

## MULTIMODAL STUDY OF SELECTED CARTOONS IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

**Prof. Jane Ifechelobi**

Department of Eng Language and Literature  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
Email: jn.ifechelobi@unizik.edu.ng

&

**Chiamaka Rosemary Ilojinso**

Email: cilodinso@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

This study aimed to identify the different modes of communication and how they correlated or act independently in communication using Visual Semiotic Theory. Multimodality perceives communication to be more than verbal or written language. It propagates that communication has always involve diverse modes, like images, colour, layout; all which has its own meaning potentials. Using Visual Semiotic theory, the study analyzed the pragmatic implications of the components of visual so as to interpret and understand visuals as an aspect of mode. The analysis indeed showed that cartoon is a visual semiotic mode that would expand the readers' interpretative repertoires and also strengthen their capacity in constructing and interpreting multimodal texts.

**Keywords:** Multimodality, Mode, Visual Semiotics

### **Introduction**

In as much as language is an indispensable tool used by human beings and forms part of our existence, it is just one of the many possible systems for producing meaning. There are diverse possible systems of producing meaning which can intertwine with language or act solely to enhance meaning. According to Gee, language is not the only important communication system in digital media; visual symbols and signs are as significant as written or spoken language. Words, images, colour, layout are mostly integrated in varieties of ways in web pages, newspapers and magazines, as well as in textbooks all to enhance meaning and proper interpretation.

Invariably, communication is increasingly becoming multimodal, as it draws on wide range of semiotic resources for the projection of meaning. Halliday (4) supporting this opines that "...there are many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of language and these modes can operate independently or interdependently in different levels in a multimodal text". Gee stresses that each of these genres or semiotic modes has its own set of rules and requirements and can as well function as a meaning repertoire. The study hopes to explore the pragmatic implications and identify the visual cues of the components of visuals.

### **Semiotic Mode**

A mode refers to a semiotic system or resource for expressing meaning that has a distinct method of representation. Mode as defined by Kress is:

A socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning and it is ...that which a community, a group of people who work in similar ways around similar issues, has decided to treat as a mode" (36).

This means that modes take shape and acquire meaning over time within cultures and reflects culturally explicit and recognizable ideals of the society. He (39) explains that for something to be a mode, there need to be a shared cultural sense within a community of its usage and then how it can be organized to realize meaning. This is to say that the joining of alphabetic scripts can be recognized within socially specific groups (readers of English). Primarily, modes take shape and acquire meaning over time within cultures.

Kress also opines that, visual modes have taken on a culturally significant meaning, so that color, dress, font, size, layout, and bodily gesture, as well as auditory elements (music, sound, speech) have the ability to convey socially constructed or socially semiotic meanings, with each mode representing

a similar socially constructed knowledge differently (39). Therefore, the use of different modes allows the producer of a text multiple choices for creating meaning and this choice of resources for meaning-making is linked to the notion of modal *affordance* in other words the “meaning-making potential” or the “potentials and limitations” of certain semiotic resources or modes in a specific situation.

### **Multimodal Discourse**

According to Van Leeuwen (28), multimodality is the combination of different semiotic modes, for example; language and music in a communicative artifact or event. Baldry and Thibault, refer it to the use of diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems are both co-deployed and co-contextualized in the making of a text-specific meaning. Multimodality discourse focuses mainly on the study of the interrelationships between various communicative modes, be it visual or auditory, words or image.

Synder (24) defines multimodal discourse as the study of the intersection and interdependence of various modalities of communication within a given context'. O'Halloran *et al* (32) gave a more specific definition to it. They opine that “a multimodal discourse involves the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as language, gesture, dress, architecture, proximity lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, and so on”

In sum, multimodal discourse studies the many different modes that people use to communicate with each other and express themselves. It propagates that people communicate and interact with each other, not just through writing (which is one mode) but also through speaking, gesture, gaze, and visual forms which are different modes. Jewitt (35) in line with this, puts forward that “multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communicational forms people use; image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on and the relationships between them”.

### **Cartoon as a Multimodal Discourse**

Onakpa (5) defines cartoon as an illustration showing the features of subjects or objects in a humorously exaggerated way. Cartoons are intended for satire, caricature or humour. Due to the nature of cartoons, they are often considered to be direct and easy-to-process means of communicating a message. Cartoons can be considered as a specific kind of semiotic domain and as a multimodal discourse, it mostly comprises of different semiotic resources like signs, words, image, layout, colours, music and sounds as can be seen in printed and animated videos. Gee (18) defines a semiotic domain “as any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities to communicate distinctive type of meaning”.

Cartoon makes use of the verbal, visual, colour, music to enhance its meaning. Its humor, effect and message can result not only from the image and text interaction, but also from colour, gaze, layout as may be the case. Therefore in the study cartoons, the reader should pay attention to all verbal and visual details made available in order to grasp the meaning of the cartoon, since cartoons in newspapers constitutes one of the most strategic and vital medium of disseminating information and reorienting the public on current issues reflecting social realities of a particular society at a particular time. In addition o this, its persuasive techniques which are literary technique use to present ideas through reason and logic like symbols, labeling, analogy irony, exaggeration & distortion should be on the lookout.

### **Theoretical Framework of Visual Social Semiotics Theory**

The visual social semiotics is an adaptation from Halliday's language metafunctions namely; the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual metafunctions. Kress and Van (20) considered that “the visual, like all semiotic modes, has to serve several communicational and representational requirements, in order to function as a full system of communication”. They assume that image, color, music, typography and other visual modes are similar to language and they can simultaneously fulfill and realize these three broad communicative metafunctions as language does; representational,

interactive and compositional metafunctions. In view of this, image and other visual modes can represent objects and their relations in the world and they often communicate things other than words.

### Methodology

The data for the analysis are cartoons from the two national newspapers; *Vanguard* and *Punch*. Both the online and printed forms were used. The analysis uses two metafunctions. These two metafunctions are: Representational and Interactive metafunctions

**Representational Metafunction:** This analysis is associated with the processes or the activity described the attributes or the qualities of the participants and, then the circumstances in which the action is being developed (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 25). When participants are connected by vectors of motion (actional process) or by eyelines (reactional process), presenting unfolding actions and events, it is called a narrative structure. Other processes are; transactional and non transactional, speech process. It also has conceptual patterns, where participants are represented in terms of their class, structure or meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen 28). In this aspect, we have the classificational, analytical and symbolical processes. Classificational processes relate participants to each other; there is always a subordinate for a superordinate. Analytical processes connect participants in terms of part-whole structures; the parts/possessive Attributes belong to the whole/carrier while symbolic processes depict what a participant is or means. This can be attributive or symbolic.

**Interpersonal Metafunction:** This analysis presents features of multimodal texts, the relationships between the visual, the producer and the viewer, together with the analysis of the intersemiotic mood in both verbal and visual modes (Unsworth and Wheeler, 69–70; Unsworth, 70). In the verbal mode, writers address their readers by making statements, asking questions, making offers or requiring some kind of action of them.

Royce (71–72) states that among the visual techniques used to analyze interpersonal meaning are the absence or presence of facial expressions towards the viewer, gestures which make demands or offers information to the viewer. Demands are considered to establish an imaginary relation with the viewer since they address her/him directly. Offer, on the other hand, address the viewer indirectly, as there is no ‘gaze’ contact between participants. It depicts the represented participants impersonally as items of information or objects for contemplation. Interactive meaning are also defined on the basis of perspective and social distance, the level of involvement by the viewer, the power relations between the viewer and the represented participants and, finally, the degrees of social distance and intimacy. The level of involvement between the image-producer, the viewers and the RPs in a visual is encoded in the horizontal angle, which is concerned with frontal and oblique planes. The vertical angle transmits power relationships between the represented participants and the viewer within an image. Royce (72) states that the high angle forces the viewers to look down on the RPs, which is suggestive of superiority to them, or of their significance. A low angle forces the viewers to look up to them, which is suggestive of the viewer’s inferior position, or of the importance of the portrayed participant(s). An eye-level angle is suggestive of a sense of equality between the viewer and the represented participants.

### Data analysis

**Image 1: The Sad Reality (Vanguard, 1<sup>st</sup> Dec, 2018. Pg 18)**



The cartoon depicts a voting process in Nigeria. The participants (voters) are all blindfolded with different national interests like “same” religion or ethnic group, poverty and these are the rationale for

their voting while the partially blind man leading them is considered as a politician has a personal interest.

### Representational Metafunction

The participants represented above are icons depicting a voting process. Vectors are formed by limbs, the hands they placed on each other's shoulder which serves as an act of (guide to) movement and this serves as chain that binds them. The participant that creates the vector is the politician who is the 'Actor' while the voters receive the action and they are the 'Goal'. In the conceptual process, the symbolic attributes of the picture are the box and staff carried by the politician which the box can be attributed to contain the stipends or gifts given to the voters for selling their votes while the staff of authority shows his social status. The mercenary is made to stand, represented in a dark shade. This signifies evil and implies shadiness and thirst for blood as he is a voter being used by the politician to achieve electoral rigging. The baton which he uses to urge the people, symbolizes the gun or instrument of torture used to achieve this feat. The voters are being led as slaves following their master.

### Interactive Metafunction

From the image, the gaze of the represented participants is not on the viewer so this is referred to as 'offer' image. This means that cartoonist presents the participants as an object to be contemplated, acknowledged or contradicted. The angle from which these participants are presented is from the side which is an oblique horizontal plane. As a result, the viewer is detached from the participants, but there is a sense of equality between the represented participants and the viewer(s). The colour creates a feeling of distaste over the electoral affairs of the country.

This cartoon captioned "Blindfolded since 1999... The Sad Reality" implies that since the military handed governance to the civilian government in 1999, Nigerian nation has not witnessed an unbiased or uncorrupted election process as to be blindfolded means to tie one's head to cover the eyes so as to disable the sight.

**Image 2: We can't pay New Minimum Wage (Vanguard March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018)**



This image centers on the new National Minimum wage bill of N30, 000 signed into law by the President, Mohammed Buhari on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This new national minimum wage met stiff refusal by some state Governors to adhere to this law, hence the leaders of Nigeria Labour Congress NLC, Trade Union Congress of Nigeria ULC, threaten to go on a national indefinite strike on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019, if the new minimum wage will not be implemented by the governors in all the 36 states of the federation. This image portrays the obvious situations of the workers, as battered, bruised by hardship, starvation and suffering as a result of poor salary structure.

### Representational Meaning

These participants are in a minor narrative transactional process where their glances are directed at each other as they are engaged in a conversation. They are connected by a vector which is their gazes on each other and this is a reactionary process. They are both reacting to the issue on ground, which is on the impending strike. The worker looks at the governor with wonder on his unflinching altitude.

### Interactive Meaning

The image act of the picture is that of demand since the participants do not look at the viewer directly, rather at one another and this makes the participants to have a direct relationship with each other, owing that they direct each other personally. The relationship between the worker and the governor is

defined by the distance between them in the cartoon which is a far social distance as there is visible space between the participants. The governor is viewed from a high level which is a vertical angle relations and their eye level is used to maintain equal relation as both is bent on their respective decisions. The colour used in the cartoon is synonymous with the event portrayed.

**Image 3: Soliciting for Foreign Aid (Punch, October 18th, 2018).**



This graphic representation is sarcasm on President Buhari's address at the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) held at New York on Tuesday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The annual debate is an occasion where world leaders gather to discuss global issues. President Buhari on this occasion decried the ethnic killing and persecution of Muslims in Myanmar, beckon the aid of the United Nations to halt this atrocious act so as to stop the massacre of Muslims in Myanmar.

### Representational Meaning

From the image, two represented participants are used, a man and a boy. The participants are in a narrative process, as they are both engrossed in an action, being surrounded by burning fire. These participants are connected by a vector as they appear looking at the crisis and so they are both reacting to the chaotic environment. They are in a transactional process. Their utterances are being linked to them by an arrow pointing each to his utterance. Again the participants are in a classificational process where the first participant is superordinate to the second who is subordinate and they can be identified due to a number of signifiers. The first participant is the President and the signifiers are his physical appearance and way of dressing, (spectacle, agbada) while the second participant could be referred to a child, which stands to represent the Nigerian masses. The first participant is portrayed in pains, signified by the presence of tears drops. He is soliciting for foreign aid to stop the killing of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. The second participant on the other hand is tapping the first participant, drawing his attention to Boko Haram and Fulani-herdsmen killing in his own country Nigeria

### Interactive Meaning

The image act is that of an offer as neither the participants directed its gaze at the viewer or to each other; each is engrossed in different matters. This act leaves the viewers to contemplate on the message of the image. The distance between the participants and the viewer is a close social distance, an impersonal relation, but there is no equal view between the boy and the man, since the man is so engrossed in a different matter. The man is viewed on a high angle and this suggests its superiority while the boy is on a level angle.

**Image 4: Office of the Governor Imo State (Punch, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019).**



This graphic has the setting of the office of the past Governor of Imo State in the person of Mr. Rochas Okorocha as can be seen by caption on the table. He is shown reading a paper. This image presents a dissatisfied and angry man in his office, reading a newspaper that has written probably a tabloid on him.

### Representational Meaning

The represented participant is presented to the viewers as someone in his office reading a newspaper. This would be attributed to be conceptual process where represented participants are static and are in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable timeless essence, (Kress & Van Leeuwen 36). This process is divided into classificational, analytical and symbolical. In analytical process, studying the image above the possessive attributes in this image are the flags, table and chair and they are possessive attribute of the office, which is the carrier. The setting fits in together and this can be referred to as structured analytical process. This image presents a dissatisfied and angry man in his office, reading a newspaper.

### Interactive Meaning

In the interactive meaning, the participant's eyes appear to be looking at something the viewer cannot see. An eye-line is formed as a vector emanating from the participant to the unknown object, and this makes it an image act of offer. The participant is reacting to the unknown object or subject which is oblivious to the reader/viewer. The absence of a Phenomenon further classifies the image as a non-transactional reactional process and this makes the viewer to imagine what the participant is looking or reading in the newspaper. This creates a powerful sense of apprehension to the readers of the cartoon. The social distance is a close personal distance, which is an intimate relationship with the participant and the viewer, showing affinity or respect. The colour of the image portrays the chaotic environment.

### Conclusion

In summary, the framework of visual social semiotics proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen, highlights how visuals or images are used in communication. It buttresses the fact that language is by no means the only means of communication or disseminating information, although it is the primary mode of communication. In most cases, other semiotic modes can function solely or intertwine with language to enhance meaning. In line with this, this study pointed out that images can be studied in correlation with other modes, other than language and can also combine with written word as can be seen in the cases of labeling and speech processes. It also pointed out that there are some relationships between the image and language, yet image is not dependent on the language explanation for it has its own structure and organization. The language explanation makes the concrete image more specific and reflects the image more clearly, while the image makes the content of the language more vivid, bringing to focus, fore messages which ordinarily might be difficult to express.

From this study, it can be concluded that, in this multi-media age, traditional literacy is not enough. The combination of language with other social semiotics resources and keen attention to the function of all of them (image, music, colour, language and so on) would communicate meaning more comprehensively and efficiently.

### Works Cited

- Adami, Elisabetta (2016). "Multimodality" In O. Garcia, N. Flores and M. Spotti (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Language and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- A.Jesu 's Moya Guijarro and Mari 'a Jesu 's Pinar Sanz. "Compositional, Interpersonal and Representational Meanings in a Children's Narrative, A Multimodal Discourse Analysis" in *Journal of Pragmatics*. pp 1601–1619, 2008.
- Baldry, Anthony and Thibault, Paul. *Multimodal Transcription and Text Analysis. A Multimedia Toolkit and Coursebook*. London, Equinox, 2006.
- Chae Kwan Jung. "Mutimodal Discourse: A Visual Design Analysis of Two Advertising Images" in *International Journal of Contents*, Vol.11, No.2, Jun. 2015
- Dai, Sin. "The Origin and Development of Multimodal Discourse Analysis". *Foreign Language Research*, 2, 17-23. 2013.
- El Refaie, Elisabeth, &Hörschelmann, K. "Young People's Readings of a Political Cartoon and the Concept of Multimodal Literacy".*Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 31(2), 195–207. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596301003679719>, 2010, (accessed on 27th May, 2019).

- Gee, James Paul. *What Video Games Have to Teach us about Learning and Literacy*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2003.
- Halliday, Michael. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978.
- Jewitt, Carey. "An Introduction to Multimodality". In C. Jewitt (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, 2nd Ed. (London: Routledge) 2010.
- Kress, Gunther. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Kress Gunther and, Van Leeuwen Theo. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold, 2001.
- O'Halloran, Kay and Smith, Bradley. *Multimodal Studies: Exploring Issues and Domains*. New York & London: Routledge, 2011.
- Onakpa, Mohammed. "Cartoons, Cartoonists and Effective Communication in the Nigeria Print Media", in *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia* Vol. 8 (1), Serial No. 32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v8i1.3>, 2014. (accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2019).
- Royce, Terry D. "Intersemiotic Complementarity: A Framework for Multimodal Discourse Analysis" in: Royce, T.D., Bowcher, W.L. (Eds.), *New Directions in the Analysis of Multimodal Discourse*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, pp. 63–110. 2007
- Sapir, Edward. *Language*. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1921.
- Stoian. Claudia. "Analysing Images: A Social Semiotic Perspective" in *Scientific Bulletin of the Politehnica University of Timișoara Transactions on Modern Languages* Vol. 14, No. 1. 2015.
- Synder, Jamie. *Applying Multimodal Discourse Analysis to Study Image – Enabled Communication*. <http://www.ideal.illinois.edu/bitsream> 2009. (accessed on 24th January, 2019).
- Unsworth, Len. *Multimodal Semiotics Functional Analysis in Contexts of Education*. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Unsworth, Len, Wheeler, Janet. "Re-valuing the Role of Images in Reviewing Picture Books". *Reading: Language and Literacy* 36 (2), 68–74, 2002.
- Yang, Yang. *A Social Semiotic Approach to Multimodal Discourse of the Badge of Xi'an Jiaotong University*. 2006. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0608.11> (accessed on January 28th, 2019)
- Zhu, Yongsheng. "Theory and Methodology of Multimodal Discourse Analysis". *Foreign Languages Research*, 5, 82-86. 2007