

CONDUIT CORRUPTION: A MULTIMODAL CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SLEAZE IN NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Corruption has become endemic among many nations of the world, Nigeria inclusive. She, more than any other country in Africa, has suffered under the crippling influence of corruption despite her much-touted position as “the giant of Africa”. To this end, several responses to this ugly scenario have emerged ranging from the literary to the visual. This study is a modest attempt to investigate the conceptual representation of sleaze in the political cartoons of Mike Asukwo and the multimodal resources deployed in creating such cartoons. The population of the study is 50 cartoons from Asukwo’s BusinessDay on-line publications between 2015- 2018. The study provides a qualitative analysis of five cartoons on the themes of conduit corruption. They are purposively sampled to ensure they align with the theme of the study. The study adopts Kress van Leeuwen’s (2006) Social Semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks for its analysis. The findings show that through Asukwo’s form of signification that corruption has eaten deeply into the fabrics of the nation. It further proved the analytical framework adequate for the interpretation of images thereby making the cartoon genre a formidable force in the fight against corruption as Asukwo sarcastically shows.

Keywords: Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Semiotics, Semiosis

Introduction

Background to the Study

Analysing visual language has always been a problem as many people interpret images just as they appear. Semiosis as a form of communication is concerned with the exchange of messages through signs. Communication among humans is often done with the intention of conveying messages or meaning through the act or process of signification. Signification in this regard means the ability of signs (whether visual, textual or gestural) to communicate meanings. According to Pierce, the world is perfused with signs if not entirely made up of signs, (Pierce 1931). Consequently, all known cultures rely on signs to convey messages swiftly and conveniently. Thus, given that communication is meaning oriented, the ultimate goal of semiotics is to unravel the meanings that are built into all kinds of human interactions including those that come from words, symbols, narratives, symphonies, paintings, and comic books to scientific theories and mathematical theorems Danesi (2007).

The universality of pictures is incontestable especially with the advancement in technology. Again, human experience has now become more visual and visualised than ever before. The tendency in the modern world therefore is to rely on pictures because they make communication more comprehensible, quicker and more effective (Mirzoeff, 1998). This is captured in what has come to be called the “pictorial turn” in which the visual is also being acknowledged as an essential component of communication (Mitchell, 2004). In other words, visual messages are much more succinct and provide clearer summary of events or issues. Such messages are given preference over conventional media in view of their unique features in communicating and retaining information (Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale and Airme, 2001).

A political cartoon is a form of political and editorial comment which is necessary and worth studying for its distinctiveness and significance. It is a hybrid of pictorial and verbal representations where the artist is given the license to mock and “censure” the actions of the powerful through the force of ridicule (Duss, 2001, Manning and Phiddian, 2004). The cartoonist targets well known politicians and critical issues in his criticism (Niven, Litcher and Amundson, 2003).

Cartoonists deploy both graphic and discursive resources in their works. The pictorial representation of events and issues function like riddles which need decoding. The cartoon genre equally entails the use of cognitive mechanisms to decode these complex metaphoric presentations. which re-enact reality. Like the court jesters of old, cartoonists speak to powers that be through their caricatures. Cartoons, therefore, have become tool kit for the cartoonist as he joins in the war of criticism through his caricatures. Notably, political cartoons come handy at a time when it is considered perilous to be too openly critical of an authority. To survive, therefore, the cartoonist has to code his messages.

Many people can say what corruption is all about but it has no clear cut definition. Its definition is dependent on the context in which it is examined. however, the incontestable thing is that corruption is a multifaceted problem facing the world. It has both destructive and inimical effects on all aspects of societal and human development. In other words, Corruption is a phenomenon not peculiar to any nation, race, gender, creed, sexual orientation, rather it transcends national boundaries and frontiers. Aluko, (2009).

The nation’s corruption problems emanate from people who accord a lot of respect to material wealth regardless of how such wealth was acquired. The cliché if you cannot beat them, join them makes the race for the acquisition of wealth endless in the nation. Little attention is paid to morals since it is generally believed that the end justifies the means. Buttressing the idea, Nwaobi (2004) avers that Nigeria must be one of the very few countries in the world where a source of wealth is of no consequence to others. People clamour around those who have “arrived” as they are given places of honour in the society. Wealthy people who are known to be corrupt are regularly courted and praised by communities, religious bodies, social clubs and other private organizations. As a result, such people are often under pressure from their friends, and relations to share out the loot. In order for them to maintain the standard and satisfy societal expectations, they country has to remain in the vicious circles of corruption.

Corruption exists in all societies. The major difference in the case of Nigeria is the extent of its pervasiveness and its implication for good governance, value system and political culture in particular Tanzi, (1998); Mutiullah, (2013). Hence, in the last few years, it has become a fashionable theme in the Nigerian media. News headlines often indicate the various levels of embezzlement ranging from tips, money laundering, payment of salaries to “ghost” workers, kick-backs to contract scams, bribery, fraud, favouritism and nepotism. According to Page (2018), “Nigerians themselves view their country as one of the world’s most corrupt; it perennially ranks in the bottom quartile of *Transparency International’s* Corruption Perception Index”.

Corruption in Nigeria has gotten to the level of being referred to as a pandemic that has reached an insoluble level. Commenting on the spate of corruption in the Niger Delta Development Commission, (NDDC), Ojugboh, in an interview with Chinwo (2020), notes the pervasive corruption, flagrant abuse of due process, abandoned projects and poor quality delivery among others at the NDDC. He noted that some of the awards were not spurious, but criminal as records available show that most of the awards were not backed by budget. The writer adds that the manner in which the political office holders neglect the projects they are supposed to execute and squander the entire money allotted to them is alarming and bothers on the pathological. The assertion is supported by the recent development involving the former EFCC Chairman who was accused of embezzling recovered billions of naira and also not accounting for seized hundreds of houses.

Commenting on the level of the scandal and corruption that greet the Buhari Administration, Eriye (2020) questions the genuineness of the administration's much touted fight against corruption. The writer notes that it has been double and even triple whammy of scandals for the Buhari Administration that leaves its much-trumpeted anti-corruption credentials in tatters. Reacting, he asks, "what difference has been made if the same stomach turning tales of sleaze are being churned out by the system in manner that keeps pace with the regime it replaced?" (*The Nation*, July 15, 2020). This level of sleaze explains why it has been described as a cancer that has eaten deeply into the fabric of the Nigerian polity (Okolo, Okiemute and Akpokighe, 2014).

Combating corruption all over the world has remained a herculean task and Nigeria is not exempted. There are different dimensions to corruption such as socio/psychological dimension; religious dimension; socio-cultural dimension; political dimension depending on how it affects that facet of the society. The various acts of corruption range from how it is practiced by individuals to how it is practiced by organized systems. The socio/psychological dimension of corruption holds that the act of corruption is socially generated. As such, individuals and corporate organisations are seen as products of the society or their environment. These various acts of corruption rub off on the larger society, affecting it adversely. Societies are therefore encouraged to make concerted efforts aimed at checking the menace of corruption as it is the major cause of underdevelopment among nations.

Many people have joined in the fight against corruption, condemning it in all its ramifications. Contributing to curbing the menace, the media employs different metaphorical expressions to describe and condemn the damages caused by corruption. Political cartoonists join the vanguard of critics in challenging this social pandemic. Cartoons are thus, used to lampoon the prevailing economic situation. Mike Asukwo craftily condemns the different ways individuals and agencies have been siphoning money out of the government's coffers, this he tagged conduit corruption. Having examined what corruption is and how destructive it can be to a nation, the study examines Asukwo's caricature presentations and their apparent critique of corruption and other unseemly activities in Nigeria. It also examines how effectively the tropes deployed could convincingly convey the message to viewers.

The present study seeks to:

- Explore the meaning potentials in the political cartoons
- Investigate the multimodal resources deployed in creating them.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts two-pronged frameworks involving Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) Social Semiotics and Kress van Leeuwen (2001) Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis theories. The choice of these two theories is based on their interrelatedness and suitability in ensuring that the various aspects of the data sets are given equal and in-depth treatment. Specifically, while visual semiotics (a.k.a. Visual Grammar) holds that "visual communication is always coded" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:32), its fundamental thesis was inspired by the communicative meta-functions of language as already established by systemic functional linguists. The theory, holds that both visual communication and verbal discourse (i.e. language) work together to "form a comprehensive meaning making unit. In other words, the three meta-functions of language – ideational, interpersonal and textual – espoused in Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday 1978), correspond neatly with the three communicative functions of visual signs – Representational, Interpersonal and Compositional Meanings. The second prong of theoretical framework is the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA). The MCDA is relevant to this study because of its multifaceted approach in combining both the denotational and connotational meanings of visual and verbal signs. The denotational meaning focuses on the literal message of the signs while the connotative meaning focuses on both the sociocultural and ideological underpinnings of such signs. Furthermore, the multimodal framework notes the inadequacy of only one resource in a communicative event, and incorporates other artefacts in the

meaning making process. In applying the theory to the present study, therefore, attention will be paid to the denotation and connotational meanings that underlie each cartoon.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design. This descriptive design is based on the qualitative interpretation of the data from political cartoons produced by Mike Asukwo. The cartoons represent an important visual contribution from the cartoonist to the raging problem of corruption and sleaze within the Nigerian political context. The population of the study comprises 50 cartoons on the theme of corruption. These cartoons were collected from the electronic version of *Laughter in the Mirror* (Asukwo, 2018). A sample size of 5 cartoons dealing specifically on conduit corruption within the Nigerian democratic dispensation are selected for the study. Again, in ensuring a seamless selection of the relevant cartoons, the study adopts a purposive sampling technique. This is a non-probability form of sampling. The choice of this sampling is predicated on the fact that it allows the researcher to come up with a manageable number of cartoons from those with shared features and themes. The selected cartoons are rich in semiotic resources, thus opening up interesting interpretations. The analysis is based on the key concepts and theses of semiotics such as, the images' Representational, Interactive and Compositional Meanings.

Data Presentation

The term Conduit Corruption is a metaphorical exploration of the diverse ways money was siphoned from the government coffers by individuals and agencies. The cartoonists used different symbols to represent the corrupt practices among the various agents of government.

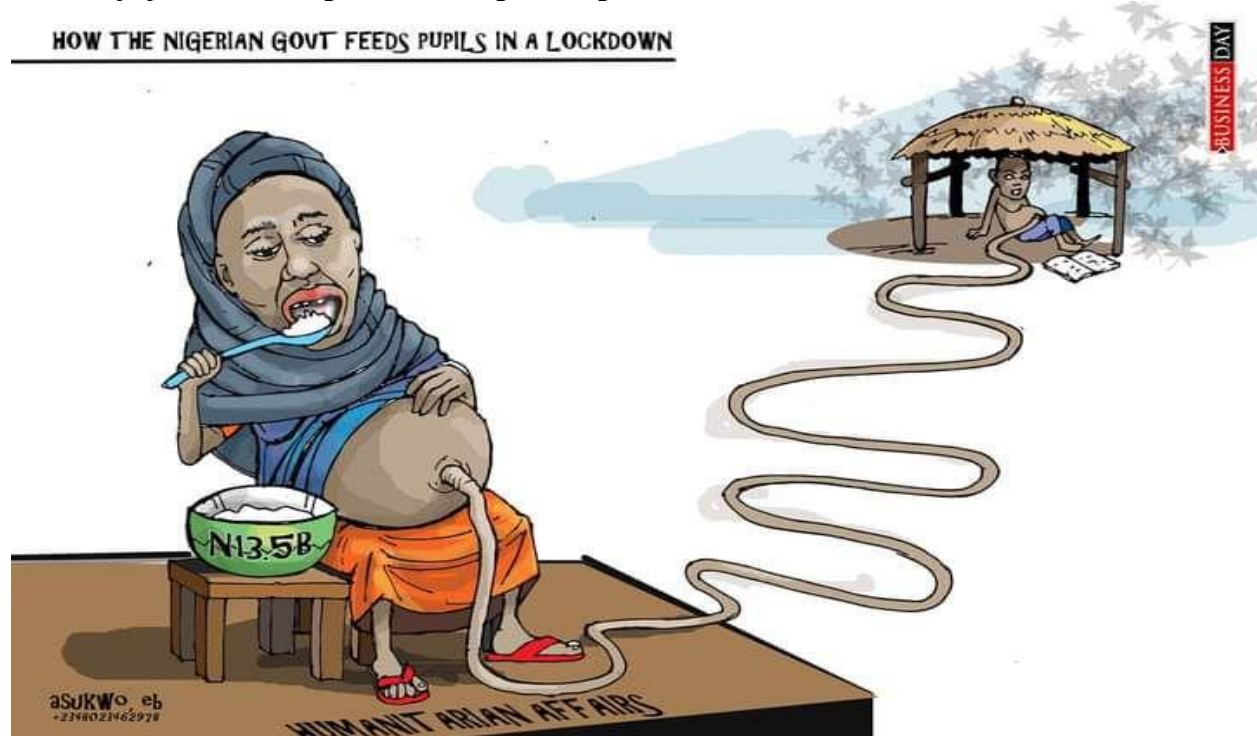


Figure 1. How the Nigerian Government Feeds Pupils in a Lockdown

Figure 1 above denotes a pregnant woman feeding from a bowl tagged N13.5B. She sits on a dais labelled Humanitarian Affairs and through an umbilical cord, feeds a child sitting under a hut. The presence of a book in front of the child indicates he is a pupil. Connotatively the cartoon is based on the much-touted Federal Government School Feeding Programme (SFP). According to the Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, a total of 13.5 billion naira was spent in feeding some school children during the Covid-19 lockdown. This claim caused a stir all over the country as the citizens wondered if

actually the children were fed, given that they were not going to school during this time. It is a coded message with the cord representing the channel through which the money was siphoned.

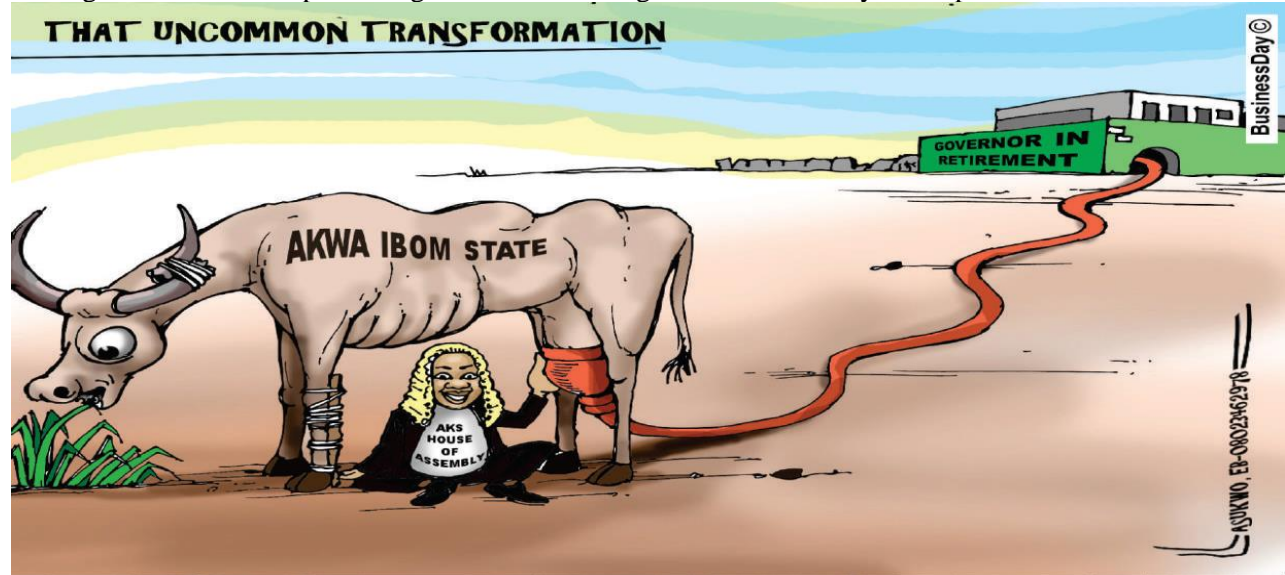


Figure 2. The Uncommon Transformation

The cartoon in Figure 2 above denotes an ill-fed cow grazing on a sparse grass. The impoverished cow is gleefully being milked by a character tagged the AKS House of Representative and transporting the milk via a pipe to a house tagged Governor in Retirement. Connotatively it is an indication of how the governors and lawmakers jointly milk the state, its impoverished state notwithstanding. Ironically, the uncommon transformation was not for the generality of the people but for personal gain. The store house is for future use while the resources are milked dry at the expense of the citizens.

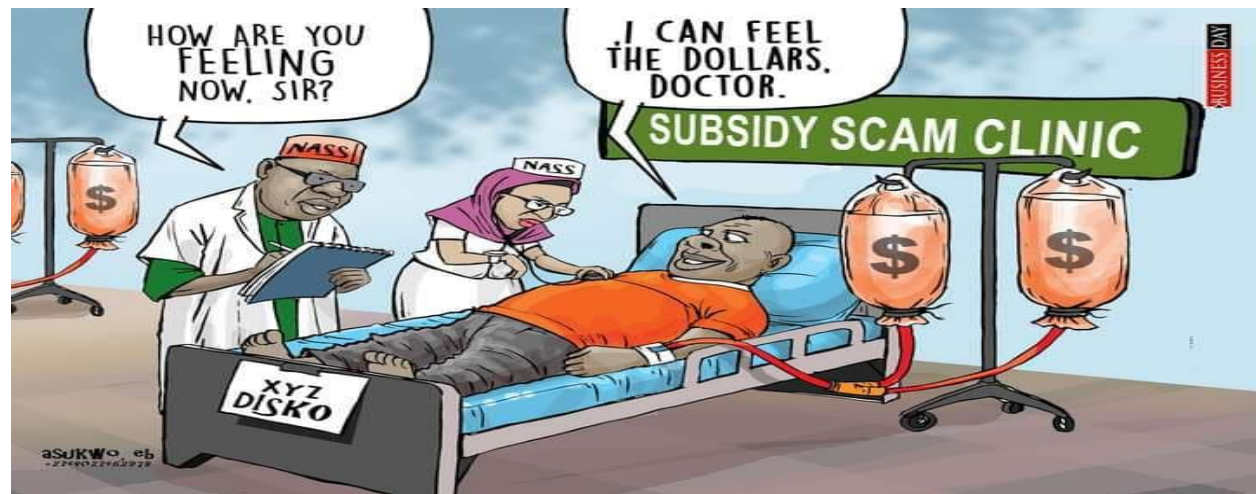


Figure 3. Subsidy Scam Clinic

The oil sector is fraught with endemic corruption. The government removed the oil subsidy to enable it utilize the subsidy funds to support productivity within the sector. The insatiable corruption embedded within the domains of the public and private sectors made the subsidy lose its essence. In figure 3 above, the law makers labelled NASS are literarily presented as medical personnel attending to the DISKO who is the patient. The doctor and nurse infusing dollars into it by way of drip while he smiles from his sick bed having gotten a life line through the infusion of dollars to his system. The cartoon connotes the dollar

pumped into the sector were made to enrich private individuals at the expense of the generality of the people. It is a scam and another avenue for siphoning funds.

Niger Delta Commission

Embezzlement is a type of crime/fraud where a person misappropriates the assets entrusted to him/her. Most times the assets are used for unintended purposes. It involves theft of resources by persons entrusted with the authority and control of such resources. Figure 8 above shows a man and a woman being flushed through the tunnel struggling to keep afloat. It depicts the former Niger Delta Commission Chairman who embezzled billions of naira meant for projects. He is shown in an embattled situation with his former deputy as they were being washed away through the tunnel.



Figure 4. Niger Delta Commission

The Security Vote

Security vote in figure 10 above depicts a military personnel fighting insurgency. The cartoon indicates how money is lavished on security personnel who in turn feed fat and are unable to carry out the operations. The officer with the bulging stomach says he is ready to 'frontally' confront the insurgents. Insecurity becomes another conduit pipe through which money is continuously siphoned by the various agents of the government



Figure 5. The Security Vote

Discussion of Findings

Aside the use of denotation and connotation to symbolically represent corruption, the cartoonist effectively utilized Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) framework to indicate the interdependence of the different modes in a communicative event. Social semiotics provides a way of analyzing the relationship between, people, places and things depicted in the cartoons. According to Halliday, any social action tends to be encoded “linguistically in the form of ideational meaning. The Ideational metafunction, is realized through the speaker’s cultural and personal experiences of the external world, his/ her thoughts, feelings and reactions to the processes taking place in this external world (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). These are expressed through the presentation of caricatures drawn from the producers’ environments. For an instance, the woman in Figure 1. captioned “How the Nigerian Government Feeds Pupils in a Lockdown” above is adorned in a hijab which is the traditional attire of the Moslem women. It easily gave up the identity of the Minister for Humanitarian affairs. Again, women are known to nurture their unborn by feeding them through the umbilical cord. The cartoon presents a pregnant doing the same. Ironically, she eats while the cord connects her, not to a fetus but to an infant who merely stares. The cord is a metaphorical presentation of the channel through which funds are siphoned by the Ministry of “Humanitarian Affairs” which she represents. Figure 3. is presented as a scam the subsidy used in injecting life line to the Dyskos ended in private pockets just as the budget for fighting insurgencies end up in private stomachs. Figure 4. Shows the Chairman of the Niger Delta Commission and the Managing Director fighting dirty in public and opting to go down the drain together.

Figure 5. shows the much touted fight against insurgency which entailed the voting of huge sums of money to curb the menace. Unfortunately, such funds are diverted into private pockets. The cartoon shows an over bloated soldier, unable to stand, fighting from a sitting position. More so, instead of the sophisticated weapons used by the terrorist, he uses a catapult, a traditional hunting tool to fight the deadly group. This makes a mockery of the whole situation. The empty cans of sardines and other canned drinks indicate the level of seriousness and genuineness in the fight. It presents the money budgeted for the fight as going into what is tagged ‘stomach infrastructure’ in a common parlance.

The Interpersonal metafunction concerned with communicating attitudes and evaluations are depicted through represented characters which bring the cartoonist into the context of the situation. The characters help in the expression of his own attitudes and judgements, while seeking to influence the attitudes, and behaviour of others. He communicates his viewpoint and perspective through the characters. Figure 1. condemns the feeding of school children programme during the lockdown. Again, Figures 2., 3. and 4. condemn the use of state resources for personal gains while Figure 5. attacks the hypocritical fight against insurgency. Many of the participants are presented as Offer contacts. They merely communicate information to the viewer as there is no direct eye contact with him/her. The participant in Figure 2. however, is realized as a Demand contact as he looks directly at the viewer as if in need of an explanation. The vectorial directionality presented by the cartoons present a reading path for the reader. The reader follows the direction of the pipes to see where the food in Figure 1. is being channeled. Same are applicable to the pipe in Figure 2. and the flow of the drip in Figure 3. Vectors are also formed by the hands of the participants in Figure 4. as they engage in a scuffle. The catapult in Figure 5. channels the viewer's attention to the soldier's target. Many of the participants are symbolic representations. They are used to signify one form of corruption or the other. All the participants are frontally presented showing equal power relations with the viewer.

The textual metafunction, is realized through the organization of language into a coherent text. Images can be read to convey meanings. The lacing of the elements together helps in their reading. Information value is realised through the placing of the elements within the frame. The elements placed at the left are taken as given and as old information while the ones placed at the right are taken as new information. This therefore presents a reading path of from left to right. For instance, image reading is realised through the empty sardine tins which show the officer to have been enjoying himself, eating gluttonously rather than engaging in the on-going fight against insurgency. In a related development, image reading was also achieved in the scuffle between the Minister for Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and his assistant in Figure 4. They are seen fighting dirty in murky waters of corruption after embezzling public funds. Image reading is in other words known as picture speak as the obvious smile on the AKS Representative shows while he milks dry a malnourished cow in Figure 2. Figure 3 reveals the smile of satisfaction from the Dyskos as the dollars are deposited in their system via a drip. The other agent of corruption is NASS symbolically represented by the nurse and doctor abating crime. The elements within the frames in the analysed cartoons are connected in one way or the other. Like a narrative, the frames equally provide a reading path for the cartoons.

Saliency is realized also through the depiction of the soldier's tommy, as he 'frontally confronts the enemy'. His poise shows lack of commitment in the fight against the enemy. Saliency is also realized by foregrounding the cords in the various cartoons, thereby attracting the viewer's attention. On the other hand, the linguistic accompaniments help in driving the message home. In figure three for instance, the doctor asks the patient how he feels and his response shows the contentment in spite of his lying on a hospital bed. His contentment being from the dollars rolling into his pocket. In Figure 5., the soldier announces his state of preparedness for the battle. His utterance confirms his frontal readiness. The artist employed the technique of labelling in some of the analysed cartoons. He also used speech balloons which helped in reading the thoughts of the represented characters. The accompanying texts help in elaborating the presented viewpoints by making the pictures more distinct. This, therefore, shows the indispensability of both the verbal and visual modes in a communicative event.

Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated how cartoons have been used to depict the level of sleaze in the Nigeria socio-political terrain. It shows some of the avenues through which individuals and agencies siphon funds from government's coffers. Though cartoons are presented from the humorous perspective, they serve as social comments, representing the cartoonist's viewpoint as he comments on the social malaise. Noting that corruption is the bane of many countries as it is the major cause of underdevelopment, the cartoonist creates

awareness, condemns the social evil while entertaining viewers. The multimodal analytical framework proved adequate for the analysis as it ensured that all facets of the data are treated adequately. The research has proved the cartoon genre a formidable force in the fight against corruption, especially during repressive regimes. The study recommends a research on the much touted fight against corruption by the government to ascertain the level of sincerity in it.

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