

Pragmatic Analysis of 2019 Nigerian Presidential Election-Related Newspaper Cartoons

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ABSTRACT

This study undertook a pragmatic analysis of the 2019 Nigerian Presidential Election-Related Newspaper Cartoons to establish the central issues, their contextual underpinning, the engendering pragmatic acts and strategies and their implication to media, society and politics. It was designed to address the knowledge gap created by extant studies which evaded the appraisal of this slant of political discourse that would provide a better understanding of the political cartoons. To address this issue, the paper adopted the Pragmatic acts theory and the theory of social semiotics to account for the ensuing issues and their semiotic significance. The descriptive research design was adopted with a purposive sampling technique to allow for a qualitative analysis of the data selected for the study. Twenty-five cartoons were purposively selected for this paper. The selection was premised on the critical issues that tainted the general elections of 2019. These were subjected to pragma-semiotic analysis. Three discourse issues were identified – partisan contest, electoral fraud, and corruption. These were constrained by six contexts, which are the contexts of rivalry, game, defeat, victory, corruption, and war with the pragmatic acts of satirizing, warning, and sensitizing, strategically crystalized through the strategies of negative lexicalization of opposition, satirisation of politicians' identity, and invocation of actor's precedence. It, therefore, concludes on the note that it takes more than a literal sense to understand the construction of political cartoons of criticism and thus needs conscious efforts to unravel the issues and pragma-semiotic means of decoding them. The study hence recommends that political cartoon studies should be initiated and their proliferation should be censored due to their sensitive construction of reality and its implication for media, politics and society.

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Political Discourse; Pragmatics; Presidential Election-related Cartoons.

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1. Introduction

Language, either verbal or non-verbal, performs different roles in society (Andini et al., 2022; Rahman & AMir, 2019). It is a medium of public communication. It is utilized in politics, religion, commerce, governance, media, education and so on (Prihandoko et al., 2019; Amir P et al., 2023; Rahman, 2018). One captivating means of communication which is the end-product of language users is the non-verbal means. It is the communicative source that depends ultimately on images and other extra/paralinguistic nuances. Cartoons, the crux of visual representations, are found within these spheres and have been observed to be veritable tools for political communication (Swain, 2012; Shaikh et al., 2019). Hence, when referencing the language of politics, cartoons are placed at the forefront of the discourse. Political cartoons are effective means cartoonists use to express their thoughts and ideas about political issues, events or personalities in a particular period in a playful manner (Usman, & Momoh, 2016; Genova, 2018). They are openly and discreetly used to make a compelling statement and provide specific knowledge on contemporary socio-political issues. The goal of a political cartoon is to raise public consciousness using a figurative tone and graphical imagery to address crucial issues and criticize political leaders and their contemptible practices. In other words, the genre serves as a medium of political reporting, articulating a particular message from a particular point of view using language and imagery as prime tools. Against the background above, this study intends to examine the pragmatics of criticism and mockery in 2019 Nigeria elections-related political cartoons.

The political situation in Nigeria before the 2019 general elections for the office of the president and other offices, precisely from November 2019 to February 2019, is a paradigm of what the erstwhile President of the Federal Republic

of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, articulated, "a do-or-die affair". This is evident in the heated and hate campaign processes anchored on ethnic, party and religious sloganeering which often prepares the political grounds for violence. Parties and candidates' manifestos were also impeccably packaged for positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Political parties, specifically, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) were at the top of the struggle, as a barrage of grave issues pointing towards fortes and failings in governance, personality qualities and deficiencies, religious, ethnic affiliations and others were foregrounded in their declarations to confuse the conviction of the electorate. Nevertheless, the use of cartoons and most importantly political, cartoons in Nigerian social media platforms was one of the main tools deployed to educate, inform and moderate the misperceptions of the electorates. These cartoons were critical of politicians, political office holders and political parties as various issues were unveiled through symbolism, stereotyping, caricatures, visual metaphors, exaggerations, humour, captions, and cartoonist's perspectives. The study of pragmatics has been one of the most effective and viable means of evaluating meaning, especially in political discourse (Odebunmi, 2009).

a. Statement of the Problem

Works on political cartoons are as numerous as their importance to the politics of a nation. Many social studies teachers have used them for years to help students understand both historical and contemporary issues and events. It further strengthens the academic value of cartoons in the context of pedagogy. Essentially, these scholars are driven by the potential in using political cartoons of the US presidential elections to foster learning among students. Accordingly, it is believed that the political cartoon presents a point of view concerning people, places, and events using visual imagery. The artist hopes to convey quickly a message using caricature, symbolism, and related techniques. Newspaper in several ways coincides with this present study, however, there is a clear departure in the areas of data sites and disciplinary focus. In their efforts, political cartoons are considered in the context of newspapers, as vehicles for setting social agendas. The crux of their study is premised on the interpretation of the sign system based on the connotation and denotation elements in the cartoons. Having considered these varying positions, it is a crystal that researchers have considered political cartoons from multidisciplinary studies as examined above. Despite these prisms from which political cartoons have been studied, no clearly defined approach has originated from the slant of pragmatics and semiotics without which a professional understanding can be made of these cartoons. This paper, therefore, undertakes a pragmatic analysis of the political cartoons of criticism of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

b. Aim and Objectives

This paper aims to explore the pragma-semiotic reading of the 2019 Nigerian presidential election-related cartoons to establish the contextual nuances, pragmatic acts and strategies employed to critique the political reality of Nigerian elections. The specific objectives of the study are to 1) examine the discourse issues and the context that characterise the selected cartoons, 2) identify the pragmatic acts underlying the selected cartoons, and 3) assess the pragmatic strategies through which the pragmatic acts are performed.

c. Significance of the Study

The present paper would be useful to students of the English Language most importantly at the tertiary level, as this would help them understand the importance of context to the realization of meaning. The study would also be a broad spectrum of an academic library for students who are willing to examine other relevant areas of pragmatics. It would widen the horizons of language students on why they should pay more attention to the context of an event to get the intended meaning. The study would also be a useful instrument for students of political science as it would serve as a stream of consciousness in terms of getting a fuller understanding of the meaning conveyed by political posters. Since the research is centred on political discourse, the findings of the study would help students get more conversant with the language of politics as it may be different from the ordinary day-to-day language use which is constantly adopted in doing political business.

d. Literature

A pragmatic analysis of 'leadership' cartoons in selected Nigerian dailies was attempted (Agu, 2015; Weda et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2021). The study aimed at examining the meaning construct which underlies the analysis of the semiotic elements inherent in the leadership cartoon discourse in Nigerian dailies. The study was targeted at exposing the problem people face while interpreting such artistic (cartoonist) work. The study restricted itself to just one (Leadership Newspaper). Hence, to involve all the dailies in research of this nature might be tasking. The study suggested pragmatic approaches that could help readers of such dailies to interpret such cartoons to understand the

underlying meanings of the cartoons as intended by the author. The study established that the pragmatic and discursive features of the 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 cartoons is a vital way of communicating to the readers, therefore there is a need to look beyond the cartoon to arrive at the hedged meaning. Cartoon communication most often carries more messages than spoken and written language. The visual mode of communication in the cartoon is given more prominence at the expense of the verbal, non-verbal and written modes of communication.

The Critical Discourse Analysis of satire as a tool of political cartoons in the Nigerian national dailies was worked on (Usman & Momoh, 2016). The work is an analysis of the use of satire as a form of imagery to depict some political issues in cartoons as featured in the Nigerian national dailies. The study found that the images of corruption, official responsibility, political failure, and brutality/cruelty/suffering are the dominant concerns of the cartoons featured by the study. While the corrupt postures of those who have links with the past government are dominant in the image of corruption portrayed, both those in and out of government are subjected to some satiric expose in respect of official responsibility, failure in politics and brutality/cruelty/suffering. In the end, the study recommended, among others, that more searchlights should be focused on the corrupt tendency of those still in power, and that more research efforts be devoted to the use of political cartoons to encourage citizen participation in the national discourse.

Political cartoons are studied as a vehicle for setting social agendas in selected newspapers (Sani et al., 2012). The study aimed at illustrating how political cartoons are used as a vehicle for setting social agendas in Nigerian newspapers to reorient and shape public opinion through recurrent depictions mirroring current socio-political issues at a given period. The analysis in the study was mainly concerned with the interpretation of the sign system based on the connotation and denotation elements in the cartoons. The results indicated that 80% of the themes focused on substantive issues through which social agenda is set to reflect social practices in the Nigerian social-political contexts. Also, the results showed that Nigerian political cartoons set social agendas by mainly encapsulating current and sensitive issues that people are much concerned about. Finally, the study has identified the lack of supportive and clearly defined theoretical background in analyzing political cartoons as a major problem in previous cartoon research. Thus, the study contributes to cartoon research by offering theoretical insight into the cartoon genre through agenda setting theory of media effect.

2. Methodology

The paper adopts the purposive sampling technique while selecting twenty-five (25) cartoons out of the corpus of the 2019 general elections sourced from a collection of editorial cartoons archives of three online Nigerian National newspapers namely, Vanguard, Punch and The Sun. The choice of this sampling technique was because it aids in the selection of those elements that satisfy certain requirements or criteria critical to the research purpose. It is also pertinent to state that the present study sourced its data from political columns in some of the front-leading news media in Nigeria. The researcher is interested in describing and analyzing certain works of cartoonists as agents of eliciting the context of mockery and criticism in political discourse. Interestingly, the thematic structure forms substantive issues reflecting the Nigerian socio-political context. Therefore, the selected cartoons were purposively drawn from the columns which address political issues. Twenty-five cartoons were purposively chosen because of their precise but witty depiction of the situation (s) being framed in anticipation and preparation for the 2019 Nigerian general elections. These data were gathered from November 2018 to February 2019, which is the period that marked the height of campaigns for the 2019 elections in Nigeria. The study adopts the Pragmatic Act theory (PAT) by Mey (2001) and the Theory of Social Semiotics (SS) by Pierce (1985) respectively. The theories jointly explain the place and position of context and significations in the meaning conveyed by newspaper columnists. This involves the analysis of mockery and criticism in the selected political cartoons in the 2019 Nigerian general elections. The PAT, on the one hand, is the instantiation of a pragmatic act and it is divided into the activity and co(n)textual parts used in indicating the activity performed as well as the linguistic, social and textual resources that help instantiate the act performed. On the other hand, SS connects the signs and symbols of the cartoons (representamen) to their insignia or social world.

3. Result and Discussion

To properly address the objectives of the paper, this analysis is structured to take three phases: the discourse issues and contexts, the pragmatic acts performed in the selected cartoons and the pragmatic strategies and linguistic devices deployed by the cartoonists. These are discussed in the following sections accordingly.

a. The discourse issues and contexts characterizing the cartoons of criticism

For this paper, critical and pragmatic interrogation of the data revealed three predominant discourse issues that were established in the cartoons of 2019 election cartoons. These are partisan contests, electoral fraud, and corruption. Partisan contest further manifests candidates' partisan contest and supporters' partisan contest; electoral fraud as an issue births ballot snatching and vote buying; for corruption, there is a further stretch to looting and lobbying. These are characterised by the macro-political context underlined by the micro contexts of competition, security, and leadership. These are taken in turn in the following sections.

1) Partisan contest

This is a contest driven by political party affiliation. It is hinged on the distribution of the party's ideology and it is the force that engenders the struggle for political positions. This issue runs through many of the cartoons. However, two dominant aspects of this issue were featured prominently. These are candidates' partisan contests and supporters' partisan contests.

Candidates' partisan contest



Figure 1. Plate 1: Partisan contests

Vanguard (February 3, 2019)

Who Will Win This Battle

APC or PDP



Figure 2. Plate 2: supporters' partisan contests

The Sun (January 30, 2019)

Plates 1&2 are different realisations of the candidates' partisan contest. The cartoonist presents the main actors of the 2019 presidential elections (Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar as opponents locked in about. The context of competition is further strengthened via the sports of wrestling and the Chinese Tug of War representamen of the

underlying contest over the presidential seat of power in Nigeria. In Plate 1, the image presents the portrait of the two candidates in a boxing duel with a boldly lexicalized inscription "2019 Presidential election". The semiotic relevance of the context of competition is portrayed by the presence of a "boxing ring", and "gloves", with the combat in full swing. In an extended representation, Plate 2 presents a Chinese Tug of War scenario where the candidates lead their major allies in a test of strength, which in this sense is political. The shared situational knowledge accounts for polarization on partisan bylines where key members of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People Democratic Party (PDP). The accompanying presence of the strongholds like Bola Tinubu, Rotimi Amaechi, and Adams Oshiomole all typify the force of the party led by Muhammadu Buhari. On the other hand, Bukola Saraki, Wike and Uche Secondus are led by their candidate, Atiku Abubakar. With this representation, the issues of candidates' partisan contest reveal that an election is symbolically a struggle, contention and war fought on a factional (partisan) basis. In addition, the contest is compared to a battle in the lexicalization of the rhetorical interrogative "who will win this battle, APC or PDP?" It is intended to demonstrate strengthened political power. Significantly, the candidates of this process, especially with the Figure of the 2019 election led the contest for power and dominance.

2) Supporters' partisan contest

Supporters' partisan contest is defined by the activities of actors who demonstrate strong allegiance to a particular party's philosophy to the point of confronting its opposition. Supporters of the main candidates of the two major parties in the 2019 election campaign, Buhari and Atiku engaged themselves in fierce demonstrations of partisanship. Plate 3 reveals this in the following cartoon.



Figure 3. Plate 3: Buhari and Atiku

Vanguard (February 16, 2019)

Supporters' partisan contest is projected in Plate 3 as shown in the representation of groups of supporters holding up placards carrying the catchphrases of the two major candidates "SAI BUHARI!" and "ATIKULATE!". These coined catchphrases are ideologically constructed to convey the confidence the supporters have in their candidates. Other significations that embellish the presentation of the supporters' partisan contest are a portrait of a neutral person girded with three signposts carrying the lexicalization "not too young to run". The underlying presupposition is that youth who are supposedly fit to run the race is questionably (?) rooting for the older generation. Nevertheless, the demonstrations in the cartoons are representative of the group's political affiliations expressed intensely by supporters of APC and PDP. That it is a contest is visibly established in the gestural and facial expressions of passion for each side.

Electoral fraud

Electoral fraud is another major discourse issue that permeates the cartoons of criticism in the 2019 electioneering campaign cartoons of the Nigerian print media. Electoral fraud is conceived in this study as the malpractices that violate free, fair and credible elections. This is expressly crystalized in the pictorial depiction and consequently produced two main thematic concerns: ballot (box) snatching and vote buying, respectively. This is entrenched in the context of security.

Ballot snatching

Ballot (box) snatching is one of the recurring issues represented in the cartoons of the 2019 electioneering campaigns. It is the process of forcefully carting away ballot boxes used for elections. Entrenched in the context of security, the cartoonist makes a statement about the need to be wary of ballot box snatchers and the role of security men in securing the mandate of the people. The semiotic representation is found in Plate 4:

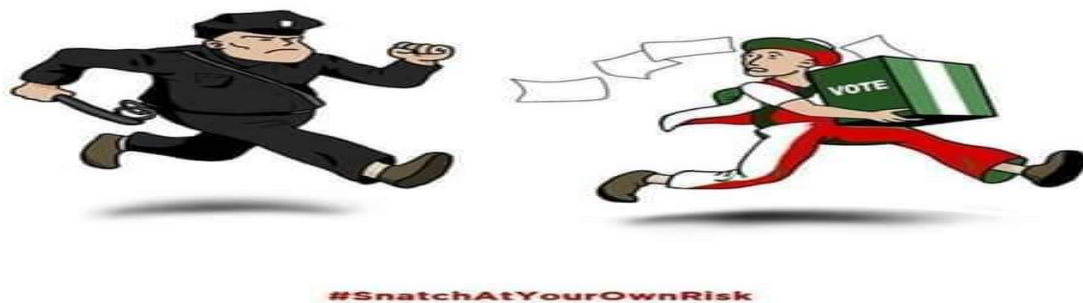


Figure 4. Plate 4: The semiotic representation

Vanguard (February 20, 2019)

Captured in Plate 4 is a representation of the discourse issue of ballot box snatching. Previous elections recorded in the country have witnessed unwholesome acts of the destruction of election materials and hijacking of ballot boxes meant for voting. The cartoon presents a youth running with a ballot box in his hands while a security officer pursues him. The significance of this portrayal directs attention to the illegalities that surround the Nigerian voting processes. Here, the cartoonist tries to discourage this act with the inscription harsh-tagged "#SnatchAtYourOwnRisk". This is a measure from the media to sanitise the minds of the electorate of any electoral fraud. It also could be a message from the security personnel to the voting populace that no such action would be tolerated at the polls. The act of electoral fraud of ballot box snatching is highly criticized and vehemently condemned.

Vote buying

Vote buying is one act that was loudly condemned in the cartoons of the 2019 electoral year. Vote buying is the practice of one candidate or political party dissuading the electorate from voting for their desired candidate by offering them money or related offerings. This is also eminently captured in the cartoons as exemplified in the example below.

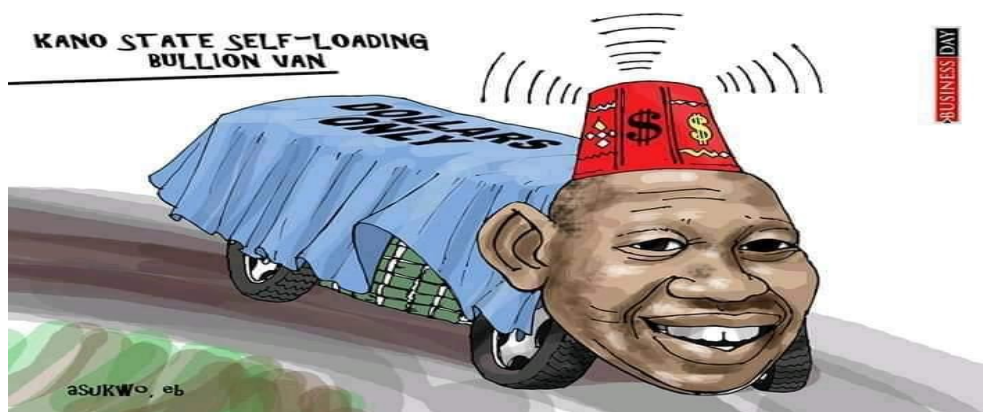


Figure 5. Plate 5: Bullion van

Vote buying is a form of rigging as represented in Plate 5. Sarcastically, the term "Bullion van" has fast become a register in the politics of Nigerian elections. It is a van used by banks to transport a large amount of money from one bank to another. Sadly, or funnily enough, its use has been re-contextualised in Nigerian political parlance. The REF is linked to a certain powerful politician who used a bullion van to convey money during the electioneering process. This money is used to buy voters' conscience. While the bullion van context indexes election rigging by vote buying, the "dollars only" phrase is rooted in the scandal of the politician whose portrait makes the cartoon, the governor of Kano, Ganduje. Hence, the cartoon is a representation of two personalities: Ahmed Tinubu and Ganduje. Having this cartoon of criticism in an election leaves no better option of interpretation than the fact that the self-loading bullion van of Kano State is out to buy votes that will hand him the victory in the forthcoming general elections.

3) Corruption

Corruption is a broad concept that describes a range of illegal, hideous, and cynical practices in certain organizations. In this context, corruption involves eco-political illegalities that are accrued to practices that dent the image of a political party or national identity. Concerning the 2019 cartoons, one major area was highlighted to be particularly permeated with what is looting.

Looting

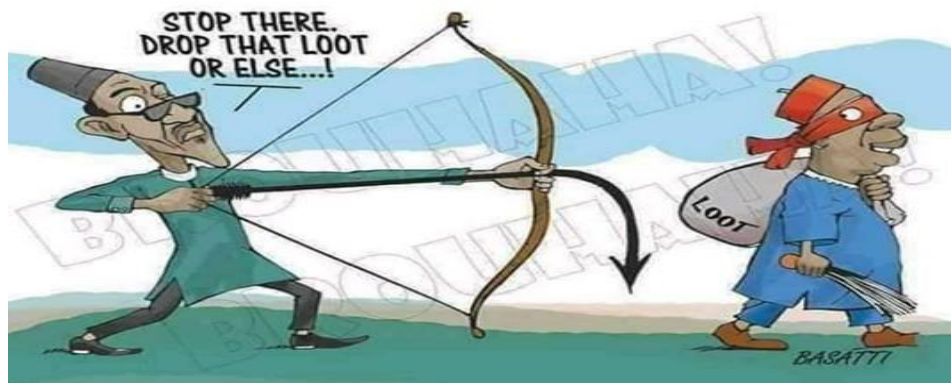


Figure 6. Plate 6: Looting

Vanguard (January 5, 2019)

Although the cartoon is directed at satirizing a particular political party, the APC, the issue of looting is expressly concretised in Figure 6. The fascinating side to this representation is that the two referents in the image are related ideologically. This relation is aided by the common ground that the actor depicted on the right is the Presidential candidate of the APC, a party whose primary manifesto is to fight corruption. Against this background, the cartoonist presents an APC chieftain carrying loot with the symbol of party identification and "immunity", the broom. In his stride, the president is seen intercepting the loot with a bow and arrow which represent the resources for battling corruption. Conversely, the arrow is redirected downward with the loot confidently walking away with a dauntless look demonstrating the confidence that he cannot be shot because they are all products of the "broom". This is typical of the Nigerian situation in which there is a lopsided prosecution of opposition for corruption while corrupt chieftains of the ruling party are left to walk freely without being challenged. The broom now becomes the shield against probe and prosecution. That is one major issue captured in the cartoon's signification of the corruption of looting.

b. The pragmatic acts performed in the selected cartoons of criticism

The paper altogether identified three pragmatic acts that were found to be recurrent in the cartoons, and they encompass: satirizing, warning, and sensitizing. These were employed concerning the various issues that formed the thematic preoccupation of the political cartoons. Below is a detailed discussion of these practs.

1) The pract of satirizing

Satire is a correctional tool of criticism intended to effect a change in behaviour with doses of mockery. Cartoons are naturally humorous creations that are full of varied messages. As domesticated in this study, the pract of satirizing cut across the berating of hypocritical behaviour among the political leaders, particularly major actors of the 2019

general elections. This pract is constrained by the context of bad leadership, irregular identity and faulty electoral process. The following examples contextualise pract in the cartoons constructed.

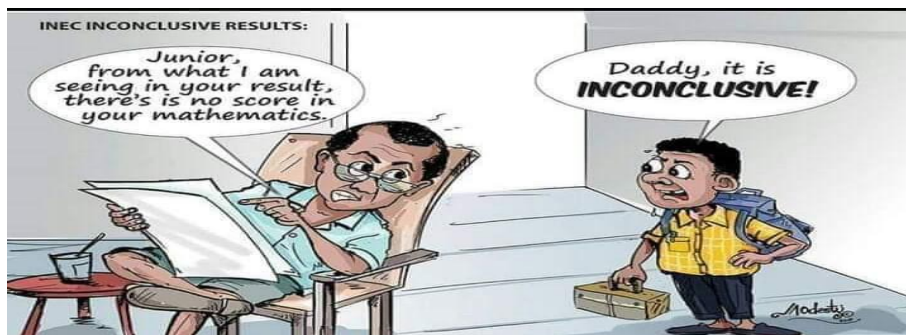


Figure 7. Plate 7: The pract of satirizing

The Sun (January 4, 2019)

The pract constructed in the cartoon representation in Plate 7 is satirizing the electoral process of the nation Nigerian. The cartoon, in the logical act, presents a man and his son discussing the result of the latter. On noticing the missing score of the child for mathematics, the father asks the son why the result was missing and the response the boy was that it is "inconclusive". From their conversation and pictorial presentation, the father relying on the speech act of questioning tries to find out the course of the missing result as is his social role through the social VCE, but the son decided to, through SSK between the two, draw INF from the sociopolitical happenings in the Nigerian electoral process to supply the answer that the father demands. The employment of the lexical item "inconclusive" entrenched the new vocabulary that has found a place in the register of Nigeria's inconclusive elections. The engendering motivation behind the construction of the cartoon in Plate 7 is specifically aimed at satirizing the electoral process that has recently produced several inconclusive results and thus the REL of the boy's response is tied to the fact that if a country's national electoral body has made it a norm to constantly produce an inconclusive result, then it has become safer to use such terms to explain the unexplainable situation of a school result. It could thus be INF (erred) from the inscriptional design of the cartoon that the jibe is directed at correcting the image-denting outcomes of the Nigerian electoral system and the Independence National Electoral Commission (INEC) in particular.

2) The pract of warning

Warning practs are directed at guiding individuals against taken actions that can lead to the dangerous and detrimental output. The pract of warning in this study is specifically designed in the cartoons to ensure that safety is guaranteed and voters' choices are carefully made concerning the 2019 general elections. In the configuration, the warning pract possesses more of SSK and INFs in which the existing knowledge about the Nigerian electoral context is used in the cartoons to enlighten potential electoral officers and the electorate. Instances of these practs are discussed in the example below.



Figure 8. Plate 8: The pract of warning

Vanguard (February 18, 2019)

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the body in charge of the conduct of elections in Nigeria and is therefore saddled with the responsibility of making the rules and regulations guiding the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. In the cartoon of figure 8 the referent INEC is positioned on a platform, addressing party faithful of both the APC and the PDP respectively. The cartoon appropriates both the physical and dialogic acts where the physical act helps create the identity of the politicians through the presence of the parties' political REFs, the broom, standing for the APC and the Umbrella symbolizing the PDP. Through the conversation or dialogic act, the political congregants expressed their fears by stating "we hope people will be democratic enough so we won't belabour ourselves". To achieve REL to the situation and to also validate the function of the electoral body, the INEC agent warns the politicians "you will surely be responsible for your action if you rig!", "ONE MAN! ONE VOTE!!" This stern warning comes with marked and motivated prominence as some of the co-textual resources such as "people, democratic, labour, and action" and the semiotic choice of "ONE MAN! ONE VOTE!!" in red colour, to implicate the dangers in disrupting the voting process or attempting any act of rigging of the election. Essentially, this pract warns against rigging and the warning is validated in the inclusion of the exclamatory marks. The pragmatics of this cartoon of criticism hinged on the common practices of rigging elections in the Nigerian political sphere, and it, therefore, becomes the concern of INEC to warn against electoral malpractices. A similar pract of warning is projected in the cartoon where ballot box snatching is principally warned against with the underlying inscription "#SnatchAtYourOwnRisk" with the visuals of a security agent chasing a ballot box snatcher. The cartoon is intended to produce the consequence of engaging in actions that will propel the security agents to hunt down any culprit.

3) The pract of sensitizing

Sensitization is integral to every electioneering year. Government, Non-governmental organisations, security agencies, INEC and other political groups create platforms for the sensitization of all actors that are involved in the election process. Many the cartoons exhibit this pract of sensitizing as a form of enlightenment and cautioning the public to realise sanity in the whole process. For the data for this study sensitization is constructed based on party and electoral Adhoc officers. Plate 9 poses a critical instance of this act.



Figure 9. Plate 9: The pract of sensitizing

The Sun (January 30, 2019)

This is a sensitizing pract that hails from the opposition party, against the ruling APC. What constitutes this pract is the act of advising the in-group against following the out-group. Graphically, the cartoon presents a scenario of physical acts that complement the lexicalization of the sensitizing act. In it, the visuals REF the APC's Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates and purported electorates moving in a different direction. Symbolically, neither Buhari nor Osibanjo is presented holding the emblematic indices of the party. Rather, the president is seen holding in his left hand a placard with the inscription "BLIND" while groping with the support stick, then, he is closely followed by the Vice President. The rest of the people followed a different direction expectedly in response to the sensitizing act "CHOOSE WISELY". Other pointers that strengthen the sensitizing act are co-textual and graphologically designed such as the construction of the catchphrase "Next Devil" which by SSK is a recontextualisation of the original slogan "Next Level" of the APC. The message is sponsored by the opposition towards dissuading potential electorates from supporting the ruling APC and to achieve this act the cartoonist deployed negative lexicalization of the party's slogan and ideological markers of political identity.

c. The pragmatic strategies and linguistic devices deployed in the cartoons of criticism

From the synergy of the discourse issues and context together with the practs that evolved from the cartoons, three main strategies were instrumental to their realisation - negative lexicalization of opposition, satirisation of politicians' identity, and invocation of actors' precedence. The following sections discuss them in detail.

1) Negative lexicalization of opposition

Some of the cartoons criticize through negative lexicalization. This is the framing, adducing, and ascribing of negative or deleterious features to the opposition to dissuade electorates from voting for them or gain favour from the populace in the general elections' campaigns. Because cartoons are largely visual representations garnished with few lexical items, the lexicalization is semiotic and lexical in the establishment of the opposition's negativities. Plate 10 speaks volumes about this pragmatic strategy.



Figure 10. Plate 10: Negative lexicalization of opposition

Vanguard (February 12, 2019)

The structure of the cartoons exudes the voting context where the two major parties of the 2019 general elections are painted. Linguistically, after the semiotic signification of the parties' emblems represented by the broom and the umbrella, the inscriptions on the two ballot boxes and the splashes of blood concretise the negative lexicalization strategy. While the lexical framing of the PDP positively labels the party as an insignia of peace and progress, the APC is framed as a "war saw". This negative construction of the APC is complemented by the blood splashes on the path where electorates are supposed to be queuing to exercise their franchise. The INF drawn from this negative lexicalization of the APC is that electorates are at risk of losing their lives should they try to follow the path of the opposition. This is the strategy of the PDP to influence voters' decisions concerning the 2019 general elections and this strategy runs through many of the cartoons. Relating it to the sociocultural realities of the Nigerian electioneering seasons, one would acknowledge the fact that the politics of bitterness takes preeminence in the process. Lots of scandals, frame-ups and betrayals accompany oppositional activities during elections and consequently form the crux of the issues and context upon which the cartoons of criticism operate.

2) Satirization of politicians' identity

Satire is a hilarious way of critiquing the foolishness of action, an actor or a group's ideology. It is not only conceived as a pragmatic analysis but a political term that humorously condemns a political character. This pragmatic strategy is found present in most cartoons since cartoon is structurally a satirical construct. The following example explains this strategy.

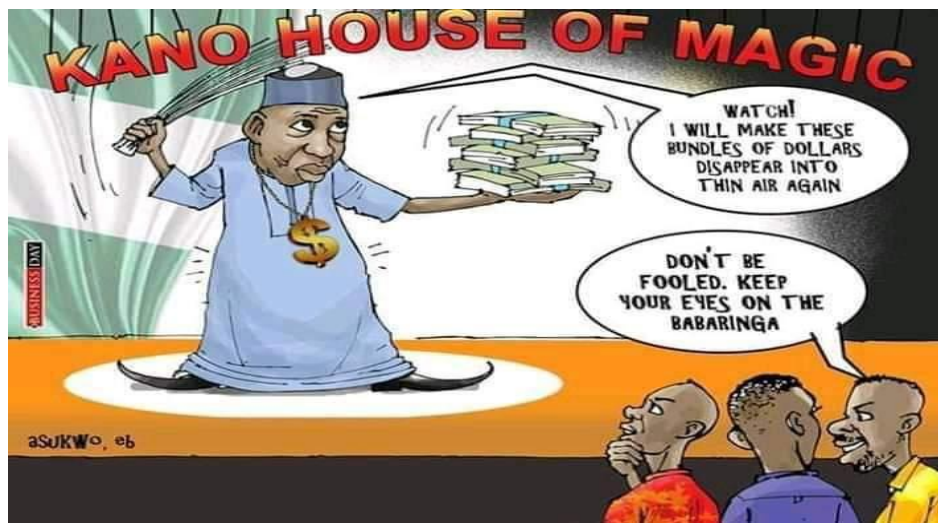


Figure 11. Plate 11: Satirization of politicians' identity

Business Day cited in The Sun (January 19, 2019)

Satirisation strategy is naturally humorous and is intended to mock the political actors through SSK that the consumers of the cartoons and the cartoonists share. Precisely, in this example in Plate 11, the governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Umar Ganduje is satirized as a magician who, in the visuals and verbal proclamation boasts of his magical powers making a bundle of dollars in his hands disappear into the thin air. The context is political, in the sense that the magic wand is the broom: the symbol of the APC. The governor is cast on a stage which is titled "KANO HOUSE OF MAGIC" where the audiences are made to believe in the dollar magic. In the conversation act the referent puts on a dollar necklace with dollar bundles in his hands and suddenly tells his audience "watch! I will make these bundles of dollars disappear into thin air again." The presupposition activated by the adverbial "again" confirmed that he has done that magic in the past. This launches us into the historical trajectory of the dollars scandal between the referent and some public work contractors. Relying on this epistemic past, one of the audiences swiftly called the attention of the others to be wary of deception and that their focus should be on the 'babaringa' (the attire he is putting up). This pragmatic strategy reveals the political situation of the country in which politicians think their deception strategy will always prevail and thus try to play them repeatedly.

3) Invocation of actors' precedence

This is the recollection of the past activities of political actors in a mild scenario of criticism. In literature, it is described as an allusion or reference to the past. In the Nigerian political milieu, this is prominent as most politicians' statements at one time, or another are replayed by the opposition to remind them of their pasts and consequently deny them of their political dreams. In another dimension, it is geared towards testing the credibility of the politicians and how faithful they are to their utterances in the past. Plate 12 illustrates this strategy.



Figure 12. Plate 12: Invocation of actors' precedence

Vanguard (January 5, 2019)

Three politicians are strategically planted in the cartoon which exemplifies the pragmatic strategy of invocation of actors' precedence as relayed in Plate 12. Each of them accrued a statement against the man at the centre who is the presidential candidate of the APC. By the looks, their clearly his allies but the statements accredited to them were made in different years. For instance, Bola Tinubu made a statement in 2007 that "Buhari is a 'destabilisation agent and far worse than Obasanjo'". Also, in 2011 another actor, Dele Momodu stated that Buhari is "an ex-coup plotter and not even qualified to vote". And finally, Nasir El-Rufai in the year 2011 equally recommended that Buhari should retire and that it is time for a new generation of leaders". Fast forward to the 2019 general elections, their political agents have abandoned these positions to support the candidacy of Muhammadu Buhari. This triggered the question "could these men have "changed" overnight? This is just the nature of Nigerian politics. The prominence given to the lexeme "change" is a disambiguation of the "change" mantra of the APC. Hence, the question is probing whether the change preached by the APC has changed these political gladiators. What the cartoonists have done is simply invoke the past of these politicians to implicitly criticize the act of making spurious statements just for the sake of political correctness. It might also be a way by which the opposition gets at their opponents.

4. Conclusion

A pragmatic analysis of cartoons of criticism of the 2019 general elections has been robustly carried out in this paper. The top-down approach was adopted to realise the objectives of the study which are to: identify the discourse issues, the context informing them, the pragmatic acts performed, and the strategies through which the acts were performed. The study concludes that partisan contest, electoral fraud, corruption, economic-driven protest, and partisan defection are the main discourse issues that made up the cartoons of criticism of the 2019 general elections. These are found to be underlined by the contexts of competition/rivalry, game, defeat, victory, corruption and war. Within this ambience, the practs of satirizing, ejecting, challenging, warning, sensitizing, condemning, and indicting are critical to the construction of the political state of the Nigerian polity. These practs are amplified through negative lexicalization of opposition, satirisation of politicians' identity, and invocation of actors' precedence. By implication, these issues, contexts and the practs produced from them depict the Nigeria political space and its intriguing electioneering processes bedevilled with violence, defections and other issues. This study has provided the template for political cartoons of criticism and their semiotic and pragmatic construct.

Essentially, considering the findings of the study and their implication for the sociopolitical sanity of the nation, of Nigeria, it is recommended that representations of political discourse should consider more cartoons as they tend to capture more vividly and practically the crux of the political reality of the nation. Also, it is recommended that negative lexicalisations be discouraged as such breed enmity and discord among actors in the political scene. It is expedient to add that, at the academic and research levels, space should be dedicated to the semio-pragmatics of political cartoon constructions and be incorporated into the curriculum as an integral part of applied linguistics. This would aid the

understanding of political cartoons in Nigeria and beyond. Some of the strategies identified in the study should be appropriated to other disciplines that focus on cartoons and their construction.

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