anger and hostility towards each other. This visual representation conveys a sense of conflict and tension between the two contenders. The pointing gestures made by both candidates further emphasise their accusatory stance. By pointing fingers at each other, they are assigning blame and shifting responsibility for any perceived wrongdoings. This gesture reinforces the adversarial nature of their relationship and suggests a lack of willingness to take responsibility or find a resolution. This is further supported by the "peace accord" document left unsigned, suggesting a breakdown of trust and an inability to find common ground. This cartoon represents the animosity, lack of unity, and failure to cooperate between the two major contenders in the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. It conveys a sense of conflict, accusatory politics, and the breakdown of potential peace-building efforts.

Cartoon 7: Vanguard, 7th Feb., 2023



The cartoon has the caption "2023: Only if wishes were horses..." The cartoon features a man struggling to roll a gigantic stone towards an upward direction.

Verbal Resources: The caption: "*2023: Only if wishes were horses...*" introduces the temporal context of the cartoon, indicating it is set in 2023, and referencing the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The expression "Only if wishes were horses" is a proverbial expression that conveys a sense of impossibility. It suggests that the aspirations being depicted in the cartoon are unlikely to be realised. The road-sign indicating the "*presidency*" in the upward direction symbolises the ultimate goal of politicians.

Non-Verbal Resources: The cartoon utilises the concept of struggle and impossibility to critique the political climate and ambitions surrounding the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. It suggests that aspiring politicians face significant challenges in their pursuit of power and the presidency. The gigantic stone with the inscription "*political ambition*" symbolises the weight and difficulty associated with political aspirations. The struggle of the man trying to move the stone represents the challenges and barriers politicians encounter on their path to achieving their goals. This cartoon suggests a critical perspective on the Nigeria's political landscape, implying that political ambitions are hindered by various factors, such as corruption, competition, or systemic challenges.

Cartoon 8: Vanguard, 16th Feb., 2023



The cartoon features a padlock that has the shape of the Nigeria map. Beside the padlock is a bunch of four keys.

Verbal Resources: The caption "Which key will unlock our path to prosperity?" raises the question of which candidate holds the solution to Nigeria's economic prosperity. It implies that the 2023 presidential election is crucial in determining the country's future development.

Non-Verbal Resources: The padlock symbolises a barrier or obstacle preventing Nigeria's progress and development. Its shape, resembling the Nigeria map, suggests that the country itself is locked and needs the right key to unlock its potential. The four keys represent the four major contenders in the presidential race: Atiku Abubakar, Bola Tinubu, Peter Obi, and Rabiu Kwankwaso. Each key represents a different candidate and their associated political ideologies and agendas. The inclusion of the candidates' faces on the keys emphasises their personal involvement and responsibility in unlocking Nigeria's path to prosperity.

The cartoon raises awareness about the significance of the presidential election in Nigeria, emphasising the need for the right leadership to unlock the country's potential for economic prosperity. It underscores the responsibility of the individual candidates and the plurality of political choices available to the electorate.

Cartoon 9: Vanguard, 7th Apr., 2023



The cartoon is set on a race track. The race track represents the political arena, specifically the context of Nigeria's general elections in 2023. The race track symbolises the competition and the quest for political power.

Verbal Resources: The journalist's question, "*Sir, why keeping us in suspense, are you in the race or just a spectator?*" implies the need for clarity regarding the then-Vice President's intentions and political ambitions. This question highlights the public's curiosity and desire for information, emphasising the importance of transparency in politics. The finish line with the "*2023 presidential race*" signpost represents the endpoint of the political race, implying that the general elections will determine the next president of Nigeria.

Non-Verbal Resources: The Vice President's perplexed expression signifies his uncertainty and hesitation in answering the journalist's question. This non-verbal cue adds to the tension and suspense in the cartoon, emphasising the lack of clarity surrounding the Vice President's political intentions. The group of five persons dressed in shorts and singlets represents the candidates running for the presidential race. Their attire symbolises their readiness and preparedness for the political race. The journalist represents the media, acting as the voice of the public and seeking answers. This character reflects the role of the media in holding political figures accountable and demanding transparency.

The cartoon employs visual and verbal resources to critique the lack of transparency, ambiguity, and power dynamics in Nigeria's political landscape, particularly during the 2023 general elections. It highlights the importance of accountability and the role of the media in seeking answers and keeping the public informed.

Cartoon 10: Vanguard, 25th Apr., 2023



The cartoon features three participants: a man representing political parties, INEC Chairman, and a man representing the electorates. The two representatives are seen pushing square blocks while INEC chairman attempts to resist the pressure.

Verbal Resources: The square blocks pushed by the participants contain specific inscriptions. The block pushed by the man representing political parties has the inscription "*Political parties pressure: Give room for malpractices*." This inscription suggests that the politicians are pressuring INEC chairman to allow for electoral malpractices, indicating a desire to manipulate the election outcome. On the other hand, the block pushed by the man representing the electorates has the inscription "*Electorate pressure: Give us free and fair elections*." This inscription highlights the demand of the masses for transparent and fair elections, indicating their desire for democratic processes to be upheld.

Non-verbal Resources: The visual representation of the INEC chairman, Prof. Mahmoud Yakubu, is significant. He is depicted as pressured, exhausted, and confused. This non-verbal representation conveys the challenges and burdens faced by the INEC chairman in navigating the competing pressures from both politicians and the masses. It also suggests a portrayal of the electoral process as overwhelming and complex.

Overall, this cartoon reflects the socio-political context of Nigeria's general elections and highlights the power struggle between politicians and the masses, with the former seeking to influence the electoral process through malpractices and the latter demanding free and fair elections. This cartoon critiques the influence of politicians on the electoral process and advocate for the need to uphold democratic principles.

Discussion and Conclusion

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics Theory, this study analysed cartoons associated with Nigeria's 2023 general elections to investigate the communication strategies employed, both verbal and non-verbal. The findings demonstrated the complex nature of these cartoons, showcasing how verbal and non-verbal elements work together to create meaning, shape ideologies, and impact public opinion. The research reveals that verbal strategies in the cartoons, including captions, inscriptions, speech bubbles, and tags, were strategically employed to reinforce the ideologies and socio-political messages conveyed in the cartoons. For instance, the inscriptions on the hurdles in cartoon 4 provide specific issues and challenges faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) during general elections in Nigeria. Such challenges include: prevalence of violence; legal challenges faced by the INEC due to conflicting court orders and controversial judgments; and poor management of youths' expectations and interference with voter's access and rights. These challenges undermine the integrity and fairness of the electoral system. Also, the speech bubble attributed to the journalist in cartoon 9 stresses the need for clarity regarding politicians' intentions and ambitions. The journalist's question highlights the public's curiosity and desire for information, emphasising the importance of transparency in politics.

In the cartoons, non-verbal resources, including facial expressions and gestures, were also crucial in conveying emotions, intentions, and power dynamics. In cartoon 3, the man is portrayed as resilient. His determined posture conveys a sense of defiance and resistance. It implies that the Nigerian citizens are ready to confront the challenges portrayed by the labels on the whale and take a stand against them. Similarly, the family's expressions in cartoon 1 exhibit confidence, determination, and a sense of unity, further

emphasising their commitment to being wise voters. The pointing gesture made by Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar in cartoon 6 reinforces the adversarial nature of their relationship and suggests a lack of willingness to take responsibility or find a resolution. Symbolic representations such as Nigerian map, race hurdles, gigantic stone, and cultural references were used to evoke specific meanings and create associations with certain political ideologies or movements. The padlock in cartoon 8 symbolises a barrier or obstacle preventing Nigeria's progress and development. Its shape, resembling the Nigeria map, suggests that the country itself is locked and needs the right key to unlock its potential. The bunch of four keys in the same cartoon represents the four major contenders in the presidential election and their political ideologies. The size and menacing appearance of the whale in cartoon 3 symbolise the magnitude and severity of the socio-political challenges Nigeria is struggling with. The big stone with the inscription "political ambition" in cartoon 7 symbolises the aspirations of politicians and their desire for power and influence.

Additionally, it was discovered that cartoons frequently employed caricature techniques to exaggerate the physical features and mannerisms of political figures, emphasising their distinct characteristics and personalities. In cartoon 4, there is a visual representation of the INEC Chairman, Prof Mahmoud Yakubu, crawling beneath some race hurdles. This portrays a sense of struggle and vulnerability, indicating the difficult and complex nature of managing elections in Nigeria. Cartoon 8 includes the faces of the four major contenders in the 2023 presidential elections on the keys to individualise the candidates, and highlight their personal involvement and responsibility in unlocking Nigeria's path to prosperity. Cartoon 6 also presents a caricature of Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubakar, looking furious and pointing fingers at each other. This caricature conveys a sense of conflict, hostility and tension between the two contenders.

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics Theory in analyzing the communicative strategies employed in cartoons associated with Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The findings reveal the complex web of visual and verbal semiotics in shaping political discourse and public opinion. Cartoons effectively function as a potent platform for expressing political commentary, employing techniques such as caricature, symbolism, gestures, satire, and textual components to engage audiences, articulate political ideologies, and convey socio-political messages. The analysis underscores the significance of semiotic resources in constructing meaning within cartoons, emphasising the need for critical interpretation to fully comprehend the intended messages.

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