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ANALYSIS OF TEXT-IMAGE RELATIONSHIP IN SELECTED ONLINE NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER CARTOONS ON COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

The study conducted an analysis of text-image relationship in selected on-line Nigeria Newspaper cartoons, using Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) developed by (Djonov, 2005 and O'Halloran, 2008) as approach to the COVID 19 cartoons. A descriptive and discursive approach were adopted for the study. The corpus of the study consisted 6 (Six) online COVID-19 cartoons which were drawn from the following 3 (Three) online National Newspapers in Nigeria: The Punch, The Iniquere and The Niche, published from the period of March, 2020 and December, 2020. The findings of the study revealed that, COVID 19 cartoons rely heavily on the interplay between images and words specific language use especially caricature as a tool to communicate social and political messages. Thus, through creative combination of images and words, COVID 19 cartoons have the potentials of entertaining and informing the public on current issues. The study therefore recommended that, the use of irony by using words or pictures to describe the opposite of what is such as what should be in COVID 19 cartoons should also be investigated.

Keywords: *Text-Image, Covid-19, Cartoon, Multimodal and Discourse.*

Introduction

The wave of COVID-19 came to Nigeria like it did everywhere in the world and on the 21st of March the land borders were closed following travel bans from countries that were experiencing high numbers of cases of COVID-19 infection. With the border shut, Lagos and other states began state-wide lock-down, and this was re-

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. S. T. Addo [GHANA]

emphasized by the President Muhammadu Buhari on the 29th of March, 2020, in his nationwide broadcast. Some states (Lagos, Abuja, Ogun States) were placed on total lock-down as these states had more cases of infected persons. While the country and different states were under lock-down, the government continued her response to COVID-19.

As scientists and health professionals search for solutions to COVID-19, cartoons were used to sensitize people to the effects of the virus. Cartoonists have the important role of selective dissemination of COVID-19–related information and resources to the public through various virtual media channels available to them, especially, on-line Nigerian newspapers (Okike, 2020). Cartoons of the COVID-19 pandemic are valuable contributions to the outbreak narrative and to the evolving visual culture of the contagion. They can help us collectively process and understand this moment. The visual documentation of the pandemic in cartoons helps demystify the invisibility of contagion, creates personal narratives about the pandemic, provides public health education, and can create a sense of solidarity around shared emotions and experiences resulting from the disruptions to social interactions, integrity, and communal boundaries (Fareeha, Tanveer, Amna, & Zainab, 2020).

From methodological perspectives, cartoons provide useful source of data that enable researchers using social discourse to study social practices (Sani, Iro, *et al.,* 2021). Therefore, given the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic elements contained in the COVID-19 cartoon texts, cartoons could be used to provide potent linguistic input especially to English as a second language (ESL).

However, the Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) involves developing theoretical and practical approaches for analyzing written, printed and electronic texts, three-dimensional sites and other realms of activity where semiotic resources (e.g. spoken and written language, visual imagery, mathematical symbolism, sculpture, architecture, gesture and other physiological modes) combine to make meaning. The Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) approach is concerned with the meaning potential of semiotic resources distributed across strata (i.e. context, discourse semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology, and typography/graphology) and the theory/analysis of the integrative meaning of semiotic choices in multimodal discourse. The Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) approach has led to the study of the functionality of language, visual images and mathematical symbolism in mathematical discourse, and theorization of how linguistic, visual and mathematical symbolic choices combine to construct reality in ways which extend beyond what is possible using linguistic resources alone (O'Halloran, 2005,

2007a, 2007b). In addition, Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) provides a trans-disciplinary bridge across traditionally distinct fields of study. The approach holds much promise for conceptualizing and analyzing multimodal semiosis.

Statement of the Problem

One of the linguistic features of a cartoon is the problem of an adequate interpretation and contextualization of its verbal component, which is particularly acute, primarily due to the reason that the values of verbal and iconic (visual) components are not simply formed, but closely intertwined (Anisimova, 2003: 11; Mazid, 2008:437; and Lent, 2000). However, COVID-19 cartoons are polysemous in nature, therefore, there is need to pay close attention to both verbal and visual details contained in each cartoon in order to provide exhaustive or explicit analysis and interpretation of messages depicted in the COVID-19 cartoons. Also, little attention has been given to the Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) of COVID-19 cartoons in Nigeria. These are some of the reasons that inform the need to carry out a Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) of COVID-19 cartoons in selected on-line Nigerian newspapers which will bring an analytical understanding of COVID-19 cartoon genre which has become a vital medium of communication in diverse social contexts.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to conduct a text image relationship in selected online Nigerian newspaper cartoons on COVID 19 pandemic. Specifically, this study seeks to:

i. Describe text image relationship in Nigerian newspaper cartoons on COVID 19 pandemic.

Research Question

i. What is the text image relationship in Nigerian newspaper cartoons on COVID 19 pandemic?

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive and discursive approach were adopted for this study. Therefore, being a corpus-based analysis, the selected COVID 19 cartoons texts were presented, analysed and discussed. COVID 19 cartoons form the corpus of the study. As many as 8 (Eight) COVID 19 cartoons were excerpted from the following online Nigerian dailies: *The Punch, The Niche magazine and The Iniquirer* Newspapers during the period March, 2020 to

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. S. T. Addo [GHANA]

December, 2020, being the newspapers that featured the works of cartoonists under study in this period. COVID-19 cartoons in Nigerian newspapers are readily available on the internet and in the library and the researcher has access to them. The analysis of the data was informed by Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) approach, developed by (Djonov, 2005 and O'Halloran, 2008) was adopted for this study. It is an approach to analysing discourse in the social semiotic tradition. Social semiotics is sometimes used in a broad sense to refer to the study of semiotics which is social (rather than, for example, structural) in orientation. In this study, however, its meaning is more closely tied to the work of Halliday and those who have worked with his social-semiotic theory, a theory that is also known as systemic functional theory.

Analysis of Text Image Relationship in Nigerian Newspaper Cartoons on COVID 19 Pandemic

An image is both a medium and modality, while a text is a medium for presenting the modality of natural language through reading. This implies that any form of communication remains a primary modality which has multiple faculties across the auditory media such as spoken language and visual media (written language/graphics), the tactile media as Braille, and Kinetic media as sign or gesture language. According to Ngamsa (2012), text is a message structure or trace message that has integrity socially. While the discourse refers to the social process in which the text exists. This means that text is a material object produced in discourse.

Visual discourse analysis is the primary language of the four principles that work in discourse analysis. First, the visual language is reflective. It has the capacity to create and reflect the context in which it was a visual language, and reflect the reality of where it is. Furthermore, the visual language works at the level where the reader recognizes the language context. That is, visual texts created to communicate the idea of even having meaning (intertextuality) wider that the written language. Second, the language allows interpretation in a particular context and based on previous experience. Meaning will be negotiated with the sign makers and their interaction with the text and other conversations. Third, the language consists of many different social languages. Every social language uses a different tool or media that will be used to communicate or convey the desired message. And finally, there is the unit of analysis in visual texts, including structural semantic, artistic, tactile (touch or palpation), and visual. Texts alone, for instance, are not enough to express certain things in a cartoon; they have to be accompanied by gestures and facial expressions. This notion is, in a sense, a great

motivation for text image relationship studies. For cartoons, texts alone possess little capacity in expressing the cartoonist's genius. There is therefore, the need to employ images.

FIGURE 1: I SAID… WE'RE RESTRICTING INTER-PROVINCIAL TRAVEL TO CONTROL THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS!



The image depicts four participants. A man standing at the checkpoint, is a Nigerian policeman on duty, holding a gun, representing the security agencies involved in enforcing the lockdown order. The other three participants sitting inside the bus, represent the people who embark on a journey. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist therefore, agrees with the position that, control measures related to international travel, including border closures, travel restrictions, inter-provincial travel, screening at borders and quarantine the travelers should be implemented in order to halt the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 2: I THINK COVID WILL AFFECT THE ELECTIONS AFTER ALL.



The image depicts a man who dressed in suit, with red tie, carrying a basket round his neck, containing a deadly virus. There is another image of the Covid-19 pandemic with human hands, nose, eyes, mouth and teeth, behind the man. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist shows that, the coronavirus has complicated the election-year calendar for the country, as elsewhere, prompting some polling delays, suspensions and uncertainties. It also has created openings for leaders to exploit fears and tighten their grips on power.

FIGURE 3: Your land has been desecrated by EVIL MEN and CORRUPT POLITICIANS



The cartoon depicts the image of Covid-19 virus with human legs, hands, mouth and eyes, standing on top of the hill, holding a flag. There are seven people depicted in the cartoon who appear to present different callings of human endeavour such as health practitioners, the police, the ASUU, politician, the poor and the traditional ruler. They carry objects common to their callings. The image depicts a policeman, holding a gun, representing the security agencies involved in fighting against the virus; a doctor with an injection and a man who dressed in deep blue trouser and light blue shirt with face-mask, representing all the heath workers on the field; ASUU member who is holding a book with the inscription ***"COVID-19 RESEARCH"*** representing ASUU members; a rotund man dressed in Babariga who is holding a sack of looted fund, representing the politicians; a

man dressed in brown clothe with cap, holding a Nigerian flag, representing the traditional rulers; and a man who wears short nicker representing the poor.

The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist shows that, these people are putting different efforts they think could help defeat the virus. For instance, a politician is depicted, holding a sack of looted funds and declaring that what the virus needs is a bribe. This satirizes the politicians in the country since they are best identified with corrupt practices such as looting and bribery.

FIGURE 4: FACE MASK #800! VITAMIN C, #800! CHLOROQUINE HOADED!



The cartoon depicts two participants. A man who dressed in brown trouser and a blue shirt, folding his arms, standing in front of the pharmacist, representing COVID-19 patients. The second person is a pharmacist, standing inside his shop, holding drugs, representing the pharmacists in the country. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist depicts the image to inform the government and the masses that, price increases have been observed along with a shortage of pertinent medicines. The medicines that help mitigate COVID-19 effects such as face-mask, vitamin C and chloroquine assumed to reach a high price. The pharmaceutical supply chain was strongly affected by COVID-19 along with the overall healthcare system. The retail pharmacy stores faced a massive change in customer buying patterns. People started hoarding face masks, vitamin C and chloroquine and other protective gear which affected the nationwide

supplies. Therefore, the government and pharmacies must establish active surveillance and warn mechanisms early.

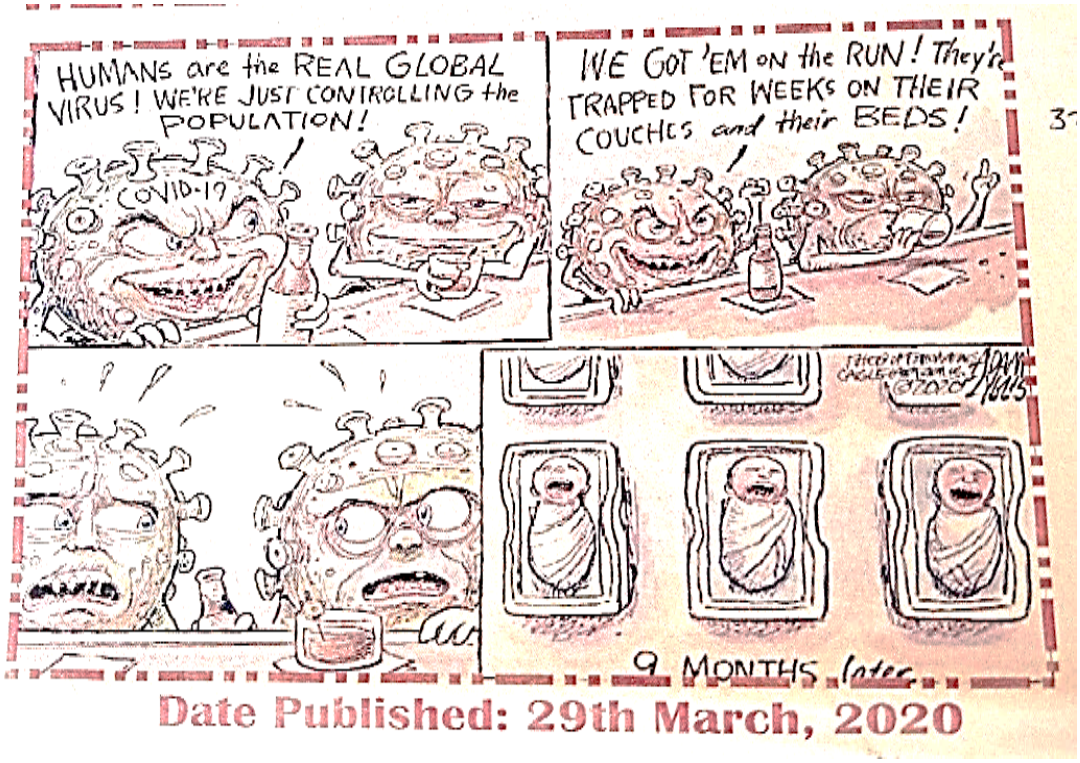
FIGURE 5: IT'S HIS FAULT. THE ECONOMY IS SO LOUSY.



There are two participants depicted in the cartoon. A rotund man, with red cap, who dressed shabbily, pointing at the second man who dressed in black suit. The image also depicts covid-19 virus with human legs, hands, eyes and mouth, pointing at the rotund man. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist agrees to the fact that, many thinks that, the source of Nigeria's economic problem is corruption. He submits that, the influence of corruption is exaggerated. It cannot, alone, be responsible for a nation that keeps shooting itself on the foot while trying to compete in a race.

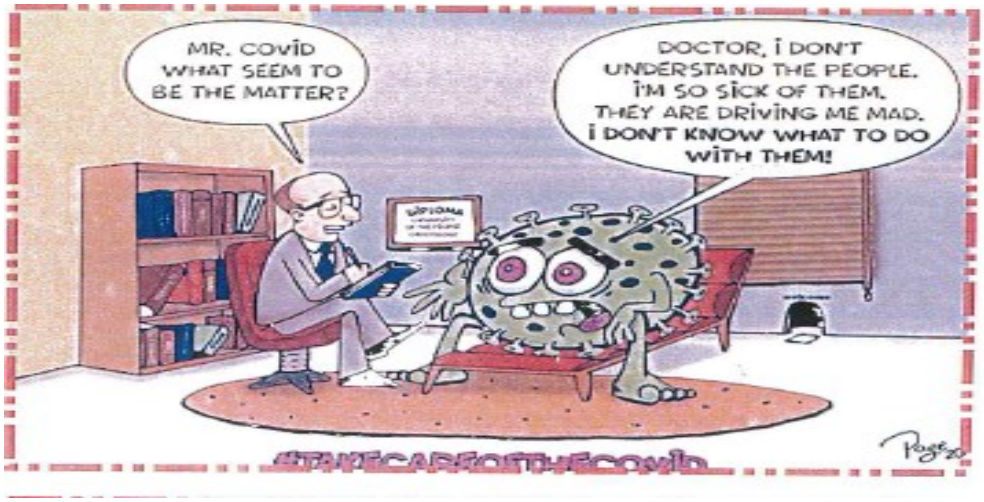
It is also believed that, the economic downturn in the country was triggered by a combination of corruption and spillovers from the COVID-19 outbreak, which not only led to a fall in the demand for oil products but also stopped economic activities from place when social distancing policies enforced.

FIGURE 6: HUMANS are the REAL GLOBAL VIRUS!



The cartoon depicts the image of six Covid-19 virus with human eyes, nose, hands and mouth, eating and drinking. Three new born babies, laying on their beds are also depicted by the cartoonist. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist agrees to the fact that, the lockdown and surveillance activities in the country were effective in controlling the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

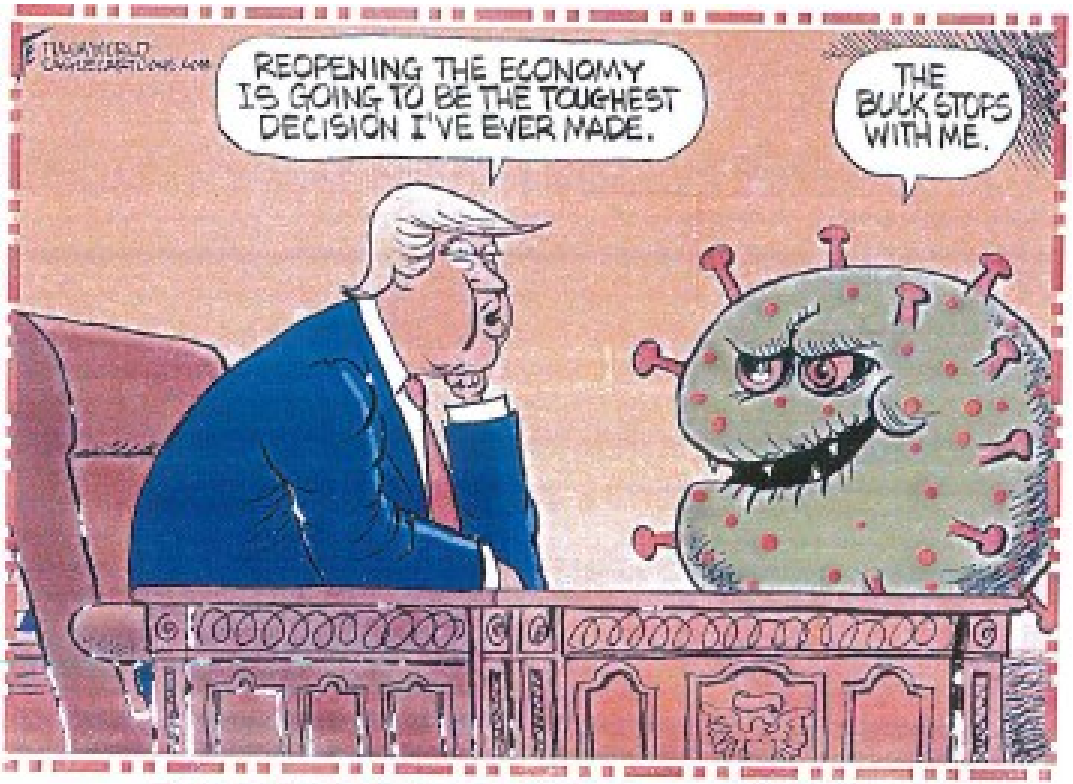
FIGURE 7: *MR. COVID WHAT SEEM TO BE THE MATTER?*



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. S. T. Addo [GHANA]

The cartoon depicts the image of COVID-19 virus with human legs, eyes and mouth, sitting on the chair. Also, the man dressed in suit, sitting on the chair with spectacle on his face, interrogating the Covid-19 virus. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist agrees with position that, Nigeria implemented containment and mitigation measures in response to the first wave of COVID-19 and these measures have contributed to the mild COVID-19 outcome in Nigeria.

FIGURE 8: REOPENING THE ECONOMY IS GOING TO THE TOUGHEST DECISION I'VE EVER MADE.



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The cartoon depicts the image of Covid-19 virus and a man who dressed in suit, sitting on the chair with a red tie, meditating about the economy of the country. The implication is that, the cartoonist shows that, economic shutdowns, which refer to disallowing employees to work on site, are among the most contentious approaches to reduce the spread of COVID-19. While economic shutdowns save lives, their large economic costs have caused some people to develop strong attitudes and even break government-issued mandates, which incurs health risks and often need to extend the economic shutdowns. The verbal aspect therefore, complements the cartoon as image form by anchoring the

meaning, which is revealed that, the cartoonist therefore, submits that, the government needs to think about reopening economic shutdowns which have caused a great number of lost manhours and have resulted in the largest global recession.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis of text image relationship in Nigerian newspaper cartoons on COVID 19 pandemic, it is obvious from the totality of this study that, the COVID 19 cartoons not only made conscious use of utterances, but also evoked and arose the reader's interest, passion and emotion towards images. Symbols are constructed as signifiers, clear, brief and unique in the interpretation of the messages. In fact, it becomes evident that COVID 19 cartoons rely heavily on the interplay between images and words specific language use especially caricature as a tool to communicate social and political messages. Thus, through creative combination of images and words, COVID 19 cartoons have the potentials of entertaining and informing the public on current issues.

Conclusion

The caricature from the non-verbal means of communication as their action communicate a lot to the readers while the written words uttered by the caricature represented in the cartoons from the verbal means of communication. Readers of these COVID 19 cartoons will find humour in them as they are caricature of certain set of people that can be easily identified in the Nigerian society. Apart from the humour found in these COVID 19 cartoons, they evoke a feeling of anger in readers due to the unusual and abnormal situations in Nigeria portrayed in them. Hence, the COVID 19 cartoons make use of appropriate symbols and words to convey their viewpoints.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are made.

i. Considering the polysemous nature of COVID 19 cartoons, one analytical framework is not adequately enough to provide exhaustive or explicit analysis and interpretation of messages depicted in the COVID 19 cartoons. Considering the identified gap in COVID 19 cartoon literature, this study has the potential to provide an inspiration for further research which might bring theoretical and analytical understanding of COVID 19 cartoon genre which has become a vital medium of communication in adverse social and political contexts.

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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