A Comparative Multimodal Stylistics Analysis of Selected Newspapers Cartoons

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Abstract

This study focuses on the comparative multimodal stylistic analysis of selected newspapers cartoons. A comparative study of newspapers cartoon juxtaposes two or more newspaper cartoon brands. Multimodality entails the mode(s) employed in a cartoon to portray meaning. The data for the study comprises ten cartoons selected through the purposive random sampling technique between 2020 and 2021 from *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* newspapers respectively. Data were analysed using Halliday's meta-function of language in his Systemic Functional Grammar. It was discovered that framing, salience and linking layout are handy analytical tools in carrying out a multimodal analysis; each brand communicates its thoughts in a unique way with salient similarities and it was discovered that newspaper cartoons also lament the current tragic occurrence in society. This study concludes that visual mode is the life-blood of a newspaper cartoon while the verbal mode only complements cartoon but cannot stand alone as a newspaper cartoon.

Keywords: Multimodality, Multimodal stylistics, Newspapers' cartoons, Comparative analysis.

Introduction

Multimodality involves the communication between verbal and visual components in various discourses. A painting represents a form of communication between the artist and the viewer in terms of colours, shades, objects, and the title. The visual representation of communication of a cartoon is equally capable as a tool of interaction between the speaker and the reader (i.e., the cartoonist and the viewer). Barcelo's (2015) view on multimodality is that 'meaning does not depend on the written text, but on reading the different modes proposed by the author and the relationship between them to make sense of the story" (p.13). According Olorunsogo (2017, p.79), in explaining idea of Kress (2010) about the mode, Barcelo rephrased that a mode is "a socially and culturally shaped resource for meaning" (2015). He also claims that "different modes offer different potentials for making meaning" (Barcelo, 2015). This includes typography, images, colour, etc. Advances in technology and cultural developments over the last few decades have led to an increased population of multimodal texts (McIntyre & Busse, 2010, p.433). It is pertinent to note that due to technological advancement, several scholars have added to the body of knowledge by analysing multimodal texts. Shaza et al. (2020) carried out a study on pictorial multimodal analysis of selected paintings of Salvador Dali and point out how multimodality can be used to decode the verbal and visual dimensions a painting holds. This is applicable to a multimodal stylistic analysis as verbal and visual modes synchronize to bring meaning to limelight.

Multimodal stylistics is a field that covers a wider range of communication whereby communication is not restricted to the verbal modes such as italics, boldface, majuscules (i.e., capital letters) but includes visual modes such as layout, colour, typography, images, framing, etc. The aim of multimodal stylistics is to develop as systematic descriptive 'grammars' of all semiotic modes as those already developed for the mode of wording (i.e., the lexical and grammatical aspects of verbal language). In addition to wording, the semiotic modes most prominently involved in literary meaning-making are those of typography, layouts and visual images (Norgaard, Busse and Montoro, 2010). Typography in a broader sense focuses on the meaning-making potential of the visual projection of verbal communication. Norgaard, Busse and Montoro (2010)

opine that in this connection, the meanings created by various typographic features such as the use of italics, boldface and majuscules (i.e., capital letters) as well as different typefaces and of lettering in different colours are considered and systemised.

A cartoon is a drawing and a symbol that make satirical, witty, or humorous point (Lee & Goguen, 2003). It is mainly used by cartoonists to mock or abuse individuals, organizations or even institutions. Cartoons are also used to project current happenings, occasions, events, or occurrences (HOEO) affecting the society at large. For instance, a war situation portrayed in a cartoon is far from depicting humour or mockery. It, however, laments the most painful situation of society. Bitner (2003, p. 306) conceptualises cartoon as "comic strip characters that represent observable characters in a society." Osho (2008, p. 238) explains that cartoons are messages meant to cause laughter, messages that are humorous in representation. Abdulla, Ali and Abdullah (2014, p. 79) defines cartoons as "…pictorial representations that portray 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. This is the cognitive process through which metaphors convey meanings.

In cartoons, meaning and humour are produced either via two semiotic modes, the verbal and the visual, or solely via the visual mode. Due to their condensed form and to the interaction between language and image, cartoons are often considered to be a direct and easy to process means of communicating a message (Tsakona, 2009). In other words, meaning can be fully derived from images without a verbal text. There are many cartoons that do not contain written language with adequate symbols that portray the cartoonist' intent to the public.

According to Emi and Obun-Andy (2017), newspaper cartoon themes are usually based on news materials, which from the context of mass communication, may require some knowledge of current affairs for their understanding. The making of a newspaper cartoon is projected from current news in two ways. It could be by selecting a news excerpt to work with. A typical example can be seen in *The Nation* cartoons. In this case, the news excerpt is attached to the cartoon. At the same time the cartoon serves as a response to the news excerpt. On the other hand, cartoonists merely choose to come up with their pieces concerning HOEO in the society.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Halliday's meta-function in his Systemic Functional Grammar in relation to functional stylistics. Functional stylistics is concerned with the relationship between the forms of language as a system and the context or situation of its production, as well as the social, cultural and political (what we may collectively call ideological) factors that impact upon its construction and reception. Halliday's meta-function comprises the ideational function of language, the interpersonal function of language and the textual function of language. Ideational meaning is concerned with how people represent what they experience in the world. In language, this can be found in grammatical choices and the different kinds of processes used to describe experience, or in the lexicon. Interpersonal meaning refers to social interaction, how a writer or speaker positions themselves with regard to a subject or to the reader/addressee. Textual meaning is concerned with how meaning is organized into a coherent text, and how the text relates to its context. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, pp.43-118) build on Halliday's meta-function whereby visual images construct ideational meaning through the participants, processes and circumstances. Interpersonal meaning is created by the positioning of the viewer and is analysed in terms of what Kress and van Leeuwen call gaze, size of frame/social distance, perspective and visual modality (pp. 119-80). Compositional meaning, in turn is realized through information structure, linking, framing and salience (pp. 181-229 as cited in Norgaard et al, 2010).

Multimodality

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p.183) define multimodal "as that which integrates more than one semiotic mode in communicative functions". Modes can potentially play a role in creating meaning, and the term 'mode' according to Jewith (2009, p. 7) refers to "semiotic resources for making meaning that are employed in a culture – such as image, writing, gesture, gaze, speech, posture". So, we can see that there is a meaning behind every mode and multimodality mainly focuses on the study of the interrelationships between various communicative modes, no matter whether they are words or image, visual or auditory (Ihidero & Suleiman-Shika, 2019). "Multimodality is a part of our everyday life, any conversation we have, consists of gesture, intonation and language" (Gibbons, 2011).

Mode

A mode is a means of communicating. Kristin, Arola, Jennifer and Cheryl (2014. p.2) define mode "as an outcome of the cultural shaping of material through its use in daily social interaction"(p.2) and they also identify five types of mode in their book, *Writer/Designer: A Guide to Making Multimodal Projects*. When a given text makes use of more than one mode, the text can be characterised as multimodal. Most texts are multimodal – we make sense out of their messages through decoding the different modes of communication that they employ.

Types of Mode

Kristin et al. (2014 p.2) classify mode into the following:

Visual Mode

The visual mode refers to images and characters that are visible to the eyes. This mode includes images, video, color, visual layout, design, font, size, formatting, symbols, visual data (charts, graphs), animation (like gifs) layout, style, size and perspective. The visual mode is used in order to instruct, persuade, entertain, represent feelings or etc. The visual mode helps writers pass meaning in a way that can be seen by the audience. Sometimes people believe what they see, and visual mode can be helpful.

Aural Mode

The aural mode is focused on sound including, but not limited to, music, sound effects, ambient noises, silence, and tone of voice in spoken language, volume of sound, emphasis, and accent. An example of an aural mode — the recording of a public speech, a radio address, or a podcast.

Gestural Mode

The gestural mode refers to the way movement is expounded. Facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, and interaction between people are all gestural modes. This has always been important in face-to-face conversations and in theater. The gestural mode works with linguistic, visual, aural, and sometimes even spatial modes in order to create more detail and communicate better to the reader or consumer of the gestural text.

Linguistic (or Alphabetic)

The linguistic mode refers to words that are written or spoken. The mode includes word choice, the delivery of written or spoken text, the organization of words into sentences and paragraphs, and the development and coherence of words and ideas. Linguistic is probably the most used mode because it can be both read and heard on both paper and audio. The linguistic mode is the best way to express details, this can be inform of emails, text messages, academic essays, and the automated voice we hear when on hold with customer service use the linguistic/alphabetic mode since they rely on words to create meaning.

Methodology

The data for this analysis are sourced from *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* in order to achieve a comparative analysis. A total of ten cartoons were carefully selected to reflect major HOEOs and periods in the Nigerian society by purposive random sampling; three from *The Punch*, four from *The Nation* and three from *The Guardian* respectively. The data were analysed using Halliday's meta-function, which combines the verbal modes and visual modes in deriving meaning from the cartoons. Hence, the aim of this study is to comparatively analyse selected newspaper cartoons. The objectives of this study are to: (i) explore the multimodal stylistics of newspaper cartoons; (ii) identify verbal and visual modes embedded in the newspaper cartoons; and (iii) investigate the peculiarity of the three newspaper brands.

Data Analysis and Discussion

A total of ten cartoons have been selected through the purposive random sampling technique. In the analysis, cartoons 1, 2 and 3 are got from *The Punch*; cartoons 4, 5, 6 and 7 are got from *The Nation*, while cartoons 8, 9 and 10 are got from *The* Guardian.
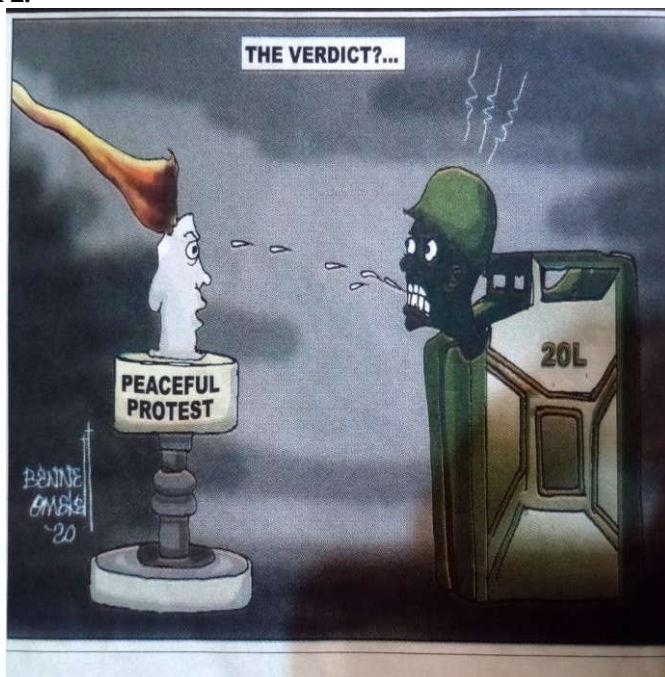
Cartoon 1:

The cartoon above dated October 14, 2020 and was extracted from *The Punch*. In these images, Muhammadu Buhari, a Police Inspector and the masses are seen. The masses display placards written boldly on them: "UPROOT!", "UPROOT THE TREE!", "ROOT OUT THE TREE", "DON'T TRIM, ROOT OUT!" Buhari can be seen carrying a machete in his hand which points to the fallen branch of the tree, he had just finished cutting the branch of the tree seen on the ground. The tree is painted in green, yellow and blue. These three colours are the colours of the Nigerian Police Force. On top of the tree and the fallen tree branch are two Nigerian police caps that carry the Nigerian Coat of Arms' badge which authenticates its originality. The cut-down branch of the tree displays skulls of human beings in their numbers. These skulls symbolize death and lifelessness. The display of skulls goes beyond the physical death. It also depicts the number of persons that have been victimised or abused by the Nigerian police emotionally, financially, and otherwise. It symbolises police brutality. The standing rooted tree displays not just skulls tied to the police cap but also bags of money and bundles of money attached carefully to the cap. The bags and bundles of money symbolize the corrupt nature of the Nigerian Police. Police officers in Nigeria are commonly known for

collecting bribes which defies the original essence of the force: to safeguard lives and properties, and ensure peace in the country. Standing behind Muhammadu Buhari is a Police Inspector whose countenance displays dissatisfaction at the on-going activity.

Admittedly, the situation of Nigeria, the police force, and the masses grievances during the "ENDSARS" protests has been generously expressed with the images. The citizens of Nigeria at this period clamoured that the police force, especially the SARS Unit, should be scrapped. This was due to the brutality of the police, abusing power, exploiting citizens, and falsely accusing innocent citizens for the crimes they did not commit (Omoera & Guanah, 2023). As a result, angry youths burnt down police stations, broke into warehouses, burnt down fleets of cars, etc., where the few of them engaged in incessant peaceful protests. In-between these demonstrations, the president promised to scrap SARS and incorporate SWAT. In response, the citizens of Nigeria demanded that SWAT should also be scrapped. This particular incidence is what we have in the cartoon above.
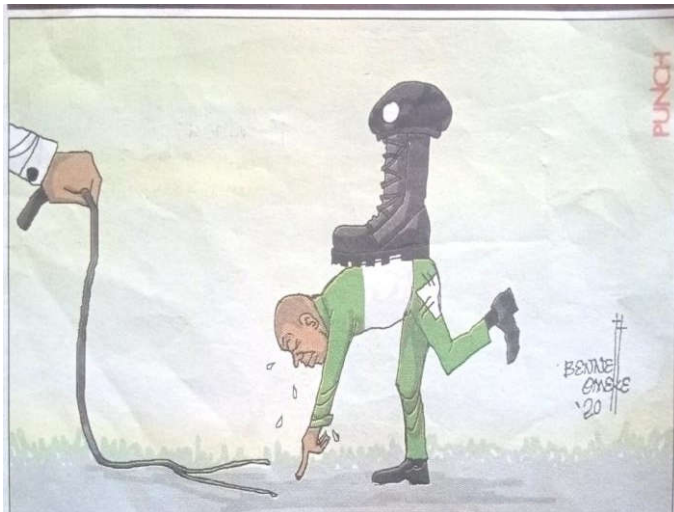
Cartoon 2:

This cartoon contains the image of a burning candle in the form of a human being. The candle is standing on a stable surface. Written beside the stable surface is "PEACEFUL PROTEST". Right in front of the burning candle is a green 20 litres gallon of petrol with a human head attached to it, spray out the content of the gallon ceaselessly. In response, the candle flame burns in the opposite direction of the gallon in an attempt to avoid the flammable substance directly aiming at it. The petrol symbolises torrents of gunshot sprays. This cartoon is got from *The Punch* dated October 26, 2020. This period in the history of Nigeria was just after the Lekki tollgate massacre that occurred on October 20, 2020. The image of the cartoon gives an overview of the scenario that occurred at Lekki tollgate that very evening. The burning candle represents the Nigerian youth on the tollgate that faithful day; whereas the 20 litres of petrol symbolise the soldiers that interrupted the peaceful protest with shooting spree of sophisticated weapons.

In addition, written on top of the cartoon is "THE VERDICT..." The Nigerian government chose to massacre innocent Nigerian youths engaging in a peaceful protest to put an end to the protest nationwide. The Nigerian army that are meant to protect the Nigerian citizens mischievously soiled the ground with the blood of the peaceful protesters who only held unto the Nigeria flag as their defence weapon. Hence, the verdict enacted by the Nigerian government was cruel and brutal.

Cartoon 3:

This cartoon depicts Nigerian citizens languishing under the brutality of the Nigerian police. The cartoon is derived from *The Punch* dated October 29, 2020. This cartoon contains the image of a man observing a punishment popularly known as "pick-pin" in Nigeria. Noticeably, the colours of the dress he puts on are green, white and green. This is the colour of the Nigerian flag. The green symbolises nature (natural wealth) whereas the white symbolises peace and unity. As the man is bent facing the floor in punishment, there is a police boot with a police cap placed on the shoe sitting comfortably on his back while he is obviously experiencing inconvenience. There is an additional image of a man holding a "koboko" cane. Apparently, this is the police officer that has subjected the man to the excruciating punishment.

Furthermore, the scenario portrayed with the images is the brutality and victimization melted on the Nigerian citizens by the Nigerian Police Force. As seen in the cartoon the man sheds uncontrollable tears while he observes the gruesome punishment. This also can be likened to Nigerian citizens. They suffer the excruciating pain of the police brutality but cannot help the situation other than shed uncontrollable tears.

Cartoon 4:

The cartoon above contains images of two men. A man is sighted reading a newspaper written on the front page, "THREE IN TEN NIGERIANS BELIEVE THEY'RE IMMUNE TO COVID-19 --- POLL", whereas the second man is a passer-by who caught the glimpse of the newspaper front page and said, "…30% STARK ILLITERATES!". The cartoon is extracted from *The Nation* dated June 17, 2020. This was at the period that the whole world experienced a pandemic called Covid-19 (coronavirus). As a result of the pandemic, lockdown was imposed by the Federal government to curb the spread of the virus. People were compelled to stop going to work and school, stay indoors, and so on. Measures were put in place to apprehend defaulters. However, some people still had the notion that they are immune to Covid-19. Perhaps, this is as a result of ignorance and lack of understanding (Omoera & Ogoke, 2021). Furthermore, the man reading the newspaper is wearing a black shirt. The second man also puts on black attire from head to toe. This symbolises mourning and bereavement. Both men have had people very close to them die of the Covid-19. As such they are not ignorant like the 30% that ignorantly believe that they are immune to the virus.

Cartoon 5:
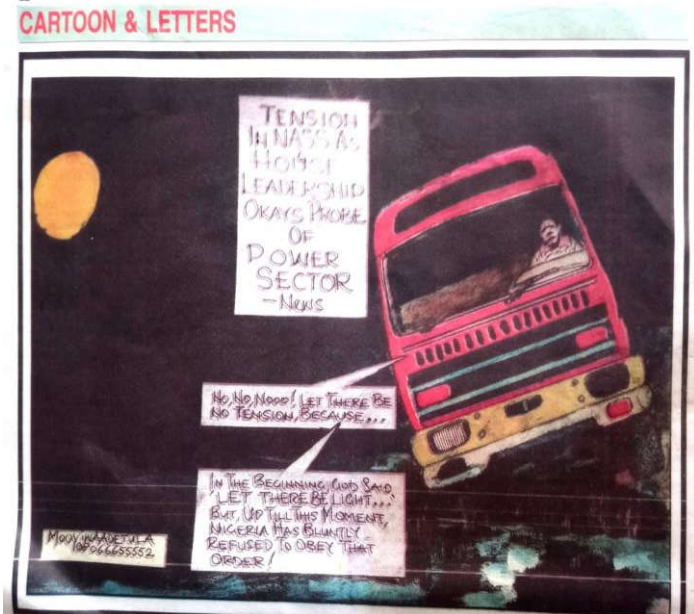
This cartoon is a mockery of the epileptic situation of power supply in the country. It was drawn from *The Nation* dated June 16, 2020. Boldly written is a news excerpt which reads, "TENSION IN NASS AS HOUSE LEADERSHIP OKAYS PROBE OF POWER SECTOR --- NEWS". The bus in the cartoon tilts to one side of the road while the tyre in the other side of the bus is raised above the ground. The bus is mainly painted in red colour which symbolises danger.

Apparently, the bus is travelling in the dark hours of the day in a gloomy environment that lacks adequate illumination. As such, there is higher tendency that the bus could eventually have an accident. From the text, the bus driver exclaims, "NO, NO, NOOO! LET THERE BE NO TENSION, BECAUSE…" he continues, "IN THE BEGINNING, GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT… BUT, UP TILL THIS MOMENT, NIGERIA HAS BLUNTLY REFUSED TO OBEY THAT ORDER!" Therefore, the image symbolises the epileptic power supply situation of Nigeria. The bus driver makes an allusion to the Bible, "IN THE BEGINNING, GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT…" to satirize the poor power supply in the country. He is unhappy that he is traveling in the dark and may have an accident owing to lack of illumination.
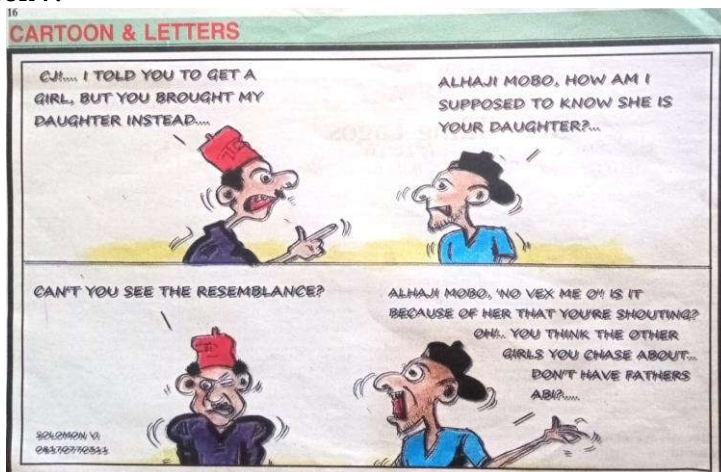
Cartoon 6:

The cartoon above is extracted from *The Nation* dated June 15, 2020. Two different men are seen drinking themselves to stupor. The first man wore an *agbádá*, a traditional cap and a shoe. He sips his drink gently in such manner that depicts he is a man of affluence and influence. He holds a pen in his left hand and wine in his right hand. This wealthy man symbolises the corrupt leaders and politicians in the country who are widely known for embezzling funds and mismanaging resources. They use pen to falsify records and direct national funds to their pocket. Carefully arranged before him are bags filled with bundles of money tagged "TREASURY LOOT" twice. He says, "SO FAR, SO GOOD… MY CONSTITUENCY HAS NOT COMPLAINED!" He is a constituency chairman who has amassed the wealth and resources allotted to his community by the government for public development and social amenities.

On the other hand, the second man is a thug. He wore a face cap turned to the opposite direction, a shirt with rolled-up sleeve, trouser and a boot. While he gulps the alcoholic drink in his left hand, he carries a riffle in his right hand. He is reclining on bags filled with bundles of money tagged, "RANSOM". He symbolizes thugs, kidnappers that kidnap people and demand for huge ransom to foster the release of their captives. He says, "SO FAR, SO GOOD… MY TARGETS HAVE COOPERATED". Admittedly, kidnappers would most likely kill their captives when the ransom is not paid duly.
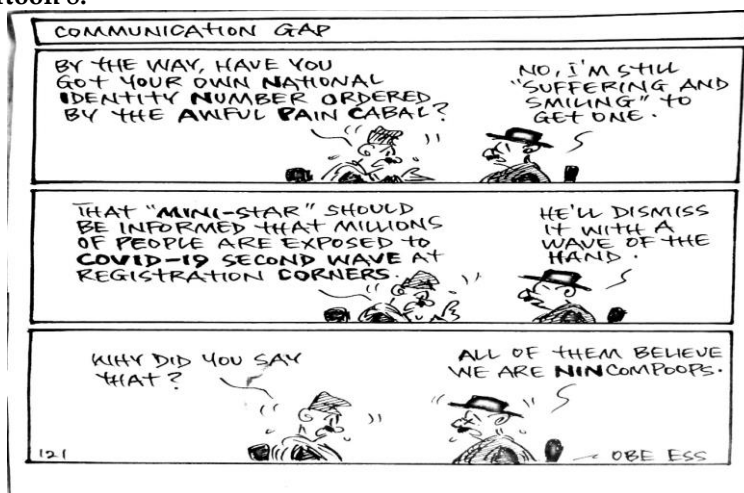
Cartoon 7:

This cartoon criticises the act of womanising and ritual killings in the Nigerian society. It was got from *The Nation* dated November 27, 2020. The image presents a conversation between two men as follows; "CJ... I TOLD YOU TO GET A GIRL, BUT YO BROUGHT MY DAUGHTER INSTEAD…", "ALHAJI MOBO, HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW SHE IS YOUR DAUGHTER...?", "CAN'T YOU SEE THE RESEMBLANCE?", "ALHAJI MOBO, 'NO VEX ME O! YOU THINK THE OTHER GIRLS YOU CHASE ABOUT… DON'T HAVE FATHERS ABI...?" Alhaji Mobo is a man of influence and affluence, whereas "CJ" is a thug who gets paid to get ladies for Alhaji Mobo. Most likely, Alhaji will pay the girls to have sex with them. Alhaji could also use the girls for *money ritual* as the lifeblood of the source of his wealth.

Furthermore, a popular saying goes, "those who live in a glass house do not throw stones". Also a Yoruba proverb says, "If one throws a stone in the market place, it may hit one's family member". Alhaji is fond of collecting girls from CJ to suite his uncultured needs, forgetting that he has a daughter whose fate could be tied to his irresponsible deeds. He is also oblivious that those girls have fathers who want the best for their daughters, the same way he wants the best for his own daughter. Hence, the image and texts depict that the society frowns at the act of womanising and kicks against ritual killings.

Cartoon 8:

This cartoon was extracted from *The Guardian* dated January 6, 2021. It contains two men having a conversation about NIN - National Identification Number. The cartoonist stylishly associates NIN to the ruling party in Nigeria APC "…BY THE **A**WFUL **P**AIN **C**ABAL?" At the same time awful pain cabal symbolises Muhammadu Buhari, the then President of Nigeria. The cartoonist plays with other words like "**MINI-STAR**" for minister and "**NIN**COMPOOPS." This choice of diction depicts the difficulty encountered by Nigerians in getting their National Identification Number as the second wave of Covid-19 looms.

Cartoon 9:
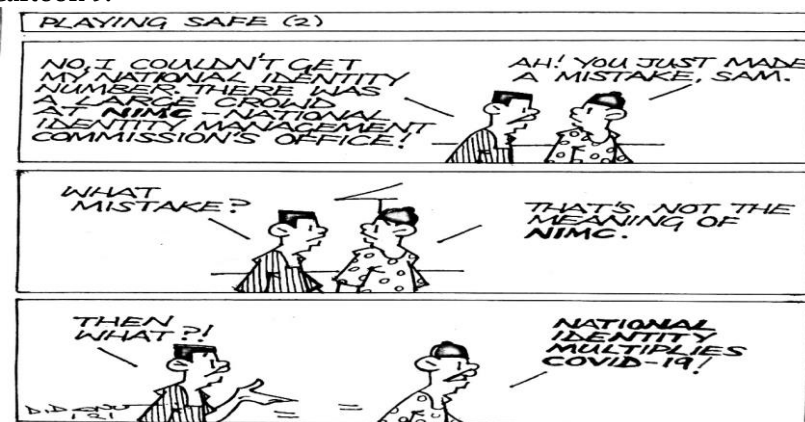
This cartoon was derived from *The Guardian* dated January 7, 2021. It is like a continuation of the previous cartoon as it is hinged on getting the National Identification Number (NIN). This cartoon stylishly portrays the difficulty in getting NIN in a post-Covid-19 society where the second wave lingers. Noticeably, the cartoonist deliberately plays with coinages in order to inform the readers. "NIMC" stands for National Identity Management Commission; the cartoonist portrays it as "National Identity Multiples Covid-19". Apart from being subjected to the stress of standing on endless queue countless times, they are also exposed to contracting the virus.

Cartoon 10:

The cartoon above was sourced from *The Guardian* dated January 13, 2021. The cartoonist successfully depicts the situation of the post-presidential election in America. From the text "**WINNER"** represents Joe Biden while "**LOSER"** represents Donald Trump. "**DOGS"** and "**BABOONS"** symbolize the American corps. "**TRUMPING"** also symbolises Donald Trump, the former American president.

Quality of Identified Features

Identified Features	*Guardian*	*Nation*	*Punch*
Colour		***	***
Images	***	***	***
Emotion Display	*	**	***
Symbolism	**	*	***
Explicit Meaning/Message	**	**	***
Verbal Language	***	**	*
Personification			***
Hyperbole	**	*	***
Rhetorical Question		***	**
Capitalisation	***	***	***
(Satirical) Acronym	***		
Bold Text	***	**	**
Satire	***	***	***
Humour	**	***	*
Ellipses	**	***	*

Cartoon Title/Theme	***	*	**
News Excerpt/Related	***	***	***
Male Gender Representation	***	***	***
Biblical Allusion		**	
Idiomatic Expression		**	

(*) is used to indicate the presence of a feature.

Findings

Verbal mode is simply written texts (alphabets, punctuation, capitalisation, etc.); while visual modes include images, colour, symbols, typography, etc. Newspaper cartoons in general mirror particular features peculiar to cartoon as a verbal mode and visual mode of communication. Some of these key features are discovered in the selected cartoon brands. These include framing, salience and layout. Framing is concerned with the compositionality of a cartoon. It looks into the modes that a cartoon is made of, either verbal mode and visual mode or whether a carton consists of visual modes only. It is notable from the selected data that *The Punch* cartoon is framed with visual and verbal modes. However, the visual mode is salient because at times the cartoons from this newspaper are presented in just the visual mode whereas *The Nation* is framed with visual and verbal modes. Here, the visual mode is also salient. On the other hand, *The Guardian* is framed with verbal modes and images (visual mode) that lack any form of colour. It is framed in black and white and the verbal mode is salient.

The layout of each newspaper cartoons is remarkable. The layout feature of a cartoon puts into consideration the relationship that exists between the verbal and visual modes of cartoon. It looks at how both modes linkup to portray meaning. Linking in cartoon comes in two ways. The visual modes can either illustrate the verbal mode (written text) or the visual mode can give additional meaning to the cartoon. From the selected data, visual modes in *The Punch* clearly illustrates the verbal mode, visual modes in *The Guardian* gives additional meaning to the cartoon, while visual modes in *The Nation* perform both linking functions; they illustrate the verbal modes and give additional meaning to the cartoon in other cases.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a multimodal approach to explore stylistics in three newspaper cartoon brands. The analysis of these cartoons shows that newspaper cartoons cannot exist without a visual mode; visual mode is the life-blood of cartoon. Verbal mode can only complement visual mode as verbal mode cannot by itself constitute a newspaper cartoon. Each brand communicates its thoughts in a unique way with salient similarities. Newspaper cartoons as tool of promoting change in society is seen as the cartoons laugh at, lament, and satirize social ills.

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