A Multimodal Discourse Study of some Online Campaign Cartoons of Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This paper analyses different patterns of verbal and nonverbal meaning-making strategies in a variety of political campaign cartoons produced during the March 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The data for the study comprises six campaign cartoons selected from the *Nairaland* online community, an Internet forum created by Nigerian Internet entrepreneur Oluwaseun Temitope Osewa in 2005. Furthermore, it takes into account the cartoons' linguistic and extra-linguistic components while developing a context within which to define their pragmatic potential. The data largely concern the two major political parties in Nigeria (All Progressives Congress and People's Democratic Party). Data were analysed using Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse analysis; this careful scrutiny revealed the manifold levels of exaggeration, satire and mockery that parties employ in their quest for visibility, acceptance and success.

Keywords: Nigeria, elections, political cartoons, political parties, multimodal, critical discourse

Introduction

In an open society with multiple political parties, competition is compulsory if the vigour of its democratic institutions is to be sustained. Most political parties try to outclass or outwit one another by employing different strategies to win the heart of the electorates and present their candidates in a positive light. Opeibi (2009, p.141) also explains that politicians and political actors believe that winning people's support is a very serious business and must be done with high sense of dexterity and deftness.

Strategies for gaining people's support were on full display in Nigeria's 2015 general elections. These elections saw the two dominant parties (APC and PDP) skilfully displace other parties by way of their financial clout and popular support. Prior to the election, most Nigerians were yearning for change; they wanted a new government. The build-up to the election was characterised by high expectations, propaganda and uncertainty regarding the continued unity of Nigeria. Assassinations of political opponents were common, at both federal and state levels. These two political parties clinched virtually all of the elective offices in the country as a result of their substantial financial resources, inventively used to convince voters to embrace their platforms. The major aim of political parties is to win elections and, accordingly, they embark on political campaigns that include rallies, debates, interviews and advertisements (Opeibi, 2009). Given the nature of such campaigns, language, with its subtle semantic features, rhetorical levels and modes of presentation plays an important role in the success or failure of a party's message.

A party's ideological perspectives are generally conveyed to the electorate through linguistic and non-linguistic resources (Opeibi, 2009, p.141). Given their linguistic and non-linguistic properties, cartoons have proven to be crucial instruments in a party's attainment of electoral success. Additionally, the public have made their own contributions by representing the two major presidential candidates (of the APC and the PDP) and some of their chieftains in satirical caricatures.

This paper attempts to provide insights on the manner in which cartoons project the ideologies of Nigerian candidates and their parties during their campaigns in the 2015 Nigerian elections. Also, it focuses on the various visual modes and linguistic features that betray discourse strategies, paying special attention to the way in which they play into the Nigerian socio-political environment.

Stating the Problem

Over the recent years, political cartoons have received growing attention from scholars, and their analyses have focused mainly on social and political issues. For instance, Walker (2003) has examined, in great detail, cartoons as a form of political communication, while Conners (2005) completed a detailed survey of the political cartoon campaigns of the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Udoakah (2006) studied political cartoon readership in Nigeria; Mazid (2008) investigated the political cartoon construction of George, W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden; Tsakona (2009) analysed language and image interaction in cartoons and expatiated on the use of verbal and non-verbal language devices like contradiction, exaggeration and metaphor, and Ekpenyong and Bisong (2012) examined the language of Nigerian political cartoons selected from tabloids in run-up to the 2003 general elections.

Despite a plethora of studies on political cartoons, attention has not yet been given to the study of visual modes, linguistic features and ideologies in Nigerian campaign cartoons. Therefore, it is against this background that this study is carried out in order to discuss the multimodalities used in the 2015 presidential election campaign cartoons and their underlying ideologies.

Cartoon

A cartoon is a drawing and a symbol that make a satirical, witty, or humorous point (Lee & Goguen, 2003). It is mainly used by cartoonists to mock or abuse individuals, organisations or even institutions. Most cartoonists portray societies either by mocking them or criticising them. Bitner (2003, p. 306) defines cartoon as "comic strip characters that represent observable characters in a society". Osho (2008, p. 238) explained that cartoons are messages meant to cause laughter, messages that are humorous in representation. Sani (2004, p. 79) defined cartoons as

> "…pictorial representations portray the real-life events through comparison into condensed graphical form that can only be understood and interpreted by the public when they map on the visual depictions contained in the cartoons with the real-life events and this is the cognitive process through which metaphors convey meanings".

According to Bitner (2003), cartoons are of two types: single panel and panel cartoons. The first type is a frame that contains only one cartoon. The second type is also a frame that contains two or more cartoons. Osho (2008, p. 243) also identified six different categories of cartoons. These are:
- General interest cartoons (these forms of cartoons represent public issues that generate public comments. They leave the readers guessing, thereby allowing them to deduce the message from the image represented).
- Economic/Trade cartoons (these are cartoons that are used to emphasise trade and commerce as well as economic issues).
- Sociological/Environmental cartoons (these are cartoons that portray different human endeavours or domains such as health, sport, education etc.)
- Social cartoons (these forms of cartoons address issues like marriage, parties etc.)
- Gag cartoons (used mainly for over and sometimes under-statements. They are equally used for brainstorming).
- Political cartoons (these mainly represent different political parties and politicians who are seeking government office).

Political Cartoons

The origin of modern political cartoons can be traced to the 16th century. Cartoons were further developed with the use of caricature in Britain in the 1800's. Political cartoons sometimes use wild imagination, exaggeration and great sense of humour in narrating or depicting things that appear to be real or factual. The political cartoon, according to Sani, Naab and Aziato (2014) "is a specific genre of political reporting because they are pictorial representations which depict political and social issues and events, as well as the parties involved, in an immediate and condensed form". Marin-Arrese (2015) asserts that it is a genre of discourse and communication that combines caricature, humour and satire in the pictorial representation of public or political figures and/or current socio-political events, its evaluative dimension being the expression of the cartoonist's critical stance.

This kind of cartoon is mainly an artistic vehicle characterised by both metaphorical and satirical language. It usually points out and explains the problems, issues and discrepancies inherent to a specific political situation. It is also used as commentary on politics, politicians and political events in a country, most especially during elections.

Political cartoons possess linguistic features that are used for constructing ideologies and social identities, reflecting real life events in a society's political arena (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999 [cited in Sani *et al.* (2004)]). Because they are used for comic relief, all the various forms of cartoons perform similar functions. As per Osho (2008, p.238-239), these include: informing, educating, entertaining, amusing, disseminating information in an amusing way, recording of an event in a memorable manner, and discussing serious national issues and reflecting current issues through the images of its apposite personalities.

English Language and Politics in Nigeria

The English language was introduced into the linguistic environment of the Nigerian nation as a result of early trade between Europeans and West African sub-regions, while the slave trade, missionary activities and colonialism contributed to its spread (Opeibi, 2009, p. 69). Today in Nigeria, English has been domesticated and nativised. Bamgbose (1995, p. 26) is of the view that English has been pidginised, nativised, acculturated and twisted in order to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction (cited in Opeibi, 2009, p. 71). In other words, it has been made to perform unaccustomed functions in order to fit into new cultural environments. Some of the functions, as outlined by Opeibi (2009, p.70), include:

a) as language of formal education
b) as lingua franca in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingua Nigerian nation.
c) as language of the mass media
d) to memorialise legal documents and proceedings in Nigeria's superior courts
e) as language of written literature
f) as language of political activities.

Educated Nigerians use English to share their experiences and express themselves in political campaign rallies. The use of English in political rallies in Nigeria can also be traced to the time of independence, especially among the educated. The development of English in the Nigerian socio-political context is also a result of politics and political activities in Nigeria (Opeibi, 2009, p.72). According to Lasswell (1960), politics is mainly rooted on "who gets what", "when and how". To a large extent this explains how values and individual interests are promoted through political power and influence. Ayoade (1997, p.2) describes politics as that which defines the government; the government defines the people, while the people at the final stage define the politics of the state. Also, the process of choosing who occupies a political office is usually done through disagreement among members of a given political party, discussion, lobbying, fighting, campaigning and voting. For one to be successful in politics, he/she must master what is termed "language of politics". This involves versatility in communication. Communication in this sense explains both verbal and nonverbal features. The verbal deals basically with the oral and written forms of expressions while the nonverbal focuses on gestures, that is, body language, facial expressions, and so on. in politics, language is a strong device for communication as it carries many or different shades of meaning. It is the tool of political discourse (Aduradola & Ojukwu, 2013). They are used in campaigns by political aspirants to entertain, persuade the electorates and inform them of their programmes. A good candidate chooses his/her words carefully based on their target audience.

A political campaign is an organised effort that seeks to influence the decision-making process within a specific group or environment. It can also be viewed as the mobilisation of forces either by an organisation or individuals to influence others in order to effect an identified and desired change (Aduradola & Ojukwu, 2013). Ademilokun (2015, p. 2) also considered a political campaign as the total and collective efforts of politicians to present themselves favourably to the public for acceptance and support. It is characterised and sometimes shaped by rhetoric, persuasion, and propaganda ad slogans. According to Harris (1979, p. 58), rhetoric in politics foregrounds an individual or the individual's beliefs in a good light. This is in line with George Orwell's view (in his 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*) that "Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind". Rhetoric is a process of speaking to people and using language persuasively to convince them. Persuasion is an art in which a convincing argument is presented to appeal to a certain judgment so as to achieve desired goals. Most politicians adopt persuasion to cajole the electorates to vote for them and their political parties. In order to achieve this, they present themselves as the only capable individuals that can do the job. Propaganda is another important language of politics. Jacque (1962) maintains that propaganda is a deliberate action or opinion used by a group of persons with the intention of changing the opinions or actions of others through psychological manipulation. Lastly, slogan is a catchy phrase that usually accompanies political party logo that captures the ideology of a political party with the aim of influencing or changing the opinions of the electorates.

The fact is that language and politics have played a great part in strengthening democratic processes. Both contribute to the process of engaging the people and convincing them during campaigns. In order to interact and convince people, most especially during campaigns, linguistic and non linguistic communicative strategies or features are very important language tools and are usually employed.

Methodology

The data for this study were sourced from the Internet. The data were selected from www.*Nairaland*.com. A total number of six cartoons were selected for both the APC and PDP. This is because cartoons are embellished with different non verbal modes and linguistic features which are meaning making strategies in communication. The data were analysed using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), which combines both visual and linguistic features.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Machin and Mayr's (2012) Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 9) opined that MCDA explains the meaning relationship between words and semiotic resources like images, diagrams, photographs and colours. Machin and Mayr further posit that MCDA also pays close attention to linguistic features such as lexical choices, transitivity, modality and non linguistic features like iconography (poses, objects, settings), attributes, salience (potent cultural items, foregrounding, colour tone focus), gaze, pose, light, shadow and colour saturation. Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 9) also add that in using MCDA as an analytical framework for any discourse analysis, focus is usually on images, photographs, diagrams and graphics and explaining how they create meaning.
Machin and Mayr (2012) further explained that the task of a multimodal critical discourse analyst is to identify and analyse semiotic choices used by speakers or authors and explain how these choices depict certain ideas, identities and values. Also, Machin (2013) added that the

most significant thing in MCDA is the way different kinds of semiotic modes are used by speakers to express or communicate the scripts of discourses. It allows room for an extensive explanation of meanings in texts with both visuals and linguistic features.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The selected data for this study are six 2015 presidential election political campaign cartoons on www.*Nairaland*.com. The political actors involved in the cartoons are the two major political parties (APC and PDP) presidential candidates and their party chieftains.
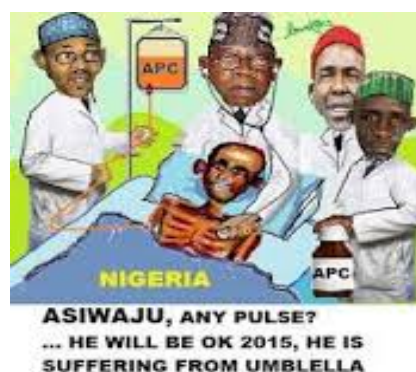
Cartoon 1:

The two represented individuals in this cartoon are Jonathan Goodluck, the former president of Nigeria, and his vice Namadi Sambo. The two politicians are presented in a small lorry with Jonathan Goodluck driving it on a grounded lorry while Sambo is seen holding a PDP flag. The small lorry being driven also has the logo of PDP. This portrays both of them travelling to Kano State or returning from a political campaign. This is evident from the expression on the small car "Kano Dream 2015". The irony of this journey by these two politicians is the fact that they are both travelling on a spoilt vehicle known as "Toyota Dyna", abandoned on the road, without wheels or tyres. A closer look at the vehicle also shows that a log of wood is supporting it. The lorry symbolically represents Nigeria as a failed nation yet the leaders ride on it to solicit for support in order to win the 2015 election so as to remain in power. This representation of the lorry as Nigeria is obvious from the word inscribed on it, "Nigeria", and the colour of the vehicle "green". Green is one of the major colours of Nigeria, symbolising agriculture and abundance. This is a mock cartoon used in lampooning the former president and his vice president who could not fix the problem of the country yet are driving on the failed nation to Kano to solicit support. The cartoon further projects the two politicians as desperate and conscienceless leaders who despite their poor performance in office (fully captured in the poor state of the spoilt vehicle) still want to remain in power at all cost. This is colourfully expressed in "THEY CANNOT STOP US FROM MOVING, LET'S GO".

Cartoon 2:

The cartoon above is a picture of the two major leaders, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu and Muhammadu Buhari, who spearheaded the formation of All Progressives Congress in 2015. The two leaders are seen sitting on an armoured tank. This cartoon further shows the unambiguous objective of APC, which is to defeat terrorism, most especially in the northeastern states of Yobe, Adamawa, and Borno. A closer look at the cartoon also shows Muhammadu Buhari, the APC presidential flag bearer, sitting in front of two pointed revolvers ready to shoot and wipe out every form of terrorism in the country. This was presented strategically to discredit Jonathan and the PDP's administration as being weak in the fight against terrorism with the intention of gaining votes and winning the 2015 election. Muhammadu Buhari's image was also used in front of two revolvers, being a retired general and a former military head of state, to convince the electorates that he would restore normalcy in the troubled region with his experience as a retired Major General.

Cartoon 3:

This cartoon has the faces of All Progressives Congress (APC) leaders. A close study of the cartoon also shows the leaders wearing lab coats with their native caps on their heads. The caps mirror their ethnic backgrounds. On the sick bed is a dying patient with Bola Tinubu, the chief medical doctor, examining the patient with a stethoscope. The dying patient here symbolises Nigeria, which the APC leaders have come to rescue by administering drugs and to cure it of the disease plaguing her and to give her the necessary strength that she needs to remain stable, as can be seen from APC bottle that contains drugs and the APC drip. The party leaders also alleged that the disease Nigeria is suffering from is an "umbrella", which happens to be the symbol of the PDP

Cartoon 4:

This cartoon contains the images of Bola Tinubu and Muhammadu Buhari, who are the two major leaders of APC. The two leaders are dressed in their native attires with each of them holding and displaying the party flag. At the centre of the party's flag is a hand holding a broom, which is the party's symbol. The broom is a symbol of change mainly used to clean up a particular mess. In the 2015 presidential election, the party used it to sell their ideology to the electorates. The flag has four major primary colours: green, white, blue and red as its background. "Green" represents agricultural abundance and fertility of Nigeria, "white" represents purity, peace and unity, "blue" projects peace while "red" symbolises thickness and firmness. This further projects the party as being solid, having the ability to tackle all challenges that may face the country, ranging from corruption to security.

Cartoon 5:

This cartoon contains the image of Jonathan Goodluck, the former president of Nigeria, sitting on a chair that symbolises Aso Rock[1]. The image also shows him holding the ASO ROCK chair with his two hands at the back of the chair. The inference is that he does not want to leave the presidential villa, which is the seat of power. The former president is also seen in the cartoon struggling with the opposition in order to remain in power. This is obvious from the way the

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[1] "A large outcrop of granitic rock located on the outskirts of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The Aso Rock is a 400-metre (1,300 ft.) prominent monolith with a peak height of 936-metre (3,071 ft.) above sea level. It is one of the city's most noticeable features. The Nigerian Presidential Complex, Nigerian National Assembly, and Nigerian Supreme Court are located around it". Wikipedia article, retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aso_Rock

opposition rope is tied directly to his left leg with a hand holding the rope firmly and pulling him so as to unseat him from the ASO ROCK.

Cartoon 6:

This cartoon is a mockery of the major opposition party's desperation to unseat the ruling party (PDP) from Aso Rock. First in the cartoon is the hurdle tagged: "2015 PRESIDENTIAL RACE" over which the major opposition party needs to jump. The Horse has the head of Muhammadu Buhari, who was the flag bearer of APC and the eventual winner of the 2015 presidential election, while Bola Tinubu is seen at the back of the horse holding a broom which is the symbol of the party's change mantra. The horse is used in the cartoon due to its ability to travel at high speed and jump, thus it depicts the ideology of change and the need to take control of power at the centre. The cartoon also depicts Bola Tinubu as the actual candidate, while Muhammadu Buhari is being used to achieve Tinubu's goal of ruling the country. This is obvious from the statement credited to him in the cartoon: "Jump! I need to win this race". The word "jump" is a command. Ironically, the horse, representing the ability to run and jump, seems quite unhealthy. This seen in Muhammadu Buhari's response, "Bros... doctor says I should take it easy o". This statement depicts clearly that Buhari should be more careful in carrying out difficult tasks because the rigours of the office of the president will be too demanding, given his advanced age and poor health.

Conclusion

This paper has focused mainly on the analysis of some of the political campaign cartoons of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. These cartoons depict the public discourse regarding the ideologies of the parties and the leadership qualities of the presidential candidates in the 2015 presidential elections. The multimodal resources and ideologies of the campaign cartoons show the desperation of the two major political parties in Nigeria, PDP and APC, to either remain in power or take power at all cost. Also, the cartoons depict politics as a game of wit. This is evident from the way the cartoons that give images of the candidates and party leaders of both parties are represented.

The data unmistakably show that the producers of these images employ exaggeration, satire and mockery; all are major ingredients in the satirizing and exposing the politicians' weaknesses and flaws.

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