A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ‘LEADERSHIP’ CARTOONS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN DAILIES

By

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Abstract

Perhaps one of the sternest yet satirical forms of communicating in modern times is cartoon. The study aims at examining the meaning construct which underlies the analysis of the semiotic elements inherent in the leadership cartoon discourse in Nigerian dailies. Cartoons as observed by this study, brings a synergy between the creative artistic texts and various presentations of signs which in turn achieves both entertainment as well as satirical presentation of the Nigerian leadership style. This paper is not targeted at ridiculing anybody, but it aims at exposing the problem people face while interpreting such artistic work. There are many Nigerian dailies of which similar study could be carried out, but this paper restricts itself to just one (Leadership Newspaper). Hence, to involve all the dailies in a research of this nature might be tasking. The paper suggests pragmatic approaches that could help readers of such dailies to interpret such cartoon with a view to understanding the underlying meanings of the cartoons as intended by the author.

Keywords: cartoon, semiotics, pragmatics Leadership, analysis.
INTRODUCTION:

The power of language makes man so distinct and different from all other creatures. Language allows man to communicate since the effective communication means the appropriate use of language in a relevant content. This work intends to investigate how communication is achieved among interlocutors and language has been used as a means of conversation. In everyday interactions, we use language to communicate with other people either in oral or written form. It has been observed that many newspaper readers do not show interest in cartoons reading as they do to other part of the newspaper. Meanwhile, there are many things to pass across to the readers through the cartoons. It is entertaining and informative.

Communication is the centre of human existence without which the world would be so boring. At every point in life there is communication. Human beings communicate among each other and also with even animals. Communication is essential in the growth and development of every society. Within the gamut of existing communication modes that exist such as verbal, non-verbal, written and visual, this paper will focus only on the visual communication which captures communication through the use of cartoons (Aarti, 22) defines visual communication as a display of information such as topography, photography, signs, symbols and designs. Cartoons are commonly used in newspapers and magazines as a subtle way of communicating ideas to their reading audience. This paper therefore seeks to highlight the pragmatic content of cartoons as presented by Leadership Newspaper.

CARTOON

Historically, the term ‘cartoon’ is derived from the Italian word “cartone” meaning paper. Cartoon was used by painters for preliminary drawings on paper which were then transferred either through tracing or punching on to a surface which could be a ceiling or a wall. Cartoon certainly ranks among the oldest core content of mass media of communication. It is obvious; however, that this vital content of mass media has received minimal research attention and or critical analysis in professional journals, series, books e.t.c. this oversight is actually what has sparked off the desire for this study.

Pictorial form of communication can be said to have existed as long as man himself. In Africa, proof of drawings, paintings and engravings - rock art which is precursor of the cartoon- is available in a variety of sources and oddly enough was discovered earlier than the European ones. Dating these have been rather difficult for several reasons, but the exciting Namibian
discovery has been radiocarbon-dated to about 27,000 years ago (Aarti, 29) Willett even posits that, since humankind appears to have originated in Africa, it may well be said art, in this instance the cartoon, originated here.

Aarti, opines that “the word cartoon is loosely used to describe any drawing published originally in a periodical that makes its on print, with or without a caption” (191). Cartoons are visual communication images that contain pragmatic meanings most often satirical in nature while entertaining the reader. It is important to note that only serious minds probe into the pragmatic content of a cartoon. Some readers may simply end at the entertainment level thus loosing the pragmatics of the text. Cartoons have semiotic resources which make up meaning, and also create an effect on the reader. Readers most often are at the mercy of the frame pictures, thus missing the main message/story that the cartoon contains.

**Pragmatics**: There are as many definitions as there are “pragmaticians”. Morris (1938) cited in Agu, (20) appears to be the most modern usage of the term pragmatics which says that “pragmatics is the study of the relation of signs to interpreters” but shortly after that he modified it ito “the relation of sign to their users.” Mey (1993) in a forward to his book Pragmatics: An Introduction; further defines pragmatics as:

*The study of language from the point of view of users of the choice they make, the constraints they encounter using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in an act of communication.*

Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as “the study of intended speakers meaning. These are meanings other than the ones solely derived from the meanings of words used in phrases. He further described pragmatics as the study of invisible meaning or how we recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said or written. In order to access this kind of meaning, there must be some shared assumptions and expectations. An investigation into the shared assumptions and expectation provide insights into how more is communicated than what is said. Pragmatics covers the study of language use and in particular the study of linguistic communication (Harrison, 201-202). Going by these definitions of pragmatics it shows that there is need to have the knowledge of the pragmatic implication of the interpretation of cartoons in the dailies. This will help to have a better interpretation and understanding of these cartoons.
OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

This study aims at focusing the attention of readers to the inherent pragmatic import of national dailies. It also intends to expose the fact that there is a serious underlying message or information in these funny stories of cartoons. Knowledge of the pragmatic implication of cartoon interpretation would enable the readers arrive at the accurate meanings of cartoons. Thus enabling the author achieves his objectives which is effective communication of the intended message.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Editors and broadcasters play important part in shaping social reality. The impact of the mass media to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking has been labelled the agenda setting function. Here may lay the most important effect of mass communication: it ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In consonance with the above theory, cartoon can be used as an effective tool for setting agenda for public discourse. To appreciate this point, it becomes imperative that cartoon focuses on one or two out of many news events. Aarti, has it that the events(s) focused on automatically enjoys more prominence and becomes an “agenda” for public discourse (19). Political or editorial cartoon, for instance, have a very strong impact in view of opinion steering and anchoring. Aarti, opines that editorial cartoon does more of attention grabbing of the audience on the matter arising as put forth by the newspaper (223). Multimodal discourse analysis has been chosen for this study, this is to assist readers in the analysis of the semiotic resources inherent in cartoons. Multimodal discourse analysis is a synergy of language study with other resources such as images, gestures, action, sound and scientific symbolism, which culminates into meaningful interpretation of language use.

FUNCTIONS OF CARTOONS

Ages and Bolieve (93) opine that cartoons perform the following functions.

- Comment on the news in order to bring these developments into focus.
- Inform the readers as a friendly counselor of information bureau and champion of their rights.
- Provide the means whereby persons with goods and services to sell can advertise their wares.
- Campaign for desirable civil projects to help eliminate undesirable conditions.
Inform readers objectively about what is happening in the community, country or world as well as to announce what possible events are to be expected on the local national and international levels.

**Presupposition:** In the context of “doing things with words” Austin (19), presupposition are those truths about the preposition that are shared by the participant concerning the context, speaker or the addressee, that are often taken for granted. There are two major kinds of presuppositions recognized by linguists: semantic and pragmatic presuppositions. Semantic presupposition refers to logical relations that hold between sentences. It is an integral part of sentence meaning. Semantic meaning is derived through a clear understanding of words used in a sentence. Pragmatic presupposition on the other hand refers to the condition necessary for a speech act to be appropriate in a particular context. It is the condition that individuals must meet for an utterance to make sense.

**Implicature:** The term was first introduced by Grice 1967, 1968, cited in Lyons (76-77) into the philosophy of language in his early William James lectures. The notion of implicature rests upon the distinction between what is actually said and what is implicated but not entailed in saying what is said. Leech (83) noted that the implication of the statement “It’s cold in here” could be:

- The heating system should be turned on
- The host pays more heed to his fuel bills to the comfort of his guests.

Implicature therefore is the act of communicating one thing while saying another.

**Illustrating Governance in Nigeria**

With regards to Nigeria, the cartoon as a visual communication genre is noted to have gained prominence with the political struggle against colonialism in the early part of the 20th century. It received a weighty mandate within the nationalist media of the day espousing anti-colonial interests and sentiments. Through Akin Lasekan, famed as the first cartoonist in Nigeria and the West African Pilot newspaper for which he worked, cartoon was established as a vital force within the political struggle to liberate Nigeria from British colonization. This paper adopts the leadership newspaper for its study.
May 28, 2013 Leadership

Text 11

This text covers just a participant. He is portrayed to be hiding inside a podium. He is dressed with a black cap on his head, black shirt and trousers with a black oversized shoe. The podium has seven microphones attached to it. The Actor’s two hands are raised. The image act in this text is that of offer. Following Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) every image performs two kinds of act: offer and demand. The latter usually request the viewer to do something while the former gives information.

On the ideal of the frame the vector says; Jonathan misses slot to speak at AU meeting – News. And the Actor says; Ah! Bros, let me be frank if you were in my shoes, would you tell the audience that Nigeria is doing well? The rhetorical relationship between the first expression and the second from the Actor is that of justification. The response justifies why he (the actor) missed his slot to speak at the AU meeting. The podium is tagged AU@ 50 and some microphones are tagged BBC, CNN, FRANCE and MTV.

Goodluck Jonathan could not address the African Union meeting because of the pitiable state of his country. It is abruptly lugubrious that in a country like Nigeria regarded as the giant of Africa, is plagued with high rate of insecurity and other challenges. Mechanism put in place are not adequate to put a halt to them. The selfish ambitions of the leaders will not allow them see what should be done. They have perpetually neglected what they should do as leaders. These
show that this country (Nigeria) is not doing well. The colour of the president’s dress ‘black’ shows that all is not well.

The glory of our nation is hidden behind that platform where Jonathan is hiding in this text. Generally, it is a shame for any president to miss his/her slot in the African Union especially very renowned countries like Nigeria. The destiny of other African countries actually lies on the shoulders of Nigeria.

**MAY 27, 2013 LEADERSHIP**

**TEXT 12**

This text holds one participant holding a Dictionary. He seems to be confused with what he encountered in the book. Close to him is a geometrical symbolism; a cross-like sign post. Beneath it are some grasses portraying the sign post as a tree.

On the sign in this text, the vector says MY NAME HAS BROUGHT GOOD LUCK TO NIGERIA – JONATHAN. The speech requires a rhetorical relationship of elaboration. Subsequently, enumerate the good things to justify the assertion but the response from the actor is inappropriate. The vector from the actor says “…Eechn can someone help me here? It seems the meaning of GOOD LUCK has changed!” The book the actor is holding is tagged DICTIONARY.
This text makes a sarcastic statement on the status of the nation and the name of the president. Some people have concluded that there is a sharp contract in the name of the president of this country and the state of this nation. The nation is retrogressing everyday, every sector is experiencing challenge and even the masses are not finding these situations easy yet people expect that the name of the president should affect the nation. But on the contrary, the experiences in this nation are bad luck, misfortune and series of unprecedented vices, such as what is happening in the north east Nigeria, kidnap of over 200 school girls at chibok, bomb blast in Nyaya, Federal Capital, Nigeria and several extra-judicial killings.

MAY 13, 2013 LEADERSHIP

TEXT 13

TEXT 13

This text put forward one participant in a bid to turning a giant stone that ordinarily will require many people to turn over. The participant is dressed in a black uniform with red belt. There are other little stones on the ground that the participant has not actually turned. As he is engrossed with turning the biggest stone, he seems to be releasing toxic fumes from his bowel. The image act in this text is offer; giving the viewer some kind of information.

The verbal process in this text is embedded in the stone the actor is turning is tagged GUNMEN, INSURGENTS, BOMBINGS and MILITIA GROUP. The actor is tagged SECURITY. On the New-real side of the frame is the vector from the actor “…Eehmmehmm! We are trying our best. No stone will be left unturned!”
best. No stone will be left unturned!” The image act in this text is offer. The actor informs the readers that they will do their best to turn every stone.
The text posits that the security agents in this nation are doing their best to curb the insurgents in the north and other vices in the nation. The statement (…no stone will be left unturned) from the actor, prove the fact that there are many vices in the nation that need to be eradicated. One can therefore make a conclusive judgment that problems have eaten deep the whole facet of the nation.

MAY 12, 2013 LEADERSHIP

TEXT 14

Two participants are featured in this text. The actor is holding a microphone whose cord projects from a box hanging on his shoulder. He is in a narrative process with the Goal dressed in a lawyer uniform. The Goal is holding a file and he addressed the actor directly. The actor says “My lord, what is your take on the men jailed 45 years for stealing a governor’s handset? The goal observing the appropriate adjacency sequence responded to the question. The goal says “Well, next time let him use his talent wisely to steal something big, like a seat in the senate or House of Reps”.

It has almost become a normal thing to steal in this nation. Even the law understand that stealing has become our culture, as such, the law encourages this act, however, expect that little things should not be stolen but big things. It is in this nation that the same law that convicts a man that
steal a goat frees a man that is confirmed guilty of money laundry. There are several indications pointing to the fact that the law is blind and not capable of exterminating the social vices in this nation.

MAY 30, 2013 LEADERSHIP

TEXT 15

Two participants are presented in a narrative process in this text. The first participant is dressed in native attire with a black cap presenting a cake to the goal that is putting on a tattered cloth and holding with his two hands and umbrella with red, white and green colour. He has a bandage on his head.

The actor says through the vector “Hey Dude, Cheer up! It’s your birthday!” presenting a cake tagged Happy 14th ANNIVERSARY. The goal, has “DEMOCRACY tagged on the bandage on his head, CORRUPTION, and INSECURITY on his shirt says “Ahh Boss, but the DEMONstrations by those under this umbrella are making me look CRAZY”. The tattered looking umbrella is tagged INTERNAL CRISIS. The text configuration in the expression of the goal coined a new word by separating the word democracy to form part of demonstration and the latter word; crazy. The new coined word is ‘DEMOCRASY’.

This text poses a serious challenge to our politicians. There has been serious anti democracy practices over the years and it looks as if it is growing. These practices have made the concept of democracy tattered. All the principles guiding a real democratic state has been violated.
The text also directly points to an entity as being responsible for all these crises. The umbrella and the colour combinations on the umbrella point to People Democratic Party. The ruling party is responsible for the misfortune befalling this nation. The goal mentions the activities of the people under the umbrella is jeopardizing the real meaning of democracy.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of these --- cartoons suffice it to conclude that cartoon communication has become an important tool used by Nigerian newspapers to pass serious messages to their readers. It is also highlighting the fact that within every cartoon you see is an embedding of a serious message meant for the reading population of that paper. The cartoons used here are political hence are carrying serious political messages. Although these serious messages are hedged, the educated or the elites and even language experts still understand what the cartoon is all about. There is often need to recourse to the semiotic constituents of the cartoon rather than seeing it as a mere something funny. Loosing the semiotic content of cartoon would also mean loss of meaning and intelligibility. When meaning is lost, communication also would be obstructed. Readers of cartoons share and interpret them from overt linguistic and sociological point of view.

From the above analysis it has been established that the pragmatic and discursive features of cartoon in political discourse are many so the interpreter needs to look critically to arrive at the real meaning of the cartoon. Pragmatic analysis of cartoon is a vital way of communicating to the readers, therefore there is need to look beyond the cartoon to arrive at the hedged meaning. Cartoon communication most often carries more messages than the spoken and written language. The visual mode of communication in cartoon is given more prominence at the expenses of the verbal, non-verbal and the written mode of communication.
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