

Satirising the Nigeria Police Force: a Multimodal Discourse Analytical Study of Selected Cartoons of TELL Newsmagazines

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Abstract

This paper analysed some selected cartoons from TELL newsmagazines. The purpose was to describe the visual components and communicative devices employed by the cartoonist to send his message to the viewer/readers. The cartoons essentially were used to satire represented phenomenon. Data for the study were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The main data for the study comprised 4 cartoons purposively selected from 2012 editions of TELL newsmagazines. The selection of the cartoons was predicated upon the subject under consideration. Analysis of the data is based on multimodal discourse analysis as explicated by Gunter Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2001). The result showed that semiotic resources such as colour, image, symbols and icons, gaze and posture enhance the semantic quality of the cartoons. This study revealed very strongly and established the potentials of visual images to convey meaning beyond the verbal language in any human society.

Keywords; satire, multimodal discourse analysis, semantic quality, semiotic resources.

Introduction

Nigerians do not in the least trust the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Unlike in advanced countries where the police force is dignified and well respected, NPF do not garner any respect from Nigerians. The reasons are not far-fetched. Corruption is endemic in the NPF. Their misbehavior, misdemeanors and general misconduct at their several police stations and posts and especially at mounted check points make Nigerians detest them and conceive strong aversions for the NPF. A substantial reference is the recent news that 195 police officers are currently facing trials for various offences ranging from corruption to extra judicial killing of innocent citizens.

A typical member of the NPF can pull the trigger at the slightest provocation at check points, especially, if the motorist feels recalcitrant in parting with his meager 20 naira. The reason for this is also very clear. Most officers in the NPF, particularly the low ranking officers depend solely on the illegal proceeds from check points for survival. Very many of them have already mortgaged their statutory salaries in forms of loans from banks and cooperative societies. Hence toying with check points “booty” will be suicidal.

Consequently the removal of police check points across the country by the present Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mr. Abubakar becomes an albatross to the corrupt officers. It is highly instructive to note that the development is a welcome stride attributed to the ingenuity of the present IGP. Various Preceding IGPs had attempted to do same in the past but had ultimately met with failures. Immediately after the announcement, the roads would be cleared of police check points. But before long, the check points will be back although gradually. Hence this latest effort by the present IGP was hailed by all and sundry.

The job of a cartoonist is to lampoon albeit surreptitiously. He tries to attack the represented phenomenon through the convention of satire. This is exactly what the cartoonists of TELL newsmagazine have done. In all the cartoons selected for this study, the NPF is the represented entity. Attempts are seriously made by the cartoonists to lampoon the NPF and subsequently bring into limelight the social ills bedeviling the NPF.

TELL newsmagazine in their column ‘cartoon extra’ makes satirical representations of all the vices associated with the NPF. Of these therefore, corruption is the chief, and it is thus made a subject of satire in the cartoons. This paper therefore takes a critical look at these various representations with a view to analyse them via the theory of multimodal Discourse analysis (MDA) as explicated by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen 2001.

Theoretical framework

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) is ‘an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, colours, scientific symbolism, gestures, action, music and sound’ (O’Halloran 2011:1). Multimodal discourse analysis is the study of the ‘intersection and interdependence of various modalities of communication within a given context’ (Snyder 2009:1). Researchers in this area seek to ‘identify the influence of mode on meaning within a given context, focusing on co-occurrence interaction between multiple semiotic system’ (Baldry and Thibault 2006:31). Multimodal discourse analysis is essentially concerned with the theory and analysis of semiotic resources and the semantic expansions which occur as semiotic choices combined in multicultural phenomena.

The “inter-semiotic’ relations arising from the interaction of semiotic choices, known as intersemiosis, is a central area of multimodal research (Jewitt 2009:14). Multimodal discourse analysis is also concerned with the design, production and distribution of multimodal resources in social settings (Leeuwen 2008:32).

The theory is also concerned with the concept of ‘visual modality’. In Bell’s second variable based on the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), it can be defined as “the represented realism of an image” (Bell 2001:30). It concerns also whether an image is portrayed as realistic and lifelike, or as something that can be classified as either a fantasy or caricature. The term ‘modality’ is a linguistic one and refers to the value or credibility of statements about the world. Modality is interpersonal rather than ideational in that it does not express absolute truth or falsehoods, it produces shared truths aligning readers and viewers with what they hold to be true for themselves, while distancing from others whose values they do not share (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:160). In terms of visual modality, visuals can represent people, places and things as though they are real. Here too, modality judgements are social and dependent upon what is considered real in the social group for which the representation is primarily intended. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:256) modality results from:

.....the degree to which certain means of pictorial expressions (colour, representational detail, depth, tonal shades, etc.) are used. Each of these dimensions can be seen as a scale running from the absence of any rendition of detail to maximal representation of details or from the absence of any rendition of depth to maximally deep perspective.

Reality is based upon the frequency of these factors within a specific image, the less they appear the more “abstract” the image, while the more prevalent they are, the more realistic the image can be said to be. However, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:256) argue that “modality is context dependent.” The domains they distinguish include scientific/technological, abstract, naturalistic and sensory. This theory is therefore suitable in the analysis of these colour Cartoons.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of this study, only four cartoons were purposively selected from the 2012 editions of TELL Newsmagazines. The analysis is done using Kress and Leeuwen’s (2001) Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA).

The Theme of Corruption

Corruption is a vermin that has been preventing Nigeria from moving up the ladder of progress. The problem of bribery and corruption in Nigeria appears to have eaten so deep into the fabrics of the nation that virtually everyone believes that Nigeria is really one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In this connection, the menace of corruption in Nigeria has defied all known medicines as it occurs in several forms. Among several factors that engender corrupt practices in Nigeria are: greed and ostentatious lifestyle, obsession with materialism and glorification of ill-gotten wealth by the general public. Certain customs and attitudes of the nation may also contribute to corrupt practices. Just as corruption is noticeable in all spheres of government parastatals, it is endemic in the NPF.

Data Analysis of the use of images



Text A

Text A is a revelation of the rot in the NPF. In the text, we see two men who are fully kitted in police uniforms. They held their guns desperately. There is a car coming on the road conveying the driver and a passenger. Beside the policeman, we see a long pole holding a warning traffic code. The code simply means that motorcycles are not allowed to ply the area. There are verbal anchorages as voiced by the two policemen.

This text is a revelation of the desperation in the NPF especially with the new laws in Lagos State. The new laws which banned commercial motorcyclists from plying certain areas have been extremely exploited by the police. The corrupt officials in the NPF see the laws as a mean to illegally extort defenseless motorcyclists. They are desperate to arrest any erring motorcyclists. The Lagos State laws come after abolition of 'road blocks' by the IGP. Hence, the laws serve as a ready instrument for generating illegal revenue to the corrupt officials in the NPF.

Meanwhile, since motorcyclists already know the desperation of NPF to prey on them, they refuse to run foul of the law. That ostensibly informs the statement offered by one of the police that there was no business that day. However, the two police officers take solace in the oncoming car. The other police conclude that they could arrest the men driving in the car and charge them for driving 4-wheel 'okada'.

This statement is highly ridiculous. It displays the greedy desperation to garner illegal revenue on the part of these lascivious and corrupt police elements.

The cartoon is a visual grammar. It speaks more volume than a whole essay on the subject satired. Just as Messaris and Abraham (2001) argue that visual components are more influential than words. They point out that:

Viewers may be less aware of the process of framing when it occurs visually than when it takes place through words. Consequently, visual images may have the capacity of conveying messages that would meet with greater resistance if put in words, but which are received more readily in visual images (P. 25).

The cartoonists clandestinely, and in a subtle but vivid affirmation declares that the new Lagos traffic laws is just a replacement of the old order of mounting police check points.

All of these are signifiers. The two heavily kitted policemen represent all the debauched and corrupt elements in the NPF. They feed fat on illegal proceeds from their greedy and unlawful ventures. The guns symbolize their threatening powers. With or without resistance from their preys, they point their guns at them coughing out intermittent threats. The warning code is just a representation of several ambiguous traffic laws spread across the country. Road users who run foul of these laws are left at the mercy of these exploitative police officers. The motorists in our cartoon signify the vast innocent users of our roads who are daily tormented by police irrational behaviours. They are subjected to numerous and inexplicable traffic laws both written and unwritten.



Text B

In this cartoon, we are presented with a wall poster containing the image of a police officer. We also see a passerby in rain coat, who makes a passing comment on the poster. The inscription on the poster reads ‘‘police on special duty in Kano decry neglect. They haven’t eaten for ten days’’. This inscription is in form of a news item. Also, a close look as the image shows that it is raining.

The news item and the image of the police officer is a representation on how the corrupt police officers have fared after the removal of police check points across the country. The individual in raincoat signifies the general opinion of people towards the police in Nigeria. The opinion is that of apathy, hatred and indifference.

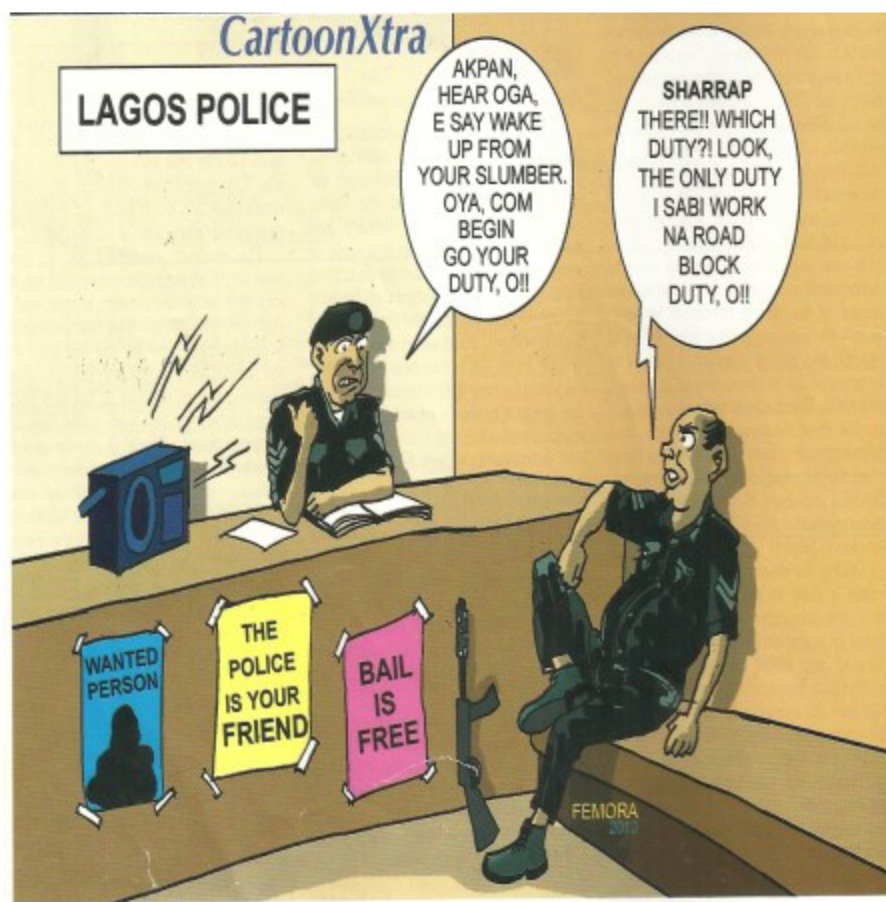
This image on the whole is a thesis on the condition of the corrupt officers in the NPF after the removal of ‘‘road blocks’’ in the country. In a simple form, the comment of this individual shows the reason for police’s suffering. The caption reveals that some police officers posted to Kano on special duty are crying of neglect. The import of the comment is that if police are still on the check points, they will have no reason to complain, since they will have unlimited access to exploit and extort motorists and other road users.

Meanwhile, just as the cartoonist identifies the cause of their complaints, he nonetheless proffers solution- back to check points. If the police are allowed to go back to the check points, their problems will

disappear. 'Mounting a check point' as proffered by the cartoonist is hoped to assuage their suffering even though they are on special duties anywhere in the country. But unfortunately, the IGP had insisted there is no going back on 'road block' removal. Hence, their suffering continues.

Furthermore, there are some posers in this image. Don't these police officers receive salaries? What do they do with these salaries? These questions can only be answered by these officers. Returning to the check points will put Nigerians at receiving end. The caption says they haven't eaten for days. Are they on hunger strike? May be to protest their neglect? Or may be the news item is simply exaggerated.

Through this image, the cartoonist has presented to us the general demeanor of the corrupt officials in the NPF towards the removal of check points and also the opinions of Nigerians towards the NPF. There is a vast message embedded in this cartoon. This, if presented in written forms surely will attract offenses from the NPF. But in a subtle manner, the NPF has been adequately satirised. The analyst therefore can bring out a whole lot of meanings just as the point raised by El Rafea (2000:25) is reinforced.



Text C.

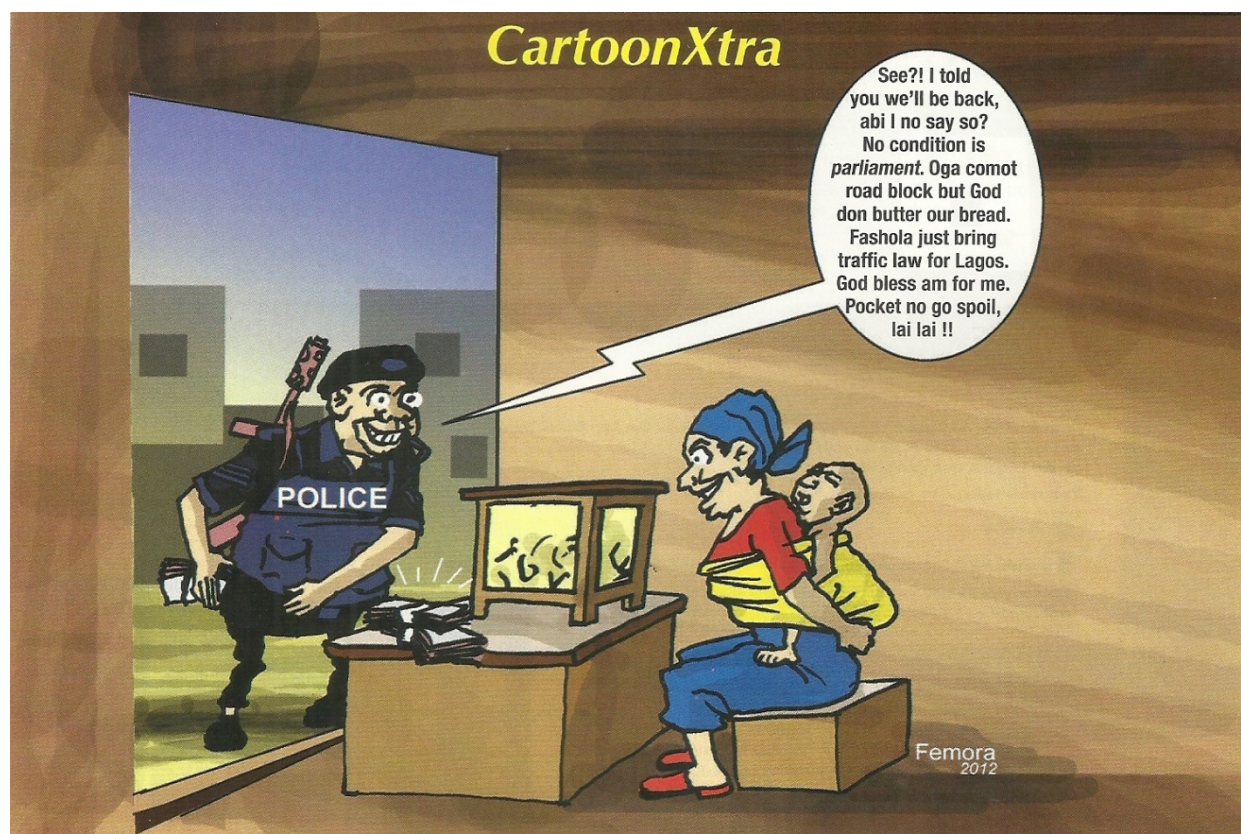
There are two represented participants in the image before us. The two of them are police officers who as expected dressed in police insignia. One of them is sitting at the counter while the other sits on a bench crossing his legs. Beside him is a gun which leans against the counter. On the counter also there is a radio which appears to be blasting a programme. Above them is an inscription which reads "Lagos Police". There are also various bills pasted on the counter with various familiar inscriptions associated with the police. The inscriptions on the bills read "Wanted Person", "The Police is your Friend" and "Bail is Free".

Its obvious these police officers are communicating. The verbal anchorage of this image reveals the intention of the cartoonist. The police officer at the counter is relaying the instruction of a superior officer to the other officer. He is being to go back to his duty post. The reply of Akpan reveals the object of satire and the message embedded in this image. Akpan reveals that the only duty he knows is "road block". The import of this can be overwhelming.

As stated earlier, the IGP had ordered the dismantling of all police mounted “road blocks” in the country and this instruction had been carried out. Hence, the major avenue and hope of police extortion has been squashed. The statement from Akpan connotes that police are no more committed to their duties since their main specialty “mounting road blocks” has been removed. The cartoonist has really captured the general mood and dispositions of these corrupt elements in the Nigeria Police Force. They are no more committed to their jobs as suggested by this cartoon. This ultimately means that the government is only wasting tax payers’ money on these officers who are derelict on their duty and displayed nonchalant attitudes towards their jobs. It’s apparent that these officers detest their primary duties and take delight in mounting illegal police check points.

We must not lose sight of the significance of the various inscriptions on the posted bills. This is a common sight in a typical police station across the country. These inscriptions to an ordinary Nigerian are filled with contradiction, falsity and deception. Nigerian knows that the police is not their friend. Otherwise how explainable are such incidents where a police officer pulls the trigger and kills a harmless citizen at the slightest provocation? Or better still, the despicable manner at which police officers extort money from motorists at illegal check points does not portray them as true friends. The derogatory question often asked is whether an average police officer is really a friend or fiend. Also in most local police stations across the country, bail is not free. The intended purposes of these inscriptions are defeated as the NPF has allowed corrupt elements in the force to act in the contrary. It is also significant to note that the picture of the ‘wanted person’ is not clear. This is also deception. So many persons that have declared wanted by the police are never arrested. This accounts mainly for the upsurge in criminal activities in the country. Since the picture of this ‘wanted person’ is not clear, the message is simple. The wanted person is not known, consequently, it is like declaring wanted an unknown person.

The cartoonist has deliberately revealed the setting of the cartoon. Obviously, the cartoon is set in Lagos. Lagos is the most popular commercial city in Nigeria. The attitude of police officers in Lagos can pass as a character measure for all officers in other parts of the country. The reason for this submission is not far-fetched. Lagos is densely populated with different people from various parts of Nigeria who come to the commercial city for various reasons. Facilities are stretched to the limit and there are growing cases of employment, traffic gridlocks, bribery and corruption, crime, and high cost of living. So if a police officer can cope with all these attendant vices and circumstances and discharge his duty faithfully and honestly, then he most likely can cope in any part of the country. In the whole, this cartoon reveals the rot and the decadence in the NPF.



Text D

There are two personalities in this cartoon. One of the represented participants is a police officer and the other is his wife. The police officer appears to be arriving home from a successful his duty. He looks very happy as he drops some bundles of money on the table. The wife seems amazed at what she is seeing and stretches her hands in utter bewilderment. In front of the woman is a show glass which contains some items displayed for sale.

This image reveals the obnoxious activities of the enforcement agencies of the new Lagos Traffic Laws. From the verbal anchorage, it clearly shows that this police officer had made a field day as he continues to drop his proceeds which he had illegally extorted from innocent citizens who have broken the new law. The police officer in our image represents the whole bunch of irresponsible and corrupt elements in the NPF. This image is highly revealing. The good intention of the Lagos State Governor has been grossly sabotaged and turned into unsavoury opportunity to make brisk money by law enforcement agents at the detriment and expense of innocent citizens. This is also done at the expense of government's integrity. The officer in this cartoon is full of praises for the governor who unwittingly has established another avenue for him and those in his caliber to continue their illicit trade.

The woman in this cartoon who obviously is the wife of this police officer signifies the vast docile wives of corrupt police officers. It can be reasoned from this cartoon that this woman is jobless. She only decides to engage herself in a petty trading after it dawns on her that the IGP has finally removed checkpoints from Nigerian roads. Hitherto, these checkpoints served as money spinning for her husband and so she has no need to do any job. Now that the husband has struck gold again, she may decide to do away with her petty trading again and become a full housewife. This cartoon succinctly captures this analysed phenomenon.

Analyses of other Visual Components

Gaze and posture

As stated somewhere else in this study, with regard to behaviour, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:122-3) discuss the way in which interaction between a viewer and the individuals shown in an image is affected by the gaze of the represented participants. Images make demand when participants look directly on a formal (and imaginary) level:

The participant's gaze [or gesture] demands something from the viewer. It demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her.

In text A, the look on the face of the police officer's image is important. He looks old and haggard. The cartoonist has done this deliberately. It shows that the police are now suffering. What is the cause of this suffering? The cartoonist gives the answer. The removal of police check points has brought untold hardships on the corrupt ones within the force. Very many of them live solely on the proceeds from check points. They have already mortgaged their salaries. Hence, their suffering is conspicuous and complaints frequent.

The gaze of the motorists is bewilderment in text B. They wonder why they should be stopped when they are not riding motorcycle. The stern looking posture of these police officers is highly instructive. They may open fire at anytime if the motorists refuse to cooperate. They held on to their guns tenaciously as if pursuing armed robbers. The posture of Akpan in text C is that indifference and resignation. He feels quite reluctant to perform his legal duty. He submits that the only duty he knows how to perform is 'road block'. He refuses to bulge even when the order comes from a superior officer to report at his duty post.

The posture of the represented participants in text D is significant. The police officer seems happy as revealed in his posture. The wife too is not different. They have caught in on the ingenuity of the Lagos state governor to raid motorcyclists and extort them with impunity. They rejoice in illegality.

Colour

Colour is believed to constitute a mode "entirely different from language" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001:27). The example given is that seeing the word 'blue' and seeing the colour blue creates different effects. Colour serves as a semiotic device that provides cohesion (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001:58). The dominant colours used in magazines of different countries are different. Colours are 'signifiers' instead of 'signs', they signify certain ideas and are therefore a kind of resource used in designs to create a cohesive message (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001:59-62). Colour is discussed as a semiotic resource - a mode, which, like other modes, is multifunctional in its uses in the culturally located making of signs.

It is observed that the colour of the warning traffic code in text A is yellow. In addition, the colour of the headlamps of the car is yellow. This is significant. In Nigeria, colour yellow means warning as well as sincerity. It may also mean caution against hazards or warning against breaking certain rules or regulations.

From this standpoint, the use of the colour by the cartoonist is deliberate. The traffic code is encapsulated in yellow to denote warning. It is a warning to motorcyclists to keep off the area. Hence, the use of colour in this regard enhances semantic quality. The headlamps are also painted yellow to still connote warning. This may mean that the driver puts on the headlamps perhaps to register his discontentment with the police who decides to mount an illegal checkpoint. The driver probably may not wait at the checkpoint.

In text c, the posted bills are in different colours of pink, yellow and blue. This also has semantic meanings. The inscriptions of 'bail is free', 'the police is your friend' and 'wanted person' are on pink, yellow and blue colours respectively. As stated earlier, colour yellow means sincerity. But how sincere is this inscription on a yellow page? Nigerians know that the police is not their friend. The cartoonist through this medium of colour use, has successfully passed across his message.

Graphology

According to Oloosun (2001), the graphological features of written texts are carriers of their phonological information of meaning. Hence, some aspects of linguistics in the verbal anchorages shall be foregrounded in this section with the aim of seeing how they have been employed by the cartoonist to communicate his message to the reading audience.

It is significant that the speeches of the represented participants in texts A, C and D are in Pidgin English. This is deliberate. It is a system of revealing the level of academic attainment of these officials who mainly fall within the rank and file of the NPF. Most of these officers are not well educated. Consequently, their speeches are relayed in Pidgin English. Pidgin English is a loose structure language which is native to any of its users.

The use of rhetoric is also noticeable in the verbal anchorages. For instance, in text D, we see rhetorics in the followings: 'see?', 'abi I no say so?'. Also in text C, the use of rhetorics is noticed in 'which duty?'. The rhetorics, in this sense, are used by the cartoonist to bring emphasis on the statements. 'which duty?' as asked by Akpan is rhetorical. Akpan is well familiar with his line of duty as a policeman, hence, asking question about it is to emphasise the only duty he knows. The intention of the cartoonist is to direct our attention to the 'duty' involved. The only 'duty' as far as Akpan is concerned is 'road block' duty. Also, the word 'see?' in text D is directing our attention to the officer's earlier discussion with his wife. The subject of the discussion is on 'the removal of road blocks' as suggested in the statement. The 'road block' issue is therefore the main subject to which the cartoonist is direction our attention.

Conclusion

Multimodal discourse analysis has made it possible to account for visual components of this study. However it is instructive to note that interpretation of images is by its very nature subjective, and an image can carry multiple messages depending upon the nature of the visually interpreting culture. Just as Kress and Van Leeuwen suggest that “.....social interactions and social relations can be encoded in images so that we are instructed silently regarding a set of implicit norms” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:153). It is clearly noted that most cartoons of TELL Newsmagazine are produced and designed to reveal, albeit, surreptitiously and satirically, certain phenomena which are considered repulsive to the general public. In all, we hope that this study has contributed to an array of scholarly works in media discourse in Nigeria. The study emphasizes the vitality of visual elements as important devices in modern print journalism. Also, this study reveals very strongly and establishes the potentials of visual images to convey meaning beyond the verbal language in any human society.

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