

MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF POST-ELECTION MEMES IN THE EDO STATE (NIGERIA) 2020 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Although several studies have investigated the deployment of memes in political discourse, a multimodal analysis of how the electoral situation and the political traits of political actors are humorously conveyed in the post-election memes on the 2020 Edo State (Nigeria) gubernatorial election is a novel scholarly inquiry. This article uses the resources of socio-semiotic theory of multimodality, incongruity and superiority theories of humour and self-leadership strategies to analyse nine (9) purposively selected memes which were retrieved from Facebook and a news blog. The analysis shows the use of behaviour-focused strategies, self-reward strategies, and constructive thought strategies to clamour against external political influence, intervention and *godfatherism* in the politics of component states of Nigeria. This political expression is achieved through humour techniques such as sarcasm, punning, exaggeration and intertextuality, and through semiotic resources such as gaze, gesture, setting and props. Memes are subtle means of commenting on national issues under the guise of humour.

Keywords: political memes; Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election; humour; self-leadership strategies; semiotic resources

RESUMEN

Aunque varios estudios han investigado el despliegue de memes en el discurso político, el análisis multimodal de cómo se comunican humorísticamente a través de memes una situación electoral y las características políticas de actores políticos con posterioridad a la elección de 2020 del estado de Edo (Nigeria) constituye una investigación novedosa. Este artículo utiliza los recursos de la teoría sociosemiótica de la multimodalidad, las teorías de incongruencia y de superioridad y las estrategias de autoliderazgo para analizar nueve (9) memes especialmente seleccionados, que fueron tomados de Facebook y de un blog de noticias. El análisis muestra el uso de estrategias enfocadas en las conductas, estrategias de autopremiación y estrategias de pensamiento constructivo para protestar contra las influencias políticas externas, la intervención y el padrino de tipo mafioso en la política de estados de Nigeria. Esta expresión política se logra a través de técnicas humorísticas como el sarcasmo, los juegos de palabras, la exageración y la intertextualidad, y a través de recursos semióticos como la mirada, el gesto, el espacio y los objetos. Los memes son medios sutiles de comentar problemáticas nacionales bajo la apariencia de humor.

Keywords: memes políticos; elección de gobernador del estado de Edo 2020; humor; estrategias de autoliderazgo; recursos semióticos

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Introduction

Language, in any form, is used for communicative purposes. The demystification of the function(s) that language is made to serve in different situations of use is the focus of discourse analysis. Discourse has, most straightforwardly, been defined as ‘language in use’ (Brown and Yule, 1983). Joshua (2020:76) conceives of discourse as ‘language identified by the social conditions of its use, by who is using it and under what conditions’. Discourse cannot be studied without common ground, which encompasses the background information and the shared knowledge of the discourse participants which facilitate mutual understanding. As posited by Bloor and Bloor (2013), the study of discourse can involve matters like context, background information or knowledge shared between a speaker and hearer. Discourse analysis can, therefore, be defined as any logical and systematic attempt at discussing one or more societal issues within the ambit of language use.

Humour has been one of the ways discourse is constructed. For centuries, humour has been a veritable tool for scholarly-cum-educational enquiries in different disciplines. As a universally understood gesture, researchers in sociology, psychology, philosophy, medicine, theatre, linguistics, literature and other fields have investigated the manifestation, application and relevance of humour in different discourse situations. As a concept and phenomenon, humour is different things to different scholars in different fields. Scholars in psychology, such as Freud (1960) say that humour can be used to reduce the psychological tension caused by depression. But psychologists give little or no attention to the technical aspects of humour production. The linguistic and paralinguistic resources of humour are the focus of humour studies in applied linguistics. Humour has been mainly considered as anything that makes one laugh or creates amusement and/or the ability to identify such stimulus. As stated by Raskin (1985), the ability to appreciate and enjoy humor is a universal human trait, whereas the individual’s response to humour is the result of their exercising of this ability in varying degrees. Exercising this ability is greatly tied to the shared knowledge of the humour merchant and the consumers of the humour act. Therefore, laughter, funniness and/or amusement, which are the reactions to humour, strongly depend on context. It is safe to say then, that, though humour is a universal phenomenon, what is humorous is context-dependent.

Beyond its amusing content, a humorous discourse appeals to reason and understanding, sharpens the intellect and serves in constructing micro and macro ideologies (Olaosun 2016: 87). Being a tool for encoding and transmitting subtle messages, humour has been largely deployed by scholars to interrogate social constructs and power relations in society. Humour is made manifest in different forms of discourse ranging from stand-up comedy (Sunday and Filani, 2018; Filani and Bamgbose, 2020), situation comedy (Azeez and Doghudje 2015; Bamgbose 2019a) and even music (Bamgbose, 2019b). Humour in these different forms is used to comment on different societal issues. For instance, Sunday and Filani (2018) analyse how Nigerian stand-up comedians mediate what contemporary culture should be through their performances and Bamgbose (2019a) discusses the layers of humour in situation comedies and how societal issues such as electioneering and domestic violence are addressed under the guise of humour. Studying humour within music, Bamgbose (2019b) investigates how Nigerian hip-hop artistes, beyond the rhythm and lyrics of their songs, poke fun at their listeners. The study concludes that using strategies such as comparing, distorting collective knowledge of people, social events and situations, and manipulating shared cultural representations, Nigerian hip-hop songs are spiced with humorous utterances which can only be deciphered by people who share the socio-cultural world of the artistes.

One other field where humour is naturally integrated is the study of memes, and that is the focus of this research. According to Wikipedia, the word meme was coined by Richard Dawkins as an attempt to explain how ideas replicate, mutate and evolve (Memetics). Dawkins (1976), quoted in Shifman (2014: 9), defines memes as “small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes,

that spread from person to person by copying or imitation". Memes are created through the use of neologisms, distorted images, clever metaphors, punning, slogans, fixed phrasal expressions and other artistic devices. Memes have evolved from simple image macros with text to more elaborate things such as challenges, GIFs and viral sensations (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2014). Specifically, relevant to this study is internet memes. Internet memes, according to Dawkins, are memes directly altered by human creativity. Going by the report of Datareportal.com, as at April 20th, 2020, there are a total of 3.81 billion social media users around the world, representing 49% of the world's total population. The advent of social networking sites, as the widest imaginable platform of virtual assembly, has greatly spurred the use of memes as interventions in societal happenings.

From election campaign images and memes (Adegoju and Oyebode, 2015; Tella, 2018) to social media semiotic studies (Olubode-Sawe 2016; Lamidi, 2016), multimodal resources have been analysed from the perspective of humour to shed light on political happenings in Nigeria. Social media and blogs have increased the political power of the Nigerian populace and made their collective voice louder. The different social media platforms have become podiums through which the citizenry reach the government and express their opinions on societal issues. In line with this growing popularity of social media and blogs as a bridge of communication exchange between the government and the people, memes have become satirical and humorous tools to react to government policies and activities. In Nigeria for instance, memes have been used by the citizens to address many issues such as the debates around the Edo State (Nigeria) Gubernatorial election, which this study focuses on.

The Edo State gubernatorial debate, which took place on June 19 2020, was a unique political experience in the Nigerian political landscape, given its unusual antithetical nature. The election was keenly contested by two candidates. The first was an incumbent governor, Godwin Obaseki, who was elected to office in 2016 from a political party called All Progressive Congress (APC), but later adopted by People Democratic Party towards the end of his first tenure for a re-election in 2020. This was as a result out of fallout between the governor and the influential members of the party. The second candidate was Osagie Ize-Iyamu who contested under the All Progressive Congress (APC). Towards the end of Obaseki's first tenure, he got out of favour with the political gladiators of his earlier party, APC, and attempts to settle the differences proved abortive. In an antithetical manner, Obaseki was offered candidacy by the People Democratic Party (PDP) and Osagie Ize-Iyamu, who had contested against Obaseki from the platform of PDP in 2016, was filed by the APC for the 2020 election. The election saw Godwin Obaseki as the winner of the 2020 Edo State gubernatorial election.

The scenarios surrounding the election are funny in themselves, given the strangeness of an incumbent governor having to commence his second term under the umbrella of a different political party. This strangeness, perhaps, also resulted in the eventual memes that characterised the days after the election. This unprecedented political deserves scholarly attention to understand how the personalities and leadership traits of some Nigerian political actors are conceived of by the citizenry under the guise of humour.

As posited by Olubode-Sawe (2016), political jokes are subdivided into two: denigration jokes and exposure jokes. Denigration jokes may have as their target political figures, political groups or institutions or political ideas, while exposure jokes are typically targeted at political regimes and contain a reference to an incident or a series of events which are not well publicised. Olubode-sawe too admits that this bifurcation is a flexible one, as both functions can overlap. In line with these two aspects of political jokes, this paper sets out to investigate the deployment of memes to depict political identities and actors in the Edo State post-election online engagements. This research is carried out with a view to accounting for the public perception of the leadership traits of some

Nigerian politicians. The study, which is inscribed in applied linguistics but corroborated by self-leadership strategies within managerial studies, is facilitated by the following research questions:

- i. How are the leadership traits of Nigerian political leaders humorously depicted through online memes?
- ii. What nonverbal cues are deployed to achieve the humorous effects of the memes?
- iii. What verbal humour techniques are used to convey the images on the memes?

Humour as a tool for political protest on social media

Among the several judicious uses to which humour is put in human society, it has been and has remained a veritable tool for shaping and reshaping politics and policies across the world. Jokes are peculiar strategies of communication. In the words of Hart (2007), 'Because of their ambiguity, jokes can often act as a relief from open or covert social pressures'. Ideologists of the political left are said to regard humour and amusement as substitutes for the political action that should aim at change in societal settings. In other words, humour has become a peaceful alternative to radical revolution in achieving political changes in a country.

Social media have evolved into an entirely new form of political communication and participation. Davis, Love and Killen (2018) hold that this new form of communication and participation take on the conventions of internet culture, which include wit, parody, sarcasm, co-optation, and playful memification as "economies of laughter have become inextricably entangled with ... civic processes" (Henefeld, 2016). The affordances of political engagement on the Internet 'point to humor as a widely used and highly valued practice within political deliberations as they take shape through intersecting social platforms (Davis, Love and Killen, 2018: 4).

According to Chagas, Freire, Rios and Magalhães (2019), the emergence of new kinds of humor, enabled by information and communication technologies, reinforces even more the importance of thinking about the use of humor in a political context. Memes are considered a good corpus for this study because they are often created by amateurs, in touch with the feelings and sensibilities of the masses (Sá, 2014). They are more often than not born out of the popularly shared notions of the masses. It is on these grounds that I consider the use of memes as a viable perspective to demystify the politics around the Edo State (2020) gubernatorial election.

Literature review

Studies have investigated political discourse from different angles of applied linguistics such as (critical) discourse analysis, pragmatics and semiotics. The place of humour and of the deployment of multimodality in the interrogation of political discourse has also enjoyed scholarly attention from numerous researchers. Outside the shore of Nigeria, Chagas, Freire, Rios and Magalhães (2019) attempted to develop a taxonomical matrix which will help researchers interested in dealing with online political memes with greater objectivity through a content analysis of memes that circulated on Twitter during Brazilian 2014 presidential elections. As part of an ongoing work, the study presented a taxonomic matrix that aims to treat the discursive framing of memes. Using an experience of coding interpretation from shared decisions, they proposed a system to classify of memes, which comprised persuasive memes, grassroots action memes and public discussion memes, each containing different forms of rhetoric. Among other results, the study revealed that memes can give insights into the political climate in a broad sense and can also help to identify how politicians formulate their rhetoric and how audiences react. Sobande (2019), in a progressive review on memes and digital remix culture, reaffirmed the knowledge that over a third of UK audiences have turned away from mainstream news, with many people starting their day by accessing social mediaspaces instead. He reported that GIFs (graphics interchange formats) involve the repurposing of photographs and the words of politicians and public figures, yielding acerbic

statements that can be as critical and/or offensive as they are humorous. The study emphasised the notion that memes can serve as digital conduits through which the public are able to highlight issues often woefully overlooked within British party politics, including anti-Black racism, Islamophobia and trans rights. These studies confirm the significance of studying internet memes as a form of sociopolitical intervention in a country.

Within Nigeria, Adegoju and Oyeboade (2015) studied the manifestation of verbal and nonverbal humour as deployed by social media users in relation to the campaign activities of the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. The data for the study comprised memes produced, disseminated and consumed by netizens via Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model with particular reference to the theoretical concept of the 'ideological square', together with Neuendorf et al.'s (2014) taxonomy of theoretical perspectives on humour were used for the analysis. The study revealed that the memes deployed in the online presidential election campaign discourse largely perform subversive purposes to detract mainly from the electoral value of the targets. The study, however, did not engage in a semiotic analysis of the memes to reveal how humour was expressed, and paid no attention to the leadership traits conveyed through the memes.

Coker and Dadugblor (2016) investigated rhetoric of online visual humour from the perspective of interpretive netnography. The study used ideas from Aristotelian rhetoric, Barthesian semiotics, and Saidian discourse analysis and came up with a paradigm for the understanding of rhetorical functions of humour on virtual platforms. They identify four basic rhetorical arguments which are characteristic of online social media visuals: gubernatorial, institutional, cultural, and grotesque. The study did not critically engage the semiotic cues to show how they facilitated humour generation in the images and they did not concentrate mainly on how political leaders are depicted.

Olaosun (2016) focused on visual construction of humour on Facebook. The author reported that Facebook users are informal misogynists, who through the methods of digital cloning, image cropping and digital impersonation, generate or appropriate visual materials and post such to generate social/communicative humour. Using insights from Visual Social Semiotics proposed by Hodge and Kress (1988) and Critical Social Semiotics espoused by Caldas-Couthard, Carmen Rosa and Van Leeuwen Theo (2003), the author maintains that online social media visuals on Facebook are used to address discourse issues such as religion, education, morals, love, health and politics. Again, this study has a wide scope of data interrogation and did not focus on the identity of political leaders in the memes.

Closest to this present study was Tella (2018), who analysed the use of language and visuals for humour generation and for the creation of definite frames for the two major presidential candidates in Nigeria, Jonathan and Buhari, in internet memes created in the course of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election campaigns. The author proposed that supporters of election candidates deploy humorous Internet memes to negatively portray opponents, and positively project their favoured candidates. Tella's study paid attention to memes and how they are used to show (dis)affiliations towards political candidates with no focus on the construction of political leaders' leadership traits.

Theoretical orientation

This study is anchored on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) socio-semiotic approach to multimodality, aspects of humour theory and Stewart, Courtright & Manz (2011) self-leadership strategies. Multimodality theory is a socio-semiotic approach that seeks to include all modes of communication within a communicative event (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The theory is a move away from the tradition of communication analysis, which often tends to put emphasis on text, as primary, during communication. Multimodality ensures that specific representations of different modes are accounted for with reference to the cultural context or situation in which they

were used to transfer messages. This means that modal resources available in one culture need to be seen as one coherent, integral field, of nevertheless distinct resources, for making meaning.

Kress and van Leeuwen's theory is a semiotic extension of Michael Halliday's systemic functional grammar. In the words of van Leeuwen (2005: 93), "social semiotics explores two closely related issues: the material resources of communication and the way their uses are socially regulated." The material resources may be physiological, which refers to facial expression, gestures, non-verbal communication, or technical, which includes communication through instruments, clothes, and other modes that extend the potential of physiological resources. Three meaning levels, namely representational meaning, interactive meaning and compositional meaning, are proposed in this socio-semiotic theory, in line with Halliday's ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Representational meaning, which is used in this study, involves the ability of a semiotic mode to represent an aspect of the world as experienced by humans. In other words, it has to be "able to represent objects and their relation in a world outside the representational system" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:42).

Representational meaning has to do with the capacity of a semiotic clue to depict how the world is experienced by human beings. This is explained as being able 'to represent objects and their relation in a world outside the representational system' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:42). Representational meaning is subdivided into narrative representation and conceptual representation. Narrative representation means that "when participants are connected by a vector, they are represented as doing something to or for each other" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 59). As a pictorial element, a vector forms "an oblique line, often a quite strong, diagonal line" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006:59). Such kind of vectorial patterns show "unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006:59). A vector is an equivalent of the verbal element which links other elements of the clause. The vector determines the type of narrative process in the visual act which could be action process, reactional process and mental process. The narrative process is dependent on the number and kinds of participants involved in the visual image which could make the action conveyed by the vector transactional (transitive) or non-transactional (intransitive).

Conceptual representation is a non-narrative process which involves "representing participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:79). When compared with narrative representation, conceptual representation has no vector but involves three structures, namely classificational process, analytical process and symbolic process. In the classificational process, at least one set of participants will play the role of Subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the Superordinate" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:79). Analytical processes help to link participants in terms of a part-whole structure. Two participants involved in these processes are respectively one Carrier (the whole) and any number of Possessive Attributes (the parts). Lastly, Symbolic process focuses on what a participant means or is. These conceptual elements are deployed in understanding the political configurations of the items in the memes analysed in this paper.

There are several humour theories and schools of thought, but this study adopts the incongruity and superiority theories of humour. The former helps to evoke laughter in the memes and the latter corroborates the semiotic theory in representing the political entities found in the memes. Attardo (1994) explains that incongruity is viewed as a mismatch between two propositions, ideas or scripts found in a joke. The core of incongruity theory can easily be explained by Schopenhauer's definition of laughter: 'The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity' (Attardo 1994:48). The levels of language

with potential for incongruity include phonology, graphology, morphology, lexis and syntax. In the superiority theory of humour, humour is generated when the joker feels superior to others by putting them down in a joke. According to Attardo (1994), the original idea of superiority theory was proposed by Thomas Hobbes, who thought that laughter is an expression of sudden glory and realisation of being better than someone else. Humour, according to the scholars within this field, is a social corrective used by society to correct deviant behaviour (Attardo, 1994:50).

Self-leadership strategies are managerial concepts proposed by Stewart, G. L., Courtright, S. H., & Manz, C. C. in 2011. Self-leadership is a process of behavioural and cognitive self-evaluation and self-influence whereby people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation needed to shape their behaviours in positive ways in order to enhance their overall performance (Neck & Houghton, 2006). It involves certain sets of strategies and normative prescriptions posited to facilitate individual performance. There are three primary categories of self-leadership strategies namely: behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought strategies (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Behaviour-focused strategies provide specific approaches for identifying ineffective behaviours and replacing them with more effective ones through a process of self-observation, self-goal setting, self-reward, self-correcting feedback, and self-cueing (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Natural reward strategies allow individuals to find enjoyment in a given task or activity, leading to increased feelings of competence, self-control, and a sense of purpose (Gagné & Deci, 2005). The constructive thought strategies are aimed at reshaping certain key mental processes in order to facilitate more positive and optimistic thinking patterns and mental processes that can have a significant impact on individual performance (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Strategies include identifying and eliminating dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions, engaging in positive self-talk, and constructive mental imagery. These theories are eclectically used to interpret the memes in the section on analysis. These three theories are eclectically used in the analysis of the memes. The leadership strategies are used to describe the identities and leadership traits of the political leaders while the semiotic and humour theories are used to tease out the inherent humour in the memes and intent of the meme makers.

Methodology

Using Internet ethnography, which is a data gathering method involving a detailed search on the Internet (Choi and Chan, 2013), this study obtained post-election memes relating to the Edo State Gubernatorial Election mainly on Facebook and a news blog. The choice of Facebook as the major source of data for this study was tied to its popularity among social media users. Datareportal.com reported on April 20, 2020 that the three mostly used social media were Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Facebook has over 2.5 billion monthly active users, Instagram has over 1 billion monthly active users and twitter has 386 million monthly active users. Another reason for the choice of Facebook is that it is the least difficult of these three major platforms to use, making it the most accessible to all social media users. Data were also drawn from *The Cable*, an online news blog. This blog was chosen because it reported different comments and memes that were posted on the subject matter by some Twitter users and afforded the researcher an opportunity to access some memes in a single post (<https://www.thecable.ng/nigerians-on-twitter-react-to-outcome-of-edo-poll-with-hilarious-memes/amp>). Given the time limit of the nature of data analysed in this study, the researchers gave a full concentration to the collection of data on Facebook between the night of the election which was Saturday, 16 September, 2020 and Saturday, 23 September 2020. This period was the peak of the post-election debates, which took both the bona fide communication mode, such as television and radio discourses, and the non-bona fide mode, such as the memefication of the election situations.

A total of 25 politically-oriented memes on the post-election situation in Edo State were

randomly collected and nine (9) significant ones that depict the identities of the different political actors as political leaders were subjected to a multimodal cum humour analysis to understand how the leaders were perceived by the makers of the memes and how such representation serves as a reflection of the Nigerian political realities. The initial twenty-five (25) memes were randomly selected for their different engagements of the election and the nine (9) memes analysed were chosen because they were directly relevant to the aim and objectives of this study. It is important to mention that the memes collected for this study were circulated on different social media platforms with no copyrights attributed to any persons. That made it difficult to determine the original creators of the memes, as characteristic of most social media memes, which eventually made the researcher go ahead with analysing them without seeking authorisation.

Data analysis

The analysis is structured in layers; revealing first, the leadership traits construed for the political actors through the memes in line with the different leadership strategies. Afterwards, the linguistic and semiotic resources through which fun is poked in the memes are analysed and inferences are drawn in the concluding section of the paper.

1.1 Behaviour-focused strategies

Behaviour-focused strategies provide specific approaches for identifying ineffective behaviours and replacing them with more effective ones through a process of self-observation, self-goal setting, self-reward, self-correcting feedback, and self-cueing (Neck & Houghton, 2006). The plates analysed under this strategy are used to construct the discourse participants as people who have engaged in politically dishonourable activities and are reflecting over their deeds to turn over a new leaf. The plates depict the politicians involved as having realised their mistakes and are willing to make a positive change.

As a background, plate 1 features the back view of a popular Nigerian politician, Bola Tinubu, who was a former governor of Lagos and has risen in his political career to become one of the most important chieftains in the All Progressive Congress (APC). The cap is the semiotic cue for identifying the person in the meme as the design on it has been Tinubu's fashion trademark since his tenure as Lagos State governor in 1999. Characteristic of him as a major political leader, Tinubu travels to any state where any important political position is keenly contested between the APC and the PDP. Speculations have it that he was in Edo for a similar purpose during the 2020 gubernatorial election.

Plate 1



In its visual grammar, the plate above is an example of the conceptual representation which is a non-narrative process. It instantiates the classificational process where one set of participants plays the role of Subordinates with respect to at least one other participant, the Superordinate” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:79). Tinubu is depicted here as the subordinate whose desire to influence the Edo State election was rejected by the electorate through their electoral power. The gesticulation displayed in the meme where Tinubu is portrayed to be walking out of Edo State after his party lost to PDP in the election is an instance of the humour technique called putdown which manifests as ridicule, mocking or sarcasm. Putdown is mainly deployed to castigate the victim of a denigrating humour and to get others amused through such ridicule. Given that superiority theory of humour deals with the assumption that people laugh about the misfortune of others, thus emphasising the superiority of some individuals over others (Odebunmi and Ajiboye 2016:13), Tinubu is ridiculously portrayed as a failure who humbly accepted his defeat by walking out of Edo back to his base, in this case, Lagos; where he is assumed to enjoy political influence. He is, therefore, portrayed as a subordinate to the superordinate winner of the Edo State Election; Godwin Obaseki who has enjoyed a popular mandate. The plate shows a behaviour-focused strategy called self-observation which allows for the examination of one’s own behaviours for the purpose of identifying behaviours to be changed, enhanced, or eliminated (Manz & Sims, 1980). The meme portrays Tinubu as one who had a rethink and realised it was in his interest to stay away from the politics of Edo State. The maker of the meme, thereby, subtly conveys a message of caution to the APC chieftain to desist from extending the ‘godfatherism’ (a political might to control and direct the political affairs of a society) which he enjoys in Lagos to Edo State. In the Nigerian political setting, godfatherism is an ideology that is championed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who get a party’s ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest (Chukwuemaka, Oji, & Chukwurah, 2013). This phenomenon which characterises Nigerian politics at almost every level is subtly addressed in this plate with the caption ‘Edo no be Lagos’. This implies that the ‘godfather’ influence is vehemently rejected by the Edo populace in the 2020 gubernatorial election.

Plate 2 features two political figures in the APC; one being a national leader of the party, Bola Tinubu, and the other is a former national party chairman of the APC, Adams Oshiomole who is also a former governor of Edo State. Obaseki also fell out of favour with Oshiomole who was instrumental in his first appointment in 2016. The narrative process in this plate revolves around the use of circumstantial tools. Circumstances subdivide into setting (locative circumstance), means (tools), and accompaniment.

Plate 2 achieves humour through setting and tools which are generally incongruous to the personality depicted. The location depicted in the meme shows a relatively rural environment which is a contradiction to the affluence of the politicians depicted. The funniness of the meme is also foregrounded with the use of tools which are in form of the different bags that Oshiomole carries in different ways. The setting and tools show a deliberate attempt to denigrate Oshiomole by the meme maker.

The conversation which is made to take place between the two politicians in the plate is also of humorous effect. In Oshiomole’s turn, the coinage *Thiefnubu*, features the humour technique of punning which is a humorous verbalisation that has (prototypically) two interpretations couched in purposeful ambiguity of a word or a string of words (collocations or idioms), dubbed the punning element, manifesting itself in one form (or two very similar ones) but conveying two different meanings, (Dyner, 2009). Ritchie (2004) splits puns into paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. In the paradigmatic variant, a particular substring appears in the text, in this case, *thiefnubu*, and the joke depends on the similarity (or even identity) of that string to some other string not in the text, Tinubu, which is the name of the former governor of Lagos State. The enactment of these two scripts

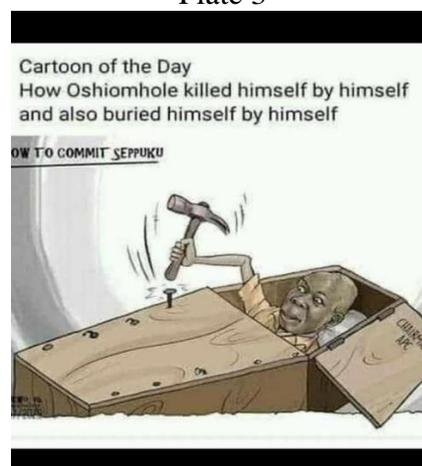
incongruously portrays the politician as a thief in the meme. The sense of *thief* in this plate is, however, not the denotative meaning of being a robber but the connotative meaning of being a looter of state treasury.

Plate 2



The plate can be said to feature an instance of the leadership sub-strategy of self-cuing. Although Neck and Houghton (2006) explain this sub-strategy as the use of environmental cues, such as to-do lists, sticky notes, or inspirational wall hangings, as a means of keeping attention and effort focused on the task at hand in the workplace environment, the sub-strategy can be adapted in political discourse to be a situation where political leaders get the cue to bow out of a political contest or situation to avoid shame. Such a bow might politically involve avoiding any plan to appeal an election or cause uproar in the polity. Given that Oshiomole is a citizen of Edo, his portrayal as leaving his own state carrying a travel bag on his head and warning Tinubu to come with him shows that he has accepted the ignominious defeat suffered by his party.

Plate 3



Adams Oshiomole is seen in plate 3 nailing himself in a coffin. This plate is a symbolic process of conceptual representation as it metaphorically depicts Oshiomole as hanging his head in shame after the loss suffered by his party during his tenure as the party chairman. At the level of humour, the plate is capable of arousing a feeling of amusement in the target audience, given the absurdity of anyone having to nail themselves up in a coffin. This humorous feeling is instigated through the deployment of circumstantial tools as coffin, hammer and nail which stand incongruous to what a person will use on himself. This seemingly paradoxical gesture is, however, a deliberate craft by the meme maker to construct Adam Oshiomole as a failed political leader.

The meme symbolically conveys that Adams Oshiomole has terminated his political influence by himself through his political engagements; especially working against an incumbent governor who eventually got re-elected under a different political party. This meme can be said to sarcastically portray the leadership sub-strategy of self-reward within the behaviour-focused strategy. Although this sub-strategy is used to mean mentally praising oneself for a job well done in its workplace application, in the context of political humour, it can be employed to mean one getting a reward for one's political engagement which could be a positive or negative reward. The meme is, therefore, suggestive that the APC's loss in the election has consequently made Oshiomole subject himself to political insignificance as the metaphor of coffin suggests.

1.2 Natural reward strategies

Natural reward strategies allow individuals to find enjoyment in a given task or activity, leading to increased feelings of competence, self-control, and a sense of purpose (Gagné & Deci, 2005). This leadership strategy is used to express fulfillment, satisfaction or gratification. It is made manifest in the memes below.

Plate 4



Plate 4 shows the two gubernatorial candidates and a referee in a boxing stage; where the PDP candidate is depicted as having defeated the APC candidate. The meme achieves its humorous effect through written and semiotic modes. The script of boxing is metaphorically deployed as a source domain to explain the target domain of politics with the *tertium comparationis* (ground) of defeat. Winning or losing is a feature of both activity types, which explains the choice of the boxing script. The plate is an instance of a narrative representation with the firmly fixed gaze of Ize-iyamu in his defeated state and the referee's grip serving as vector. The scenario captured in the plate exemplifies

the transactional narrative action process. The transactional structure consists of both actor and goal. Goal is "the participant at whom or which the vector is directed" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The vectors, which include Ize-iyamu's gaze directed at Obaseki and the referee's firm grip too are used to humorously convey Obaseki as a victor, who had not only won a match but was also being held not to further wreak havoc on Ize-iyamu.

The written text in the plate corroborates the inherent humour through the deliberate deployment of hyperbole as a humour technique. Schwarz (2010) holds that hyperboles are not to be taken literally and are not necessarily funny as such, but are often used to increase the funniness expressed in a joke because they completely overstate the situation ridiculed. The written caption showing that Obaseki won the fight at zero minute and zero second of the first round is obviously impossible in the boxing game as the sound of the bell alone moves the time beyond zero second. Even in the election being depicted, the winning was not a landslide, which suggests, therefore, that the meme was only deliberately crafted to denigrate the PDP candidate as a loser and eulogise the APC candidate as the winner and preferred choice of the people.

Plate 5



Plate 5, which also depicts both candidates in a fight, deploys semiotic and written modes to poke fun and communicate its message. This meme also addresses the *godfatherism* syndrome of the Nigerian politics. Bassey and Enetak (2008) conceptualised godfatherism to connote the power and influence of people who are politically relevant in deciding who gets nominated to contest elections and who eventually wins the election.

This plate, a transactional narrative representation, presents Obaseki as the actor who dealt a blow on Ize-iyamu in 2016 election as the left image shows. The falling glasses and torn lips are circumstantial cues specially used to achieve the effect of denigrating humour on Ize-iyamu. On the other side of the plate, there is the semiotic deployment of size to communicate the ideologically-laden message about the insignificance of a godfather in the 2020 election. In the right hand image, Obaseki is made bigger than the other candidate and the godfather carrying him as a way of stating that elections could still be won by one who does not have the backing of a godfather. As a way of showing the political and democratic development of Nigeria which is gradually making *godfatherism* inconsequential, it is clear in the meme that although Obaseki leveraged a godfather to emerge in 2016, he did not need him to be returned in 2020. The written words accompanying the meme which were uttered by the supposed godfather are capable of inducing humour. The words

carry the implicature that a blow beneath the APC candidate's belt would definitely hit the godfather; which in clear terms translate into the end of godfatherism and the influence enjoyed by the godfathers. Since these are post-election memes, Obaseki's victory is, therefore, constructed in this meme as being a demolition of the long-lived godfatherism associated with Nigerian politics and polity.

Plate 6 is another artistic craft at depicting Godwin Obaseki as a victor. Neck and Houghton (2006), in their explanation of the natural reward strategy, opine that, individuals can employ natural rewards either by building more pleasant and enjoyable features into a task or activity so that the task itself becomes more gratifying or by shifting cognitive focus to the intrinsically rewarding aspects of the task. Obaseki is reflected in a state of gratification in the meme. Through the transactional narrative action process, Oshiomole and Ize-iyamu are shown as actors, their gaze as the vector and Obaseki as the goal.

Plate 6



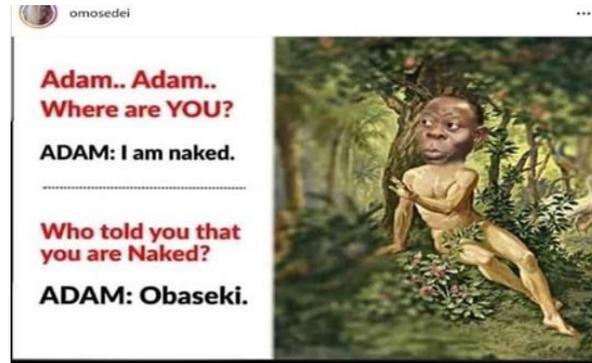
The APC candidate and the party chairman at the time of the election are gestured to look frightened while Obaseki who dominates a larger space in the meme is constructed in firmness and boldness; staring into the air like one who is daring anyone to come close. The gaze and utterance from Oshiomole in the meme instantiates humour as it depicts the duo (Oshiomole and Ize-iyamu) in surprise about Obaseki's victory. These gestures, looks and utterance are pragmatic markers of what can be considered a new dawn in the electoral situation of the country; that is, the end of godfatherism.

1.3 Constructive thought strategies

The constructive thought strategies are aimed at reshaping certain key mental processes in order to facilitate more positive and optimistic thinking patterns and mental processes that can have a significant impact on individual performance (Neck & Houghton, 2006). This strategy involves a re-ignition of mental processes to ensure a better thinking pattern. This psycho-emotional state is conveyed in the memes below.

The humour in plate 7 draws greatly on intertextuality. According to Halliday and Hassan ((1989: 47), 'part of the environment for any text is a set of previous texts'. Intertextuality is therefore an attempt to understand a text better by drawing on one's knowledge of an existing text. In plate 7, the meme maker uses the locative circumstance depicting the Garden of Eden and means such as trees and leaves to metaphorically achieve the comparison of Adam Oshiomole to the Adam of the Christian faith through religious intertext.

Plate 7



The jointly deployed scripts of religion and politics through the multimodal cues of setting and means are used to poke fun at Oshiomole who, like the Adam in the Bible with whom he shares a name, becomes conscious of his nudity. Beyond the surface humour, the mentioning of Obaseki as one who conscientised Adam Oshiomole of his nakedness in the caption is discursively aimed at implying the loss of his political influence and significance in Edo State to Obaseki just as Adam in the Bible lost the Garden of Eden. This is in line with the leadership sub-strategy of identifying and eliminating dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions. The result of the election served as an awareness to the APC chairman that he was no longer popular among the majority of the electorate in his own state. Note that Oshiomole was at a time the governor of the state and he was succeeded by his preferred candidate after his administration. The 2020 election, however, changed the narrative of his political might.

Plate 8



Plate 8, which also features the former APC chairman, achieves its humorous effect through the deployment of a zip as a semiotic resource. The humour in the meme is instigated through the incongruous utilisation of a zip is fixed in a person's mouth, as against the regular use of zip on objects such as bags. The impossibility of this artistic craft in real life is a deliberate attempt to ridicule the former APC national chairman, Adams Oshiomole.

Beyond the surface humour, the meme symbolically constructs Oshiomole as a talkative person who has come to realise that his verbosity does not put him in a good standing in his political career. The meme utilised the leadership sub-strategy of engaging in positive self-talk and constructive mental imagery as the depicted gaze is that of someone who is in a state of reflection over his deeds. In the Edo State gubernatorial race, Oshiomole had expressed so much optimism

about the victory of the APC candidate and some citizens assumed that his verbosity and confidence had worked against his preferred candidate to some extent. This is the background knowledge behind his depiction as having to zip up his mouth after APC lost the election.

Plate 9



Plate 9 uses semiotic and written resources to convey humour and message simultaneously. The plate judiciously relies on circumstantial elements of location and means to create an incongruous feeling in order to poke fun at Oshiomole. In the first place, the background of the meme which looks like a conventional Nigerian carpentry workshop is a world apart from the personality of Oshiomole who, in real life, enjoys affluence. His sober looks and sad gesture which are complemented by his hands on his head are all eclectically deployed by the meme maker to depict Oshiomole in a state of sorrow. Culturally, many Nigerian tribes portend that having one's hands on one's head is suggestive of sadness and the meme maker deliberately designs the meme in that manner to depict Oshiomole as one who has become politically irrelevant; hence, engulfed in sadness. The written text corroborates the denigrating humour in the plate through the absurdity of referring to Oshiomole as a fairly used chairman. A fairly used product suggests one that the owner is no longer in need of. This is a way of saying that Oshiomole had lost his political relevance in his party as he even eventually got replaced as the party chairman not long after the election.

Conclusion

The paper has critically engaged humorous memes found on Facebook and a news blog as deployed in constructing the post-election period of the Edo State 2020 gubernatorial election. Socio-semiotic approach of multimodality, incongruity and superiority theories of humour and self-leadership strategies were eclectically used to analyse how identities are constructed for political actors through purposefully crafted memes. A total of nine (9) purposively selected plates were then subjected to a qualitative analysis.

The findings revealed that the selected plates can be classified into three self-leadership strategies namely: behavior-focused strategies, self-reward strategies, and the constructive thought strategies. These strategies are used to convey the personality traits of the two governorship candidates, Godwin Obaseki of the People Democratic Party and Osagie Ize-Iyamu of the All Progressive Congress alongside two important political leaders in the country; Bola Tinubu and Adams Oshiomole. The analysis reveals the use of humorous memes in rejecting external political influence and intervention in the electoral affairs of the component states of Nigeria. It also shows a deliberate attempt to clamour for the end of *godfatherism*; a political situation where political candidates and office holders are at the mercy of political leaders and gladiators. The Nigerian

political landscape has, over the years, experienced the political situation whereby national leaders of political parties tend to influence the polities of the states they control. The memes analysed in this paper reflect the agitation of the makers against such external political influence through memes which are used to ridicule and denigrate known political leaders in the country and to praise a candidate who rose against all odds to emerge as winner despite his fallout with the political leaders in the party. These impressions are subtly made through humour techniques such as sarcasm, punning, exaggeration and intertextuality and semiotic resources such as gaze, gesture, setting and props. The analysis of these memes shows that memes are subtle means of commenting on national issues under the guise of humour. The study, therefore, recommends that Nigerians and citizens of other developing nations should perpetually clamour against the influence of political gladiators in the electoral processes of their countries through intellectual means such as the use of memes. Internet memes are veritable ways of addressing different societal issues without opting for violence.

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