

A Pragmatic Study of Political Cartoons in the Nigerian 2023 General Elections

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Abstract

Political cartoons serve as an influential medium for shaping public opinion and discourse through humor, satire, and irony. This study explores the role of political cartoons in the 2023 Nigerian General Elections. The study uses Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature to analyze their pragmatic elements. Through qualitative content analysis, ten selected cartoons from Nigerian newspapers and online platforms were examined for their use of implicature in conveying political messages. The study identifies how cartoonists flout Grice's conversational maxims—Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner—to subtly critique governance, electoral practices, and societal issues. Findings indicate that political cartoons employ irony and ambiguity to bypass direct criticism while engaging readers in nuanced political discussions. The study concludes that political cartoons play a vital role in non-verbal political discourse, shaping public perception and fostering political engagement. By revealing the mechanisms through which cartoons challenge political structures and reflect electoral sentiments, this research contributes to the broader discourse on pragmatic analysis in political communication.

Keywords: Conversational implicature, Political cartoons, Nigerian General Elections, Pragmatic analysis, Political discourse.

Introduction

Political cartoons serve as a powerful medium for shaping public opinion, critiquing governance, and reflecting societal sentiments. As a form of visual satire, they distill complex political and social realities into simplified, often humorous, yet thought-provoking illustrations. Throughout history, political cartoons have functioned as an essential tool of resistance, advocacy, and critique, influencing public discourse on governance, policy, and political ideology (Gray, 2022; Ajayi & Omowole, 2021). Their effectiveness lies in their ability to bypass direct confrontation while subtly exposing political flaws, corruption, electoral malpractice, and governance failures (Usman & Momoh, 2016).

In Nigeria, political cartoons have played a significant role in public discourse, particularly during periods of political transition, democratic instability, and contested elections (Adejuwon & Alimi,

2011). From the colonial era to post-independence years, cartoons have provided an alternative means of political expression, often functioning as tools of resistance against oppressive regimes (Abati, 2009; Adesoji, 2010). In the digital age, the increasing accessibility of political cartoons through social media has further enhanced their role in shaping political narratives and engaging the electorate (Gray, 2022).

The 2023 Nigerian General Elections provided a fertile ground for the use of political cartoons as an alternative channel of political communication. Against a backdrop of heightened political tensions, allegations of electoral malpractice, and growing public dissatisfaction with governance, political cartoons emerged as a critical tool for shaping political discourse. With major contenders such as Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi, the elections generated significant media attention, and cartoonists creatively captured public sentiments, using satire and irony to critique governance and electoral conduct (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023). By analyzing political cartoons within this electoral context, this study seeks to examine how cartoonists employ conversational implicature to critique political actors, electoral events and governance.

This study draws on Paul Grice's (1975) Theory of Conversational Implicature, which explains how implied meanings emerge when speakers flout the conversational maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner. Examining how these maxims are manipulated in the 2023 Nigerian General Election political cartoons allows for a deeper understanding of how cartoonists convey implicit messages about political figures, electoral processes, and governance failures. While previous research has examined the use of political cartoons in critiquing governance and electoral processes in Nigeria (Abubakar & Imrana, 2019; Usman & Momoh, 2016), limited attention has been given to the pragmatic functions of conversational implicature in electoral cartoons. By addressing this gap, this study explores how visual satire influences political discussions, voters' behavior, and public engagement with electoral issues in contemporary Nigeria.

Literature Review

Scholarly discourse on political cartoons as a medium of political communication has so far emphasized their historical relevance, semiotic function, and pragmatic significance in various political contexts. In Nigeria, several studies have explored the role of political cartoons in shaping public perception, critiquing governance, and influencing political engagement.

Historical and Political Role of Political Cartoons

Adejuwon and Alimi (2011) highlight the use of cartoons as a form of political resistance during Nigeria's anti-colonial struggle, demonstrating how visual satire was employed to challenge colonial policies and inspire nationalist sentiments. Similarly, Abati (2009) explores the influence of cartoons during military rule, where they served as coded critiques of dictatorship, human rights violations, and governance failures. These studies establish a historical precedent for cartoons as instruments of political resistance and public engagement in Nigeria. In contemporary democracy, cartoons continue to serve as tools for holding leaders accountable, particularly during election cycles (Gray, 2022).

Pragmatics and Political Cartoons

From a linguistic and communicative perspective, extant researches have examined the pragmatic elements of political cartoons. Abubakar and Imrana (2019) argue that political cartoons in Nigerian newspapers often adhere to the maxim of relation, ensuring relevance to contemporary political issues. However, cartoonists frequently flout other maxims—such as quality, quantity, and

manner—to introduce satire, ambiguity, and irony, which add depth to political commentary. This aligns with Levinson's (1983) assertion that implicature plays a crucial role in non-verbal political discourse. Other studies, such as Usman and Momoh (2016), reveal how satire in political cartoons serves as a tool for public consciousness, exposing corruption, electoral fraud, and government inefficiencies.

Political Cartoons in Electoral Discourse

Existing literature underscores the significance of political cartoons in electoral contexts. Ibrahim and Jolaoso(2023) analyze political cartoons from the 2019 Nigerian General Elections, demonstrating how they reflect public sentiments, highlight political tensions, and reinforce ideological divides. Their findings indicate that cartoons often depict electoral malpractice, campaign controversies, and leadership failures in ways that traditional news reporting may not. Despite this, there remains a research gap in the application of conversational implicature to electoral political cartoons, particularly in the context of the 2023 Nigerian General Elections.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies provide substantial evidence of the impact of political cartoons on public perception, voter engagement, and media discourse. A content analysis of 200 political cartoons from four major Nigerian newspapers (2015–2018) by Abubakar and Imrana (2019) found that cartoonists frequently manipulated conversational maxims, particularly violating the maxims of quality and manner to introduce exaggeration, ambiguity, and irony. A reader-response study conducted by Usman and Momoh (2016) with 500 respondents across Lagos, Abuja, and Kano found that 76% of respondents identified implicit messages in political cartoons, and 60% reported an influence on their political perceptions. Similarly, Ibrahim and Jolaoso (2023) analyzed 150 political cartoons from the 2019 Nigerian General Elections, finding that they functioned as counter-narratives to official political messaging, exposing contradictions in campaign promises and electoral processes.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature (1975) as a framework to analyze the pragmatic elements in Nigerian political cartoons, particularly during the 2023 General Elections. Grice's Conversational Implicature is central to understanding indirect communication, as it explains how meaning can be derived from what is unsaid or implied. Through his Cooperative Principle, Grice posits that speakers typically adhere to a set of conversational maxims—Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner—to facilitate effective communication. However, in political cartoons, these maxims are often flouted to convey implicit messages, allowing cartoonists to engage in indirect criticisms or endorsements without explicit statements.

The Cooperative Principle is foundational in Grice's theory, asserting that effective communication requires participants to make contributions that are appropriate for the conversational context. The principle is based on the expectation that interlocutors will contribute meaningfully to the exchange, facilitating a cooperative atmosphere (Grice, 1975). However, in political cartoons, the Cooperative Principle is strategically subverted to create implicature. By flouting conversational maxims, cartoonists introduce layered meanings, prompting readers to interpret underlying messages through their awareness of contextual and cultural cues.

Each of the four maxims plays a distinctive role in generating implicature in political cartoons:

1. **Maxim of Quality:** Usually, speakers avoid falsehoods or unsubstantiated claims, but political cartoons often use exaggeration or irony to imply the opposite of what is shown, prompting viewers to question the authenticity of political figures.

2. Maxim of Quantity: This maxim suggests giving just enough information. Cartoons often break this rule by using minimal text, relying on visual cues to suggest implicit meanings, such as corruption or luxury, allowing viewers to infer the message.
3. Maxim of Relation (Relevance): Contributions should stay relevant, but cartoons might connect unrelated symbols to political figures, inviting viewers to interpret potential contradictions between a politician's actions and ideals, such as justice.
4. Maxim of Manner: Typically, clarity and directness are valued, but cartoons use ambiguity and symbolism (e.g., animals with cultural connotations) to allow multiple interpretations and nuanced critiques without direct confrontation.

The study uses Grice's implicature theory to examine how political cartoons imply critiques subtly, engaging audiences in interpretation. This framework highlights the role of cultural and contextual knowledge, particularly relevant in Nigerian political discourse, where cartoons reference socio-political issues resonant with the public. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to an enhanced understanding of how political cartoons function as pragmatic tools for non-verbal political discourse, shaping public perception and fostering political engagement.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative and quantitative approach to explore conversational implicature in political cartoons from the 2023 Nigerian General Elections. Employing content analysis, the research attempted to explain how cartoonists utilize Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature to convey political critiques and social commentary. Through purposive sampling, ten cartoons presented in the table ...below were selected from two popular online Nigerian newspapers – The Punch, Daily Trust, and online platforms – Balama twitter page, This Is Africa (TIA), Cartoon by Awofisayo Segun, Research Gate and Cartoon by Gado. The themes purposively selected were youth involvement, power dynamics, and electoral politics. Each cartoon was systematically analyzed for instances where conversational maxims—Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner were flouted to create implicatures, in both visual and textual elements to reveal layers of meaning. Each cartoon is labelled figures 1-10

Fig	Title	Source
1	Generational Tensions in Nigerian Politics	Daily Trust
2	Insecurity vs. Electoral Priorities in Nigeria	The Punch
3	Nigerian election funding process	Daily Post Nigeria
4	Political priorities for the 2023 election	ResearchGate
5	Nigerian Political leader's Race towards election	Cartoon by Gado
6	Nigerian Electoral Competition	This Is Africa (TIA)
7	Public Apathy towards electoral Integrity	Cartoon by AwofisayoSegun
8	Nigerian political Aspirants' Confidence for primaries	Daily Trust
9	Nigerian 2023 Election Campaigns	Research gate
10	Politician's Obsession with voter power	Research gate

The analysis format includes:

- **Figure Summary:** A brief overview of the figure's key points.
- **Maxims Flouted in the Figure:** Identifies instances where conversational norms (such as Gricean maxims) may have been strategically disregarded to convey certain messages.
- **Implicit Messages:** Highlights unstated messages inferred from the data and also discuss how the figure may influence public understanding, opinions, or dialogues about political matters.

Data Analysis

This study explores ten cartoons that cover the data of this study and are labelled figures 1-10, each figure was examined based on the analysis structure stated in methodology.

Figure 1: Generational Tensions in Nigerian Politics



Figure 1 Summary: Figure 1 depicts an elderly politician labeled as “Old Politician” sitting on a throne labeled “Our Candidate,” surrounded by a group of frustrated young people expressing conflicting sentiments about youth participation in governance. Their statements include demands for youth to rule, distrust in the youth, resignation to the idea that the old guard won't allow them to rule, and a sarcastic acceptance of growing old in complaint.

Maxims flouted in the figure:

This figure flouts several conversational maxims to highlight the irony and frustration surrounding youth involvement in Nigerian politics. The Maxim of Quality is flouted through sarcastic statements like "The old won't allow us to rule,". The Maxim of Quantity is flouted by providing minimal information, with phrases like "We don't trust the youth". The Maxim of Relation is also flouted, as the statements reflect the youth's frustration with leadership but lack a cohesive stance, illustrated by the conflicting slogans of "Young people must rule!" alongside support for the old politician. Finally, the Maxim of Manner is flouted through ambiguous and contradictory statements, such as "Let's continue complaining till we grow old too".

Implicit Messages:

The throne labeled "Our Candidate" in the above figure implicitly mocks the notion of democratic choice. This sarcastically signifies an immovable figure of power.

The youth play a crucial role in sustaining Nigerian politics by supporting those in power through votes, labor, or passive consent. However, they are denied opportunities to lead, highlighting an evaluation of their passive involvement in upholding the very system they may oppose.

The cartoon's composition, with the old politician elevated above the youth, symbolizes a persistent power imbalance. This visual hierarchy highlights the entrenched nature of the political status quo, suggesting that even amid vocal opposition or calls for change, the system remains largely unaffected, and younger voices continue to be marginalized.

The cartoon may import public perception by highlighting the disconnect between desires for change and actual actions. The image serves as a reflective critique, prompting viewers to consider their role in perpetuating the status quo. It will encourage discourse on the need for genuine youth representation rather than token support for traditional figures.

Figure 2: Insecurity vs. Electoral Priorities in Nigeria



Figure 2 Summary: The figure depicts a politician stepping onto a bus labeled "2023 Election Matters," leaving behind a man labeled "Insecurity," who is being attacked by a large snake. The man desperately reaches out for help, but the politician dismissively responds, "Help you? ...Haba! Be reasonable!"

Maxims flouted in the figure

This cartoon flouts three conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted as the politician sarcastically replies, "Help you? ...Haba! Be reasonable!" to the figure labeled "Insecurity,". The Maxim of Relation is flouted by the politician's focus on "2023 Election Matters" while ignoring the pressing issue of insecurity, suggesting a disconnection between political agendas and the real needs of citizens. Finally, the Maxim of Manner is flouted with the ambiguous phrase "Be reasonable!".

Implicit Messages:

"Help you? ...Haba! Be reasonable!" The implicature here is that addressing insecurity is less important or even irrelevant in the context of their current priorities. The choice of words suggests a lack of empathy, indicating that the politician views elections as the only matter worth attention.

The snake attacking the man labeled "Insecurity" symbolizes an escalating and dangerous threat to citizens. The imagery suggests insecurity has become a predatory force, with the government ignoring the danger. This intensifies the urgency, emphasizing the immediate and potentially deadly nature of the issue.

The cartoon also implies that political agendas are prioritized over citizens' safety, hinting at a misalignment between government actions and public needs.

This satirical representation encourages viewers to question the priorities of political figures and serves as a commentary on the neglect of public welfare in favor of political gain.

Figure 3: Nigerian election funding process



Figure 3 summary: The figure depicts a politician handing ₦87.7 billion to an INEC representative, who smiles while accepting the money. The politician emphasizes the need for "credible elections" but with a suggestive tone. National Assembly members look amused, hinting at a potential unspoken agreement or complicity between them and the politician.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This cartoon flouts three conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted through the statement, "To whom much is given, much is expected, but remember... credible elections!". The Maxim of Relation is flouted as the presence of officials with "National Assembly" Lastly, the Maxim of Manner is flouted as the phrase "credible elections" lacks clarity in this context.

Implicit Messages:

"To whom much is given, much is expected..." – This statement, while seemingly straight forward also implies an expectation for favorable outcomes or some level of cooperation.

"...but remember... credible elections!" – This phrase appears to be a reminder, but it carries an ironic undertone when considered in context. The phrase implies that credibility may be compromised by the underlying expectations tied to the funds.

The nonverbal cues from the INEC representative and the members of the National Assembly convey complicity and shared understanding. This implicature suggests that both the National Assembly and INEC are aware of and possibly complicit in a system that prioritizes political agendas over electoral integrity. The cartoon uses these flouted maxims to satirize how large financial investments in the election process are met with public distrust, questioning whether funds truly translate to credible outcomes

Figure 4: Political Priorities for the 2023 Elections



Figure 4 Summary: This figure depicts a group of "Politicians" walking in a direction marked "2023 Elections," ignoring an alternate path labeled "Fixing the Nation."

Maxims flouted in the figure

This figure flouts several conversational maxims to critique political priorities in Nigeria.

The Maxim of Relation is flouted as the politicians are shown heading towards "2023 Elections" instead of "Fixing the Nation,"

The Maxim of Quantity is flouted by providing minimal visual context around "Fixing the Nation," leaving viewers to infer the nation's issues that need attention, such as economic, social, or infrastructural problems.

Maxim of Manner is flouted by the ambiguous road sign indicating two opposite directions, subtly pointing to the conflicting paths of self-interest and public duty.

Implicit Messages:

The figure depicting that no politician is heading toward "Fixing the Nation" suggests an intentional disregard for addressing the country's issues. The conversational implicature here is that politicians, as represented in the figure, lack commitment to national development.

The cartoon implies that politicians have a choice in determining their priorities. By selecting the election path, the figure suggests that they are consciously neglecting their responsibility to the people.

This imagery encourages the public to question the commitment and accountability of political leaders, sparking discourse on the need for leaders who prioritize national development over personal ambition.

Figure 5: Nigerian Political Leaders' Race Towards Elections



Figure 5 Summary: This figure depicts Nigerian political figures, Tinubu and Buhari, struggling on a running track in what appears to be a race labeled with party symbols like APC, PDP, and LP in the background. Both figures are shown panting and sweating heavily, struggling to move forward, with Buhari even holding an IV drip stand, highlighting their physical exhaustion.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This cartoon flouts three conversational maxims.

The Maxim of Quality is flouted as the image humorously exaggerates the physical struggles of the two political figures, Tinubu and Buhari.

The Maxim of Relation is flouted by depicting a race scene, a setting traditionally associated with athletic prowess, which contrasts sharply with the evident physical weakness of the characters.

The Maxim of Manner is also flouted with the exaggerated expressions of exhaustion, making a clear, though indirect, statement on the perceived unsuitability of elderly or ailing politicians to lead effectively.

Implicit Messages:

The figure implies that these leaders, shown struggling on the track, may be struggling just as much in their political roles, casting doubt on their capability to carry the nation forward. The figure also suggests that the drive for power supersedes any concerns about fitness for office, hinting at a possible disconnection between personal ambition and the actual needs of the country.

By depicting these leaders in a physical race, the figure implies a competition for influence and control in Nigerian politics, but the leaders' visible exhaustion suggests that they may be out of touch with the demands of modern leadership. This implicature criticizes the persistence of aging figures in Nigerian politics, hinting that they may be clinging to power even when they are no longer the best candidates for it. This imagery indirectly fosters a discourse on the need for younger, more capable leaders in Nigerian politics, challenging the dominance of long-standing figures who may be seen as out of touch with modern demands.

Figure 6: Nigerian Electoral Competition



Figure 6 Summary: This figure presents three political figures depicted as birds in a confrontational stance, representing Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar, and Peter Obi in the context of the Nigerian elections. Tinubu and Abubakar appear engaged in a heated battle, while Peter Obi, depicted as a smaller figure resembling a rabbit, watches from below with a calm expression, seemingly unaffected by the conflict above.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This cartoon flouts three conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted through the exaggerated depictions of the candidates as fighting roosters, symbolizing aggressive rivalry rather than cooperative political discourse. The Maxim of Relation is flouted by the chaotic and combative imagery, which, instead of presenting constructive debate or policy differences, highlights the tension and personal conflict between the candidates. The Maxim of Manner is also flouted through the hyperbolic and caricatured design of the candidates.

Implicit Messages:

The fierce confrontation between Tinubu and Abubakar implies a rivalry that consumes the attention of both, suggesting that their primary focus is on outmaneuvering each other rather than engaging with broader issues. They overlook the potential impact of a third-party candidate like Obi.

The conversational implicature hints at Obi's potential to disrupt the political status quo or act as a surprise candidate, despite being perceived as less dominant compared to his counterparts.

The figure implicitly critiques the dominance of established political figures, represented by Tinubu and Abubakar, by positioning Obi as an alternative choice who stands apart from the aggressive dynamics above. This positioning encourages viewers to consider the possibility of change in Nigerian politics, questioning whether the established power struggles will give way to new leadership.

Figure 7: Public Apathy Towards Electoral Integrity

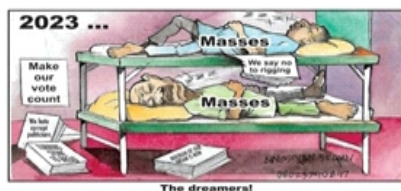


Figure 7 Summary: This figure shows two groups of people labeled “Masses” sleeping on bunk beds. Around them are scattered documents with slogans like “Make our vote count,” “We say no to rigging,” and “We hate corrupt politicians.” Despite these declarations, the people are sound asleep, suggesting a passive or inactive stance on these issues.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This cartoon flouts several conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted through the

ironic title “The dreamers!” paired with the imagery of sleeping individuals labeled “Masses.” This suggests that the public's desire for change, expressed through slogans like “Make our vote count” and “We say no to rigging,” is more wishful thinking than active pursuit. The Maxim of Relation is flouted, as the idealistic messages about voting integrity and anti-corruption are juxtaposed with images of people sleeping. The Maxim of Manner is also flouted, with the signs displaying bold, hopeful messages that seem futile as they lie beside the sleeping masses.

Implicit Messages:

The image of the masses sleeping, despite slogans advocating for electoral accountability and fairness, implies a lack of active participation or engagement.

The juxtaposition of bold slogans with sleeping masses highlights a contradiction, suggesting that these ideals remain unachieved due to inaction. The conversational implicature implies that true electoral change cannot happen if citizens remain complacent, simply “dreaming” of a better system rather than working toward it.

By titling the figure “The dreamers,” the artist implies a critique of the electorate, portraying them as idealistic but ultimately ineffective in pursuing these ideals. This visual satire encourages viewers to question their own role in the democratic process, potentially prompting a discussion on the need for active civic participation.

Figure 8: Nigerian Political Aspirants' Confidence for Primaries



Figure 8 Summary: This figure depicts two Nigerian political aspirants, each holding documents relating to the postponement of their party's (APC) screening process and reconciliation plans for aspirants after the primaries. One aspirant confidently declares, “I will definitely emerge there,” while the other states, “I would have emerged by then.” In the background, an older figure stands silently, observing with a bemused expression and holding a calabash, symbolizing the onlookers or traditional observers of the political process.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This figure flouts multiple conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted as the candidates confidently state, “I will definitely emerge there...” and “I would have emerged by then,”. The Maxim of Quantity is flouted by providing minimal context around the statements, letting the visuals and expressions speak for themselves. The Maxim of Relation is flouted by juxtaposing the candidates' statements with the figure of an ordinary citizen holding an empty bowl, a symbol of poverty or unmet needs. Lastly, the Maxim of Manner is flouted through ambiguity, as the aspirants' confident declarations lack clarity on how they intend to address the needs of the masses, represented by the citizen in the background.

Implicit Messages:

Both aspirants' statements, “I will definitely emerge there” and “I would have emerged by then,” imply an assumption that these candidates may take their political success for granted, indicating a perception of entitlement or predetermined outcomes within the party's selection process.

The casual manner in which the candidates discuss their “emergence” implies a belief that outcomes

are likely already decided behind the scenes, raising questions about the transparency and integrity of the selection process within the party.

The silent figure in the background with a bemused expression and a calabash may symbolize the general public or traditional observers. This figure's presence implies an external awareness of the presumptuous attitudes of the aspirants, subtly critiquing the political culture that prioritizes power aspirations over genuine engagement with the electoral process. This cartoon uses irony, visual symbols, and ambiguity to critique the politicians' self-interest and disconnect from public concerns, encouraging readers to question the sincerity of political promises.

Figure 9: Nigerian 2023 Election Campaigns



Figure 9 Summary: This figure shows a ballot box labeled "2023 Election" with a voting slip inserted, positioned prominently in the foreground. Behind it, two shadowy figures representing politicians or campaigners are depicted, each addressing a crowd under "Campaign" banners. The focus on the ballot box contrasts with the vague, indistinct presence of the politicians in the background.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This figure flouts several conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted by depicting politicians passionately speaking to crowds, suggesting grand promises or rhetoric that may lack sincerity or truthfulness. The Maxim of Quantity is flouted as the image lacks detail about the specific messages politicians are conveying, leaving viewers to infer the content of their speeches based on their gestures and postures. The Maxim of Relation is flouted through the contrast between the campaign speeches and the voting box in the foreground.

Implicit Messages:

The prominent placement of the ballot box in the foreground, with politicians relegated to the background, implies that the act of voting is of greater importance than the words or promises of the campaigners.

The shadowy and indistinct depiction of the politicians implies that political campaigns may be filled with empty promises or generalized rhetoric and by making the ballot box the focal point, the figure implies the significance of individual voting power in shaping the future. the cartoon critiques the typical election campaign dynamics, urging viewers to focus on the significance of their vote rather than on politicians' empty promises.

Figure 10: Politician's Obsession with Voter Power



Figure 10 Summary: This figure shows a politician with hearts floating around his head, gazing lovingly at a glass case containing a "PVC" (Permanent Voter's Card) labeled with "84 million carats votes." Beside him is a large box labeled "Politician," overflowing with money. The figure implies an almost romantic obsession from the politician toward the voting power symbolized by the PVC.

Maxims flouted in the figure

This figure flouts several conversational maxims. The Maxim of Quality is flouted as the politician is depicted with hearts in his eyes, gazing lovingly at a box labeled "PVC" (Permanent Voter Card) with "84 million carats votes," suggesting exaggerated affection or adoration for the voting power rather than genuine care for the people. The Maxim of Relation is flouted by the juxtaposition of the politician's overflowing box of money with his obsession over the PVC, linking his financial resources to his interest in securing votes rather than making a difference. Lastly, the Maxim of Manner is flouted by the cartoon's metaphorical setup, where votes are depicted as valuable "carats,"

Implicit Messages:

The politician's enamored expression toward the PVC implies that the politician's love for the voter's power is opportunistic rather than authentic, reflecting a desire to secure votes for personal or political gain.

The description of the PVC as "84 million carats" implies that the politician sees voters as assets to be won over or possessed, rather than individuals with rights and voices in a democracy.

The overflowing money in the "Politician" box contrasts with the PVC on a pedestal, symbolizing authentic democratic value. The conversational implicature here suggests that while politicians may be wealthy or well-resourced, the real "treasure" lies in the people's votes, subtly critiquing the tendency of politicians to prioritize votes as a means to power rather than as a reflection of genuine public trust.

This satirical portrayal encourages the public to critically view political motives, fostering a discourse around the need for genuine accountability and questioning whether leaders truly have the public's interest at heart. It emphasizes the importance of informed voting and the demand for leaders who prioritize citizens over personal gain.

Discussion of Findings

The study's findings indicate that political cartoons from the 2023 Nigerian General Elections effectively utilize conversational implicature to communicate nuanced critiques of political figures, electoral integrity, and governance priorities. By systematically analyzing ten cartoons, it was observed that cartoonists flouted Grice's maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner to craft ironic, satirical, and often ambiguous messages that reflect public concerns. These findings align with existing literature on the pragmatic function of political cartoons, particularly studies emphasizing their role in shaping public discourse and critiquing governance (Abubakar&Imrana, 2019; Usman & Momoh, 2016).

For example, in "Generational Tensions in Nigerian Politics" (Figure 1), the cartoon flouts multiple maxims to highlight youth disillusionment with political leadership. The Maxim of Quality is flouted through ironic statements, while the Maxim of Relation is violated by juxtaposing contradictory slogans supporting both youth leadership and an older candidate. This finding supports Ibrahim and Jolaoso (2023), who argue that political cartoons often reflect societal contradictions and reinforce ideological divides in electoral politics. However, while previous studies emphasized how cartoons depict youth as victims of political marginalization (Adejuwon&Alimi, 2011), this study finds out that cartoons also implicate youth in sustaining the status quo, an aspect not fully explored in earlier research.

Similarly, "Insecurity vs. Electoral Priorities in Nigeria" (Figure 2) critiques the government's prioritization of election matters over security concerns. The politician's dismissive attitude toward the figure labeled "Insecurity" flouts the Maxim of Quality and Relation, suggesting a disconnect between governance priorities and public welfare. This supports Usman and Momoh (2016), who found out that political cartoons expose governmental negligence in addressing national security. The depiction of insecurity as a snake reinforces the underlying threat ignored by political leaders, shaping public discourse on leadership failures. However, unlike previous studies that focused solely on explicit satire (Gray, 2022), this study reveals the subtlety with which cartoonists encode criticisms through implicature, allowing for multiple interpretations by the audience.

Furthermore, "Nigerian Election Funding Process" (Figure 3) uses conversational implicature to question the integrity of electoral financing. The phrase "To whom much is given, much is expected" appears straightforward but carries an ironic undertone, implying expected returns for financial investments in the election process. This implicature fosters skepticism regarding electoral transparency, aligning with findings from Abubakar and Imrana (2019), who argue that political cartoons often highlight financial corruption within electoral institutions. Unlike their study, which emphasized direct accusations of corruption, this study finds that cartoons often use layered meanings and implicature, which may resonate more effectively with audiences wary of explicit political criticism.

The theoretical framework applied in this study, Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature, was instrumental in explaining how meaning is conveyed beyond explicit statements in political cartoons. The consistent flouting of Gricean maxims across the cartoons analyzed illustrates how cartoonists strategically manipulate pragmatic norms to construct indirect yet impactful political critiques. For instance, the Maxim of Manner is frequently flouted through ambiguous symbols and exaggerated imagery, reinforcing Levinson's (1983) assertion that implicature plays a vital role in non-verbal communication. The findings validate the applicability of Grice's theory in political satire and extend its relevance by demonstrating how maxims are flouted not just in verbal communication but also in visual and multimodal texts.

Across all analyzed cartoons, the recurrent themes of power dynamics, corruption, and electoral manipulation were evident. By strategically violating conversational norms, cartoonists engage audiences in deeper political critique, shaping discourse on governance. These findings reinforce the role of political cartoons as non-verbal communicative tools that influence public perception and encourage democratic accountability. However, unlike prior research that emphasized cartoons as mere satirical instruments (Gray, 2022; Usman&Momoh, 2016), this study underscores their role as pragmatic tools that foster critical engagement by subtly challenging dominant narratives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that political cartoons in the 2023 Nigerian General Elections serve as more than just humorous representations of political realities. They function as complex communicative devices that employ implicature to navigate sensitive political subjects, allowing audiences to derive layered meanings while engaging in critical discourse. This interplay between Grice's theory and empirical observations highlights the strategic role of political cartoons in contemporary political communication and electoral critique.

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