

## **Pragma-Semiotic Analysis of Selected Hate Speeches in 2015 and 2019 Nigerian Presidential Campaign Adverts**

**M. Lekan Oduola PhD**

*Ifra Senior Research Fellow & Lecturer, Department of English,  
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria.*

*abilacrown@gmail.com*

*08034227134*

**&**

**Adeagbo, Olajumoke E.**

*Department of English,*

*Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria.*

*07035536376*

### **Abstract**

*Hate speech, any form of utterance targeted at ridiculing and defaming others, has become a potent political weapon in the Nigerian polity. Previous studies on political discourse in Nigeria have focused on general stylistics, pragmatics and semiotic features but have not significantly explored the combination of semiotics and pragmatic acts types in meaning negotiation. This study, therefore, examines discursive image and pragmatic acts used in the hate speeches to establish their joint roles in the negotiation of meaning. The study adopted Jacob Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory and Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's (2006) Discourse analysis approach. Five speeches were purposively extracted from The Punch and The Guardian Newspapers on 2015 and 2019 presidential campaign speeches due to their ornate multimodal resources to project sensitive political messages. The data were subjected to pragma-semiotic analysis. The speeches were characterised by different pragmatic acts such as condemning act, warning act, cautioning act, challenging act and accusing act which overlaps with the following contextual features: reference (REF), metaphor (MPH), share situational knowledge (SSK) and voice (VCE). The visual portrayal of hate speech foregrounds different semiotic resources such as contact, information value, salience and framing in constructing representational, interactive and compositional significance. Verbal and visual modes in the selected presidential campaign adverts indicate that dominant political parties in Nigeria employ derogatory expressions to boost their prestige while denigrating inferior parties.*

**Keywords:** Pragma-semiotics, Hate speech, Presidential campaign, Nigeria election, Discourse analysis.

### **Introduction**

A political campaign is a strategic mechanism created by political parties to influence the opinions and possible decisions of a group of people. In a democratic setting, political campaigns also known as electoral campaigns are aimed at

consolidating political representation or referendums by political parties. Recently, highly-rated political campaigns are employed by candidates for the lofty office of the President or Prime Minister (Boundless Political Science, 2016). A political campaign is as old as human civilisation and is necessitated by the need for a structure that promotes political activities within societies. It is a conscious effort of someone or individuals who seek the support of public or group of people to win an electoral contest. Grace (2015) opines that “In politics, campaigns have become an essential tool used amongst candidates contesting for various positions to get the electorates to vote for them” (Ojekwe, 2015). The period of an election and political campaign in any country is always intense. The politics of a country is heavily affected as activities and issues are brought to the fore for the public interest. A political campaign is a step in the electoral process of any country and it foreshadows the actual voting process.

Hate speech is a communicative form in which indiscriminate expressions are used to insult and slander others based on either race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or affiliation (Bagdikian, 1997). Therefore, a hate speech entails rhetorical strategies that occasionally provoke hostility, impunity, physical violence and political arson all of which are unwholesome contraventions of democratic principles and norms (Chaiken and Eagly, 1978). Mrabure (2016) submits that hate speech is generally used to describe any message that defames a specific person or a group of people. It can be in the form of conversation, gesture, behaviour, writing or visual expression. In this regard, a politically-motivated hate speech is generally an antecedent to electorally-related hostility and violence in Nigeria, though it is a global phenomenon. Essentially, such speeches deflate the egos of others.

The United Nation in 2016 highlighted circumstances that can motivate hate speech and they include:

- all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means;
- incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin;
- threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above;
- expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; and
- participation in organizations and activities which promote and incite racial discrimination.

Nigeria as a democratic state has an active political culture and conducts intensive presidential campaigns which are often content and context-based. Against this backdrop, the study does a pragma-semiotic analysis of selected hate speeches in

2015 and 2019 Nigerian presidential campaigns using *The Punch* and *The Guardian Newspapers* as a case study.

### **Statement of the research problem**

Previous studies on political discourse in Nigeria have focused on Speech Acts, General Stylistics, and Text Linguistics. For instance, Ongaroga and Matu's (2016) study centres on the interpretation of political hate speeches in Kenya, using Sperber and Wilson's (2004) relevance theory. Rasaan, Abubakar and Laaro (2017) on the other hand, examine political hate speeches in the media from Van Dijk's (2001; 2004) standpoint of critical discourse analysis. Matthew and Chinwe (2017) explore the relationship between verbal hygiene, hate speech and society, with emphasis on politeness principles in Pragmatics, while Alakali, Philip and Mbursa (2015) employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to discuss moral and legal consequences of hate speech on society with emphasis on journalism. The above studies are scholarly and ground-breaking efforts which focused extensively on "a mono-modal" discourse analysis of hate speeches at the expense of combining multimodality with pragmatic acts for the analysis of hate speeches. The present study, therefore, adopts theoretical eclectic perspectives of Jacob Mey's (2001) pragmatic act, and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal discourse analysis to critique hate speeches in 2015 and 2019 presidential campaigns. The study foregrounds the reception of Nigerians to her politics through an exploration of captions, pictures, semiotic signs and symbols embedded within some political campaigns in the country.

### **Aim and objectives**

The study aims at investigating the manifestation of hate speeches in political captions and other semiotic resources (visual signs, symbols, pictures and images) during campaigns in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- to explore the significance of hate speeches in selected Nigerian campaigns
- to highlight extra-linguistic features in hate speeches in selected Nigerian campaigns
- to discuss the pragmatic effects of semiotic resources used to convey hate speeches in selected Nigerian campaigns

### **Significance of the study**

The study is a contribution to linguistic scholarship in multimodality through discourse analysis for meaning-making. Apart from exposing discursive images and pragmatic acts in hate speeches, the study seeks to enlighten Nigerians and media practitioners on approaches to manage and respond to hate speeches in society. It is expected that academics, students and scholars will immensely gain fresh insight on multimodal discourse analysis and pragmatic acts theory as applied to communications within the Nigerian political sphere. In conclusion, findings will boost nation-building processes and stimulate further studies on hate speeches.

### **Empirical works on hate speech**

Quite a number of researches have been conducted in the sub-fields of social, media, legal and political discourses of hate speech. Fasakin, Oyero and Oyesomi (2017) evaluate the impact of hate speech in electioneering and the choice of voters' candidate based on perception before, during and after the election. Their study focus on hate speeches in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria underpinned to the social responsibility theory, which delineates on the role of the media and social values as a benchmark for an effective electoral process. Their essay concludes with a recommendation of capital punishment for erring media outlets who propagate hate speeches which is detrimental to the democracy of Nigeria.

In a similar vein, Rasaq, *et al.* (2017) buttressed on the viral nature of hate speech in Nigeria and implicates the Nigerian media as being responsible for its widespread. His study is premised on a critical discourse analysis of hate speech during campaigns which is a likely cause of violence during elections in Nigeria. He is of the opinion that hate speeches should be discouraged for the development of the Nigerian polity.

Auwal (2018) explores users' comments on Biafra agitations and the Arewa Youths' ultimatum to Igbo residents in the North collected from Facebook accounts of selected media organisations. He, in similitude to Rasaq, *et al.* (2017), also adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to assess the nature of Facebook users' comments (confrontational or supportive of a particular ethnic or religious group, and those that attack the personality of the Nigerian President based on his regional and ethnic affiliation), and its implication on peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Auwal's (2018) study reveals that there is a regional and religious bias among Facebook users and their comments could destroy the harmony of Nigeria. This is possible due to the ubiquitous nature of news on the social media, through which users could read or react to posts anonymously using derogatory comments devalue others' ethnicity, political, regional and religious affiliations in the country. The study suggests a need for effective policies to moderate activities on social media, and to counter the negative consequences of such posts on peaceful coexistence.

From the foregoing, it can be established that a sizable number of researches has been conducted on hate speech, though extremely from the Critical Discourse Analytical standpoint, but insufficient studies on multimodality and pragma-semiotic analysis of hate speech. The study intends to fill the gap and also exceed the purviews of the above critics.

### **The nature of hate speech in Nigeria**

The term 'hate,' refers to a very strong feeling of dislike for a particular person or thing (*Oxford advanced learner's dictionary*, 2006). It suggests the extreme negative feelings and beliefs held about a group of individuals or a specific representative of that group because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation. There is difference in the meaning and dimensions of hate speech, as the term has acquired diverse viewpoints. For the purpose of this study,

we would take hate speech as any writing, speech, gesture, conduct, or display which could lead people to violence or prejudicial action.

Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity, as listed above by the United Nation (2016); and in addition, hate speech refers to all communications (whether verbal, written or symbolic) that insults a racial, ethnic and political group, whether by suggesting that they are inferior in some respect or by indicating that they are despised or not welcome for any other reasons. Hate speech has also been conceived as “verbal terror” or a war waged on others by means of word. Aside causing danger of physical assault, hate speech risks violent reaction (Kayambazinthu & Moyo, 2002; Neisser, 1994; United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2013).

Hate messages lead to lower personal self-esteem and a diminished sense of security with short- and long-term consequences which are similar in nature to the effects of other types of traumatic experiences (Kiai, 2007; Malik, 2015). “It seeks to create hatred or incite violence. It could come in terms of advertorials and sponsored political news, abusive editorial comments or opinions that denigrate individuals or groups on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief”. The volatile nature of the nation’s ethno-social, cultural and religious complexity makes it fertile soil for hate speech of all kinds. It is, therefore, rewarding to attempt a pragma-semiotic analysis that can mitigate the situation in the interest of national unity.

### **Theoretical framework**

Jacob Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal discourse approach provide the ground work for the study. Pragmatic acts look at discursive elements holistically, that is, they signify human's acts with everything that humans bring into their interactional forum. Mey's pragmatic acts theory is an approach to explain the way pragmemes are represented in pragmatic acts in speech situations. A pragmeme is a situated speech act in which the rules of language and that of society combine to give meaning. Mey's major criticism about speech act is that for speech acts to be effective, they have to be situated: “they both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realised (p. 218). According to Mey, “there are no speech acts, but only situated speech acts, or instantiated pragmatic acts”. A particular pragmeme can be substantiated and realised through individual pragmatic acts. In other words, a pragmatic act is an instance of adapting oneself to a context, as well as adapting the context to oneself. There are two parts to this theory: *activity part* and *textual part*. The activity part contains indirect speech acts, conversational (‘dialogue’) acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts and physical acts which the interactants rely on for meaningful communication while the textual part contains the contextual features within which the pragmeme operates, and which include INF representing "inference"; REF, "relevance"; VCE, "voice"; SSK, "shared situation knowledge"; MPH, "metaphor"; and M "metapragmatic joker" (Mey, 2001).

Based on Halliday's theory, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) use a barely different diction in discussing the meaning of image in visual communication: representational instead of ideational; interactive instead of interpersonal; and compositional instead of textual. The representational meaning are of two types: narrative and conceptual. Narrative images involve four processes: action process, relational process, speech and mental process, and conversation process; while conceptual images include three kinds: classification process, analytical process and symbolic process. Kress and van Leeuwen have indicated three ways to examine the interactive meaning of images from three aspects: contact (demand or offer), social distance (intimate, social, or impersonal), and attitude (involvement, detachment, viewer power, equality, representation power, etc.). The compositional meaning of images is realised through three interrelated systems: information value (given or new, ideal or real, important or less), salience (achieved through size, colour, tone, focus, perspective, overlap, repetition, etc.), and framing. From Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, we can see that images are made up of parts that can be dissolved when analysing their meaning. Just as language, images have meanings only when they are integrated together. That is, the meaning of visual images comes from the arrangement of different visual elements (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001). Hence, the study aims to investigate pragma-semiotic analysis of hate speech in selected 2015 and 2019 Nigerian presidential election campaigns.

### **Research methodology**

The research design for this study is descriptive survey approach which accounts for qualitative findings. With this, the content analysis of the data for adequate interpretation, description and presentation of selected hate speeches should be enhanced in order to feed on the two theories, pragmatic acts theory and multimodal discourse approach. This necessitates a systematic description of the discursive images with actual pragmatic acts used in the hate speeches to establish their joint roles in the meaning negotiation. The study thus adopts a purposively sampled five hate speeches selected from *The Punch* and *The Guardian* Newspapers. The natural speech forms were generated from the political jousting of 2015 and 2019 presidential campaign speeches of the two dominant parties, in Nigeria – PDP and APC. The two newspapers were selected purposively for the reasons based on independent patronage, easy accessibility and scope of readership. The data are to be subjected to pragma-semiotic analysis, the selected sample speech-texts are laid out and sequentially numbered as Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, and so forth, for ease of reference.

**Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion**

A leopard cannot change its spots.



Figure 1

**Source:** *The Punch*, Monday March 23, 2019

S/N	Hate speech/Statement	Pragmatic act	Communication value	Pictorial accompaniment
1.	Nigeria Be warned!  A leopard cannot change its spots	Warning act	Buhari is dangerous and subtle	+

Drawing on pragmatic acts and contextual features of REL, SSK, and MPH, and symbolised by the umbrella, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) speaks with a metaphorical voice against Buhari in order to caution Nigerians against voting him as president. The voice opposes Buhari's ambition of becoming Nigeria’s president for second term. This verbal text is metaphoric to depict Buhari as being dangerous and subtle. The voice also used *share situational knowledge* (SSK) by capitalising on the failures of the administration in the first term. The point is, Buhari is not fit to be re-elected or else, his performance would be worse. This category of hate speech is full of accusation, condemnation and abuse. Verbal texts as shown in the above advert indicate the pragmeme, ‘*Buhari is dangerous, incapable and unpredictable.*’ The visual-text comprise of two objects; President Buhari and a leopard. Buhari is the *subject* while the leopard is the *intention*. Buhari’s picture is placed alongside the leopard’s to signify the unreliable trait of the president. The *vector* here is the look of the leopard which connects with the interactive participant/analyst. Looking at the background colour of this figure, green and white colours are used at the background to represent the two dominant colours of the Nigerian flag indicating the discourse is national phenomenon. Red colour is used for the text, ‘a leopard cannot change its spots to denote danger’ as caution against re-electing Buhari.

The next picture is captioned: Nigerians be warned! Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of State burials.

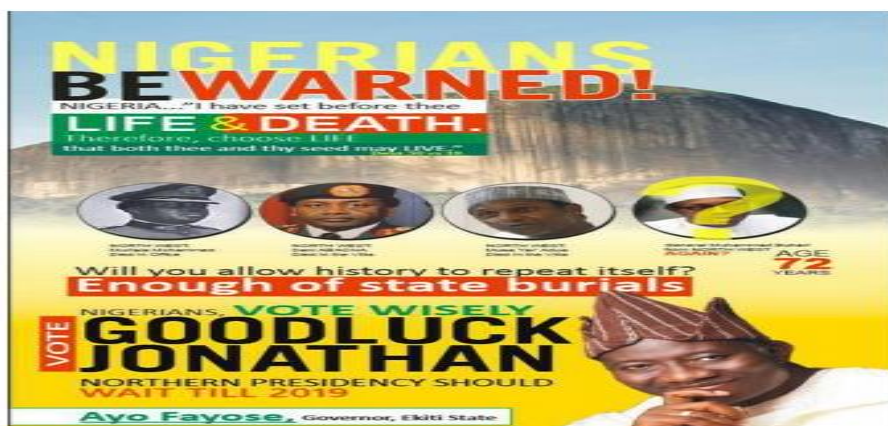


Figure 2

Source: *The Punch*, 19th, Thursday, 2015

S/N	Hate speech/Statement	Pragmatic act	Communication value	Pictorial accompaniment
2.	Nigeria Be warned! Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of state burials.	Warning and condemning act	Buhari will die in office if voted in	+

There are five represented participants in the foregrounded resources: Gen. Murtala Mohammed, Gen. Sanni Abacha, Musa Yar’Adua, Muhammadu Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan. Jonathan stands as the *actor* while other represented participants placed above the text are *goals*. The above figure shows pictures of late heads of state and placed Buhari as the last one. The question mark placed at the facial part of Buhari is meant for the Nigerian populace to decide their choice. They are warned against the choice of a president that will likely die in office as Buhari is likely to go the way of his northern predecessors. The textual segment of **figure 2** is accompanied with the contextual features such as REF, SSK and MPH. The voice in this text is that of Ayo Fayose, the then Governor of Ekiti State. The first textual part of figure 4 reads; "Nigeria... I have set before thee LIFE and DEATH. Therefore, choose LIFE that both thee and thy seed may LIVE". The voice is referring to Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP as LIFE while Buhari, the APC candidate is referred to as Death. Metaphorically, life in this sense means that Jonathan is nearer the cradle than the grave, and will do well in office by bringing good fortune to the Nigerian nation compared to Buhari who is considered of no electoral value, and therefore will serve no useful purpose in the administration of the country considering his age.



The next two expressions which read; ***Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of state burials;*** express the pragmeme, ‘Buhari might die in office if voted in’ The voice in the text used shared situational knowledge (SSK), that is, the case of one death too many which has become perennial recurrent decimal especially with Northern elements in power exemplified by late Gen. Abacha, Murtala Mohammed and Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar’Adua. Fayose makes reference to these set of ex-presidents so as to remind and warn Nigerians of the need to vote wisely. Meaning that, if they should insist and vote for Buhari, he (Buhari) might also die in office like his predecessor, Yar’Adua. The voice suggests Goodluck Jonathan as a better alternative for the next president. The yellow colour in the background is indicative of “golden” opportunity available to electorate through their vote, which is, voting in Goodluck Jonathan. On the other hand, the death of Buhari will be a setback to Nigeria’s politics. The pragmatic acts used in the above hate speech are “warning”, “condemning” and “directive” respectively.

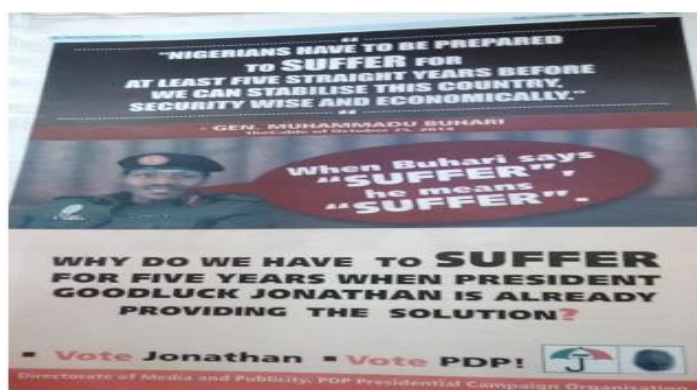


Figure 3

Source: *Sunday Guardian*, February 8 2015

S/N	Hate speech/Statement	Pragmatic act	Communicative value	Pictorial accompaniment
3.	When Buhari says "suffer" he means "suffer"	Condemning and warning act	Buhari is seen as a leader that will inflict pain on the masses	+

The voice in the text interacts with the pragmatic act of the contextual features such as SSK and REF. This voice which is coming from the PDP has a shared situational knowledge (SSK) of what Buhari said concerning the situation of Nigeria. The textual expression makes reference to words of General Buhari during his interview with CNN on 25<sup>th</sup>, October, 2014, which is based on ways of ameliorating the sufferings of Nigerians. In order for this voice to portray Buhari as a bad leader that will inflict pains on the masses, it quickly misrepresented Buhari's words. Buhari meant that it would take up to five years before everything in the country can be

stabilised and this can lead to a kind of suffering for people in the country. The expression 'When Buhari says suffer, he means suffer' expresses the pragmeme, Buhari is wicked and has a penchant for inflicting pain on Nigerians, therefore they should not expect a different outcome if he is re-elected as Nigeria's president. The voice performs "warning" and "condemning" pragmatic acts. The captions are indicative of PDP's admonition to Nigerian electorate not to vote for Buhari, a tyrant while presenting Goodluck Jonathan as a better alternative. The black military uniform portends oppression, evil and national disaster if the wrong candidate is elected.



Figure 4

Source: The Guardian Friday, June 14th, 2019

S/N	Hate speech/Statement	Pragmatic acts pe	Communicative value	Pictorial accompaniment
4.	Buhari on Islamisation of Nigeria.	Expressive and Assurance Acts	Buhari will not <i>Islamise</i> the country if voted in	+

The speaker draws on contextual features of pragmatic acts such as VCE, REF and SSK. The voice (VCE) is aware that Buhari is a Muslim who had been portrayed as an Islamic fundamentalist, especially by the opposition party. The voice sets to launder Buhari's battered image with a view to absorbing him of alleged intention to *Islamise* the Nigerian nation. The verbal text of the above advert expresses the pragmeme, 'Buhari "does not intend" to Islamise the country if voted in'. The pragmatic act type used in the above hate speech is "expressing" act. The visual aspect in the above goodwill speech has three represented participants in terms of interactive meaning; a vector is formed through the represented participants' eye - lines and connect with the viewer/ interactive participant. The close shot of Buhari with his unusual smile, in this case calling the viewer to enter into a relation of social affinity with him. In the textual materials "BUHARI OSINBAJO", there is an appeal to Osinbajo who happens to be a pastor, and Buhari's running mate to dissuade the Nigerian Christian Community of claims on the "Islamisation agenda".

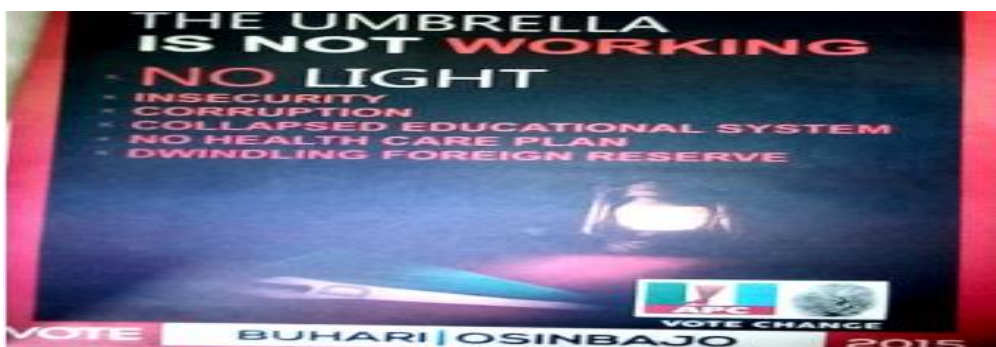


Figure 5  
 The Guardian, Friday, February 6th, 2015  
 “The umbrella is not working no light, insecurity, corruption, collapsed educational system, no health care plan, dwindling foreign reserve”

S/N	Hate speech/Statement	Pragmatic act	Communicative value	Pictorial accompaniment
5.	The umbrella is not working, on light, insecurity, corruption collapsed educational system, no health care plan, dwindling foreign reserve	Condemning and suggesting act	Jonathan administration is futile	+

In the above caption, the speaker extensively referenced (REF) Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, the PDP presidential candidate, using *indirect act*. The shared situational knowledge (SSK) is appropriated in the logo of the party which is an umbrella. Both verbal and visual communication depict PDP as ineffective, inefficient and a disappointment. The umbrella as indirect reference and object of the discourse serves as a slander on the PDP and her candidate, President Goodluck Jonathan. This implication is that the party (PDP) is irrelevant in her service to the country. The speaker (APC) used “condemning” act to indirectly refer to Jonathan as incapable. The lantern in the advert is used to depict the epileptic power supply that characterised the PDP’s *reign of darkness*. The dark background where the lantern is placed is to communicate corruption within Jonathan’s administration. In terms of information value, the inanimate represented participant which is the lantern placed at the right side of the advert is to attract attention to the poster. Based on the visual aspect of the advert, we have the logo of the APC party which is the broom towards the bottom of the advert as the instrument of ousting out poor governance. Through this, the APC party is beckoning on the masses to give consideration to Buhari, its candidate. The expression ‘the umbrella is not working’ expresses the pragmeme Jonathan's administration is of no relevance to the nation’s survival.

**Summary of findings**

This study, so far, investigated the discursive images and actual pragmatic acts used in the posters to establish their joint roles in the negotiation of meanings. It is an exercise that addresses the academic lacuna in political discourse. Amongst the findings of the study are:

Hate speech is characterised by different pragmatic acts such as condemning act, warning act, cautioning act, challenging act and accusing act which interact with the following contextual features: reference (REF), metaphor (MPH), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and voice (VCE). This is in line with Ajayi and Ajayi (2014, p. 1) who submit that language of politicians is characterized by practs (that is, acts such as pragmatic accusation, challenge, abuse, warning, persuasion, assurance and condemnation which draw on contextual features such as shared situational knowledge (SSK), Shared cultural knowledge (SCK), metaphor (MPH), voice (VCE) and relevance (REL).

The visual language of hate speech manifests different semiotic resources such as: contact, information value, salience and framing in constructing representational, interactive and compositional meaning. This is also in line with Liu (2013) who submits that visual grammar provides readers with various perspectives for attending to and interpreting visual images. For example, how they interact and coordinate with other elements relating to the objects and participants in the image.

**Conclusion**

The study has attempted pragma-semiotic analysis of selected hate speeches in 2015 and 2019 Nigerian presidential campaigns with insights from the Pragmatics act theory to multimodal discourse approach. It is palpably evident that verbal and visual modes in the selected presidential campaign adverts show that the two political parties (PDP and APC) use different derogatory expressions to ridicule and lower each other's self-esteem. Also, distinctive features such as demand, offer, actor, vector, goals, close shot, long shot, and salience found in the adverts facilitate the understanding of the meaning constructed in the hate speeches.

In the overall analysis, the nature of the multimodal interaction in generating a huge verbal and non-verbal jousting that often characterise political electioneering campaigns in the form of hate speech has been explored. The global nature of multimodal interaction, notwithstanding, the Nigerian variety has been found to be of accentuated volatility as seen in the 2015 and 2019 political experience. Though issue-based, the campaign adverts, covered in the study, have been full of hate rather than clearly thought out ideologies, making the Nigerian socio-political environment a cheap bowl for public spit in the comity of nations.

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