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Contexts and pragmatic strategies of COVID-19 related cartoons in Nigeria

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Abstract: The global outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has been experienced differently by people depending on their socio-cultural contexts. These varied experiences are expressed in various forms of communication, including cartoons. This paper examines the pragmatic resources inherent in COVID-19-related cartoons depicting the impact of the virus on Nigerian society. Forty COVID-19-related cartoons, circulated on social media, were collected on Twitter and WhatsApp platforms between March and April 2020 as data. Multimodality and presupposition served as theoretical framework and descriptive research design was adopted. Findings reveal five socio-contextual domains, religion, health, economy, politics and governance and family, characterizing the social experiences of Nigerians during the pandemic. Through the evocation of situational reality, pragmatic sarcasm, punning, and orientation to government insensitivity, the cartoonists evoke pragmatic functions of informing and warning about social behaviours in the religion, family and health domains; recreating situational realities on socioeconomic impacts in the domain of economy; and satirizing government policies and mocking politicians' insincerity in the domain of politics and governance on sociopolitical experiences of Nigerians before and during the pandemic. The study concludes cartoons are a strong means of portraying societal realities and people's experiences comically and graphically.

Keywords: multimodality; COVID-19-related cartoons; sociocultural experience; shared situational knowledge; context

1 Introduction

The global outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been experienced differently by people depending on their socio-cultural contexts. These varied

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experiences, including the negative impact of the virus on Nigerians, are expressed in various forms of communication including cartoons. The choice of the cartoon as a graphic representation of the socio-contextual effects of the coronavirus is significant in comparison to other forms of communication as it has multimodal features enhancing not just humour but also aiding understanding of the cartoonists' communicative intentions through multiple interpretations. Corroborating the foregoing, Waribo-Naye (2018) opines that "cartoons do not merely convey utterances with semantic implications that provoke humour but also rely on contexts to perform acts in addition to understanding linguistic elements". Cartoons are a multimodal genre in which meaning is derived from a conceptual integration of image and text. Images and texts in cartoons work together as part of the informative structure of the cartoon. Adejuwon and Alimi (2011) and Jolaoso and Shojonwo (2023) aver that cartoons are a means of depicting social realism and have become a pungent instrument of communication, being the art of showcasing societal happenings and a means of communicating societal reality graphically.

Context is pivotal to interpreting the communicative intentions of a cartoon because it unveils the discourse composition of cartoon resources. In this way, contextual cues, which can be internal or external depending on whether they belong to the body of the cartoons or they are framed, are crucial. In this case, whatever can activate our prior knowledge (background knowledge) concerning the topic or the content of the cartoon is described as external cues. Against this background, this study investigates contextual frames of COVID-19-related cartoons depicting the experiences of Nigerians.

It is worth noting that cartoonists use elements such as colours, fonts, kinesics, perspective etc. (Fairclough 2009) and match them with the possibilities offered by the informative structure (Giora 1997) to achieve their communicative intentions. Cartoons offer humour, satire, or simple similes to readers in order to relieve tension and anxiety. Cartoons selected for this study depict the mimicry of the socioeconomic experiences of Nigerians during the COVID-19 era. This paper, therefore, investigates pragmatic resources inherent in COVID-19-related cartoons depicting the impacts of the virus on Nigerian society. Significantly, this study aims to showcase how the selected cartoons show the peculiarity of the impact of the virus on the sociocultural experiences of Nigerians. The study also attempts to highlight the communicative functions of the selected cartoons to unpack the pragmatic processes in cartoon discourse.

1.1 Cartoons and society

An extensive body of published work exists on the importance of cartoons to human society. For instance, the strategic use of cartoons in Nigerian politics has been

variously highlighted (Olajimbati 2019). In this regard, Sani et al. (2012) consider the linguistic analysis of the construction of satire in Nigerian political cartoons, using the example of newspaper cartoons, using the perceptual theory of satire and linguistic analytical framework within the realm of critical discourse analysis. Their findings reveal that Nigerian cartoonists often use interjections in cartoon-written texts to create satirical impressions about political leaders. Similarly, Chen et al. (2017) examine static images in print news media to map political cartoon studies into six major subfields. The subfields mapped out are meta-studies or surveys of political cartoons, their function as cultural mirrors, political cartoons' impact, audience reception and the cartoon ecosystem.

Cartoons usually are humorous in nature as cartoonists strategically deploy humour to reflect on serious socioeconomic, political and cultural vicissitudes. The corollary of the foregoing is demonstrated by Oluremi (2019). Oluremi considers the pragmeme of political humour in selected Nigerian political cartoons. Adopting Flanson and Barrett's Encryption Theory of Humour and Mey's Pragmeme Theory, the researcher subjects six political cartoons to discourse interpretations. The findings of the study reveal that audience who were well-informed about these political activities were able to decrypt the cartoons because they shared the same key political knowledge as the cartoonist, thereby producing honest laughter.

Studies have examined COVID-19-related cartoons from various perspectives. These studies focused on comics and the visual culture of cognition, pandemic comics, metaphors, metonymies, stigma and blame, conspiracy, controversies and manipulations related to vaccines (Abdel-Raheem 2023; Callender et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2021). Other linguistic research works on COVID-19-related cartoons around the world have explored diverse ways by which people responded to COVID-19. They include the visuality of COVID-19 cartoons published in three media outlets in China (Chu 2024), the sinophobic attitudes in the wake of COVID-19 through a detailed analysis of sequential comics and cartoons by artists of Asian descent (Venkatesan and Joshi 2024), humorous and satirical depiction of vaccine inequality and hesitancy in the Covid-19 political cartoons published in Pakistan (Rana et al. 2022), the portrayal of societal discourse around the pandemic through the exploration of the main themes in South African editorial cartoons (Wasserman and Joubert 2024) and portrayal of COVID-19 pandemic in political cartoons in Tanzania (Lusekelo 2023). While these studies motivated the insights for the present study in terms of data orientation, it is proportionately different from them because it focuses on how cartoonists portray the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerians. The study is therefore an effort to complement cartoon studies from discourse-pragmatics scholarship as it addresses two important questions: what contextual domains of Nigerians are captured in COVID-19-related cartoons? How are multimodal features

and pragmatic strategies deployed to achieve the cartoonists' communicative intentions to Nigerians?

Extant scholarly studies on COVID-19-related cartoons in Nigeria have examined crisis communication and coping strategies during the pandemic (Alabi 2020), the impact of COVID-19 cartoon colours on health behaviour (Okpara et al. 2021), pragmatic-multimodal functions of Covid-19 memes in Nigerian context (Ajayi and Akinrinola 2021), the framing of COVID-19 cartoons (Mu'azu et al. 2022), representation assumptions and attitudinal perspectives in Nigerian Covid-19 memes (Filani et al. 2022), a multimodal analysis of social media representation of Covid-19 (Adebomi 2022), humorous responses to coronavirus pandemic (Ali 2022) and linguistic and literary recreations of Nigerian socioeconomic realities during the coronavirus pandemic (Asiru and Bello 2023). None of these studies particularly examined the importance of context and strategies in the decryption of COVID-19-related cartoons in Nigeria. Since context is culture-specific, non-Nigerians and culturally deficient Nigerians may not have enough contextual resources to appropriately decipher the communicative intents of the cartoons. Research in this area is, therefore, necessary to provide a platform for audiences of varied cultural backgrounds to adequately understand the communicative intents of COVID-19 cartoons created through the Nigerian experience.

2 Theoretical orientation

The study draws on multimodal discourse analysis and the concept of presupposition to achieve its objectives. Multimodal discourse analysis is an approach to information dissemination that focuses on meaning-making through the use of different modes of communication as opposed to using only language. The multimodal analytical framework is introduced to contribute to a discourse-oriented study to account for the visual information and it draws on modes of communication such as pictures, video, film, images, and in combination with words to make meaning. It is an offshoot of Halliday's social semiotic approach to language, which considers language as only one among many semiotic resources, others include gestures, images, and music that people use to communicate with one another. van Leeuwen (2005) opines that the notion of social semiotics is concerned with how people use semiotic resources to create communicative interfaces and events and to interpret them in the context of specific social situations and practices. The concept of multimodality has also been extended to semantic resources including visual images which form the data for this study. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest and develop a method of social semiotic analysis of visual communication and establish a descriptive framework of multimodality. The framework identifies three subsystems

which are representational, compositional, and interactive meanings. The representational meaning points out that semiotic resources should be able to represent events and happenings that occur in the real world within or outside the environment they occur. This meaning is split into two main categories of processes – narrative and conceptual. The compositional meaning captures how the semiotic system is capable of forming texts, different semiotic systems cohering both internally and being meaningful in the context in which they are produced. In other words, the visual and verbal elements in a multimodal system form a compositional mode. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), represented participants and interactive participants are the two kinds of participants involved in an image. Between these participants, there are three kinds of relations: relations between represented participants; relations between interactive and represented participants, which refers to the interactive participants' attitudes towards the represented participants; and relations between interactive participants, which refers to the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images. This theory is relevant to this study because the selected cartoons deploy different modes such as pictures, postures, gestures, colours as well as written texts, to pass information across to the masses including cartoon readers and these features are what Multimodality is used to track. This theory is supplemented with insights from presupposition to account for the contextual orientations of the individuals involved in the cartoons and the contextual knowledge of the masses that help them (the masses) to decipher the information conveyed by the cartoonists.

Presupposition as a pragmatic concept makes it possible to make explicit the implicit assumptions and intertextual relations that underlie text production. Lyons (2013) defines presupposition as an aspect of pragmatic or social language use. It entails an implicit assumption about the background knowledge relating to an utterance, the truth of which is taken for granted in discourse. For the utterance to be considered contextually appropriate, the presupposition must be mutually known or assumed by the speaker and listener(s). In presupposition, there is often a piece of information, which the speaker assumes that the hearer already knows. This assumption is based on some shared background knowledge (context) between the speaker and the hearers. An outsider in the communication circle (someone who lacks contextual knowledge) may not understand the language used. For example, the conversation below illustrates an instance of presupposition:

- (i) Tolu: Are you able to bring Kunle along?
- (ii) Akin: That will be splendid. On our way, we shall pick up the drinks.

The presupposition in this conversation is that both Tolu and Akin know who Kunle is. They both have an idea of the drinks and the source from where to bring them.

Pertinent aspects of presupposition were deployed to extract the intended meaning depicted in the cartoons selected for the study.

One aspect of Fetzer's (2004) contextual model, the social context, was adopted to account for the contextual domains of the sampled data. The social context is an unmarked type conceptualised as a socio-oriented frame of reference with the following as its constituents: discourse participants, the immediate concrete, physical surroundings including time and location, and the contextual institutional and non-institutional domains. The use of language in this context is assigned to the domain of linguistic performance. The linguistic resources in this category may be attributed to the habitual relatively stable schemes of perception about people's relational activities. In this study, the domains captured in the cartoons are identified based on images, communicative acts, participants, settings, and contextual experiences during the pandemic.

3 Methodology

Forty covid-19 related cartoons, being circulated on social media, were collected between March and April 2020 on the Twitter and WhatsApp platforms of the two authors and their close associates as data for this study. These social media platforms were chosen because of the convenience and easy accessibility of such data during the lockdown period occasioned by the coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria. A descriptive qualitative research design was adopted because of its capacity to achieve the aim of the study. Similarly, multimodality and presupposition served as the theoretical framework. This methodological approach was adopted to enhance discourse-pragmatic analysis through a thematic coding process of all identified features which appear in the 40 cartoons selected for this study and then examples were picked for analysis. Multimodal features such as images, linguistic resources, colours, physical settings and discourse participants were all considered in the classification of the contextual domains categorised for the analysis, and presupposition resources frame the strategies and communicative intentions of the cartoons.

4 Analysis and findings

The social experiences of Nigerians captured in the sampled cartoons were categorised into five domains. These are health, religion, economy, politics and governance, and family. These are analysed in turn simultaneously with multimodal resources and pragmatic strategies deployed.

4.1 Domain of religion

The effects of the virus on Nigerians in the country's three major religions – Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) are captured humorously by the cartoonists. The physical settings, costumes, and discourse participants give credence to how the virus moderated the socio-religious activities of Nigerians during the pandemic. In this category, strategies such as the evocation of situational reality and pragmatic sarcasm are mainly deployed (Figure 1).

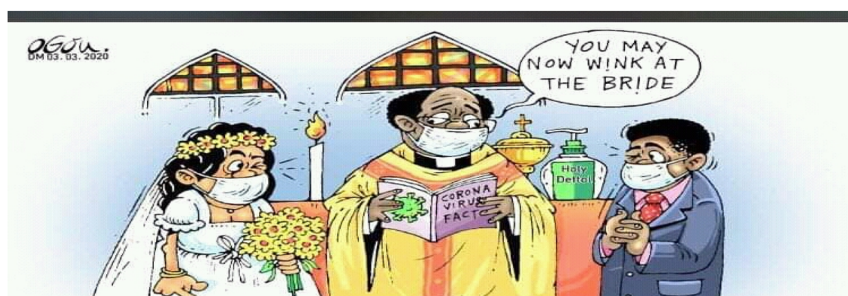


Figure 1: Cartoon of a church wedding programme.

The excerpt captures the conceptual representation of a church wedding programme during the pandemic. It illustrates how the cartoonist, supposedly a member of the Nigerian community, draws on the shared practices of Christian weddings to represent the impact of the virus. This is underscored in the compositional meaning of the text which features three represented participants with strategic dresses. The woman on the left side of the image is dressed in a white wedding gown and holding a bouquet, the man on the right side in a black suit and tie and the Christian priest in full regalia all depict the wedding situation in a church setting. To humorously represent how coronavirus moderates the socio-religious activities of Nigerian Christians during the pandemic, the cartoonist deploys the strategy of evocation of situational reality to recreate as “*coronavirus facts*”, the marriage vows, whose reading by the groom and bride in the church on the wedding day is usually coordinated by a Christian cleric. The depiction in this cartoon aligns with Ali’s (2022) opinion that Nigerians humorously respond to the coronavirus pandemic. To multimodally present this situational reality, the sign for coronavirus is drawn on the right side of the manual while “*coronavirus facts*” is written on the left side of the manual. Instead of asking the groom to kiss his bride, which is a common practice of the wedding programme, the clergy is conditioned to say, “*You may now wink at the bride*”. This cliché demonstrates how the cartoonist evokes situational reality contextually presupposing that the coronavirus exists and that social distancing is

necessary to prevent infection and the spread of the virus. This strategy brings into line Asiru and Bello's (2023) discovery that Nigerian socioeconomic realities during the coronavirus pandemic are being recreated in cartoons. The couple as the interactive participants gesturally wink at each other which further demonstrates the shared knowledge of the situational reality occasioned by the virus. The cartoonist further recreates the situational reality of the prevalence of coronal virus and how this moderates the socio-religious activities of Nigerian Christians during the pandemic by the tag "*Holy Dettol*" placed on the altar to be supposedly used as a hand-sanitiser to prevent the spread of coronavirus instead of "*Anointing Oil*" normally used by many churches in Nigeria. The masking of noses and mouths by the bride, the minister and the groom is also a context depicting the awareness of the spread of coronavirus and the need to avoid catching it. The semiotic and linguistic resources are strategically deployed to inform readers of the precautionary measures that must be taken by people to avoid the spread of the virus (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Cartoon of Muslims attending the mosque for prayer and leaving afterwards.

The physical context in the image above represents that of a mosque which is the place of worship for Muslims. The arc at the two entrances of the building is typical of mosque buildings in Nigeria. Also, on the building are the images that usually hold the crest which is an Islamic symbol. The costume in this image is also typical of Islamic worshippers in Nigeria, especially during the coveted Friday Jumat when a lot of Muslims prefer putting on white attire. The small caps on the heads of the projected male worshippers are another indication that they are Muslims. During the peak of the pandemic in Nigeria (relatively between April and July 2020), the Federal Government ordered that to prevent the spread of the virus, every gathering of more than 20 people must be stopped and that no religious house must open since the worshipers are presumed to be more than 20. This government's order which moderated the

socio-religious activities of Nigerians including the Muslims projected in the image above is being captured to illustrate the assumption of shared knowledge by the cartoonist and potential readers. The cartoonist also lashes on situational reality to pragmatically caution the worshippers against the spread of the virus while insisting on going to the mosque to pray, writing “*Don’t spread the virus, stay at home*” and graphically showing that out of 12 worshippers who are about to enter the mosque, two of them carry the sign of coronavirus but all the worshippers that are projected to be coming out of the mosque have been infected with the virus. This presupposes that attending religious gatherings increases the likelihood of contracting the virus; hence the pragmatic act of warning in the text “*Don’t spread the virus, stay home*” (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Cartoon of traditional religion believers attending shrine for oracle consultation.

The semiotic resources in this excerpt contextualise the representation of the third most popular religion in Nigeria. The setting of the cartoon is the shrine of a typical African religion. The biggest image in the cartoon is the lifeless statue in human image in a “sacred” area encircled with pink colour and surrounded by bones of animals that were presumably killed and offered as sacrifices to the gods the statue represents. The dress of the priest of traditional religion is also an indication that this is a shrine of traditional African religion. The wearing of spectacles by the priest is an indication that he is no longer young, implying that he has a comprehensive understanding of the religion and can consult an oracle to solve challenges that people bring to the gods. The other two represented participants, the man and the woman, are dressed in the usual Nigerian attire. These semiotic resources demonstrate how the cartoonist recreates the situational reality of the prevalence of the coronavirus and the need to stop its spread in two modes. The cartoon illustrates that Nigerians are using different coping strategies during COVID-19. First, through the image of the statue wearing a mask that covers the mouth and nose, which is one of the ways to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. To express the same thing in another way, the cartoonist

writes: “Sorry, the oracle can’t speak today. He is maintaining social distancing.” It is humorous because the oracle, who is considered to have supernatural power to solve every human problem, is afraid of contracting the coronavirus. The oracle is sarcastically represented, as a non-human oracle who cannot get sick or die and can be afraid of contracting the coronavirus, is a pragmatic strategy to warn the potential readers (Nigerians) to maintain social distance to avoid contracting the coronavirus. The cartoon presupposes that some Nigerians, who believe in supernatural methods to solve their problems, want to approach oracles to gain immunity from the virus. With pragmatic sarcasm, the cartoonist attempts to inform the people that social distancing is a measure to avoid the coronavirus and not attending a religious gathering.

4.2 Domain of health

This refers to health-related circumstances that foreground the understanding of the presupposed message of the cartoons during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this category, particular reference is made to medical practitioners, patients, and the hospital’s physical setting in the cartoons to show the situational realities of the effects of the virus on people regarding health. Evocation of situational reality is a pragmatic strategy deployed to show various discourse participants’ attitudes and behaviours and general advice on health-related matters during the pandemic (Figure 4).

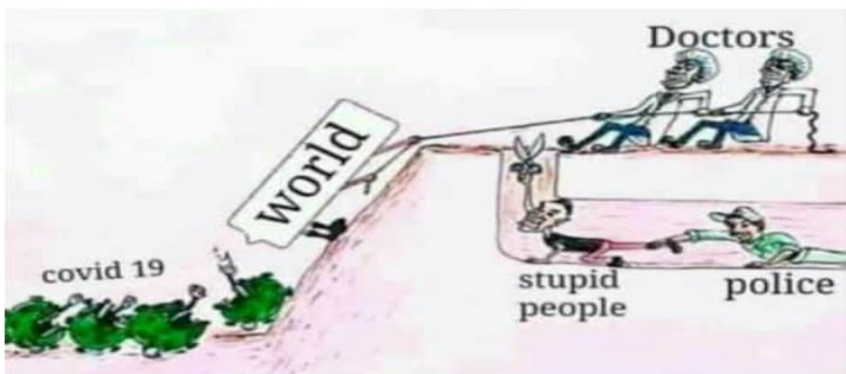


Figure 4: Cartoon of people’s behaviours when doctors save lives during COVID-19.

The physical setting of the cartoon reflects COVID-19 and the world (people) in a valley and medical doctors (supposedly representing all medical practitioners) on a hill who are using a rope to draw the world out of the COVID-19 valley. A represented participant tagged “*stupid people*” who digs a hole under the hill to covertly cut off the rope that the medical doctors use to draw the world out of the valley of COVID-19, is

captured as trying to prevent the world from coming out of the pandemic. Another represented participant is the police who arrest the “*stupid people*”. The presupposed message of the cartoon is that as hard as the medical practitioners are trying to save people (the world) from COVID-19, there are some people who probably through their actions, inactions, or violation of COVID-19 safety rules, surreptitiously prevent the medical officers from being able to achieve this. These people who make it difficult for medical officers to draw the world out of COVID-19 are sarcastically tagged “*stupid people*”, supposedly because if they are not stupid, they will not be involved in an act capable of destroying the whole world which they are part of. The cartoonist demonstrates shared situational knowledge with the potential readers by recreating the prevalence of COVID-19; the effort of medical officers to draw the world out of COVID-19; the behaviour of the people sabotaging the effort being made by medical officers to draw the world out of covid-19 and the effort of the police to stop the “*stupid people*” from such act. These semiotic and linguistic resources indicate how the cartoonist pragmatically captures various represented discourse participants’ attitudes and behaviour during the pandemic with the intention to warn “stupid people” against such social behaviour that could jeopardize the efforts of the medical team (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Cartoon of doctor forcing a high-temperated person to the hospital during COVID-19.

The physical setting represented in the cartoon is that of a hospital where a medical doctor is seen wearing a white lab coat, and glove, masking his nose and mouth and hanging a stethoscope around his neck and a supposed patient represented as interactive participants. The cartoonist demonstrates the assumption of shared knowledge with Nigerians by representing the cognitive experience (fear) of the masses graphically. The realities of the effects of coronavirus on people regarding health is that Nigerians are scared of visiting the hospitals presumably for fear of being tested positive for the virus and being “detained for treatment”; being asked to stay in the isolation centre for the required number of days, and f contracting the

virus in the hospitals that carriers of coronavirus might have previously visited and infected. The heading of the cartoon, captioned “COVID-19: NIGERIANS SCARED TO VISIT HOSPITALS ...”, contextualises the image therein. The image of the medical doctor is shown forcefully holding the hand of a Nigerian to drag him into the hospital from the entrance. This underscores the common ground feature of a mutual contextual belief between the medical doctor and the man being forcefully dragged into the hospital that during the pandemic, anyone with a high temperature tends towards being positive for coronavirus. The fear of the virus makes the supposed patient struggle with the doctor as he argues that the doctor should not take his high temperature for the likelihood of being positive for coronavirus, but what he inherited from his parents. The pragmatic strategy deployed in this cartoon to humorously pass the message is the evocation of situational reality which is used to recreate the struggle of the medical doctors to stop the spread of coronavirus and the fear of the virus by Nigerians which makes them unwilling to visit the hospitals. While it is not a practice in the Nigerian medical industry to drag patients to hospitals, the cartoonist represents this situation to reflect how medical doctors’ efforts to ensure that the spread of coronavirus is contained by isolating people with symptoms of coronavirus, by all means.

4.3 Domain of economy

Issues such as labour, hunger, salary cuts and the evacuation of emigrants as well as other economic impacts were captured by cartoonists in their effort to depict the socio-economic realities in the Nigerian context during the COVID-19 pandemic. Images and discourse participants are humorously depicted and complemented by linguistic resources to justify the use of pragmatic sarcasm and evocation of situational reality as pragmatic strategies in highlighting the economic impact of COVID-19 on Nigerians (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Cartoon of a family suffering from hunger inside and afraid of COVID-19 outside.

The image captures five represented participants, three human beings and two non-human beings. The semiotic resources reveal the signs of the coronavirus outside the house, the hunger inside the house and the family (father, mother, child) standing frightened between the coronavirus and hunger. The mother is carrying some goods on her head, that are expected to be sold outside to earn money to feed the family members, with lexical items “outside”, “inside” and “hunger”. The depiction of family members who are afraid of the coronavirus outside and crying from hunger indoors is a representation of social reality in Nigeria during the COVID-19 lockdown. Inferable from the image is the fact that apart from the government-imposed curfew during the pandemic, many Nigerians were afraid to go outside for fear of contracting the virus. This background knowledge guides the cartoonist’s choice by representing the socioeconomic experience of the masses during the pandemic. Using evocation of situational reality, the cartoonist recreates the economic situational reality in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricts economic activities in the country (*outside*) and results in hunger for the family conditioned to stay at home (*inside*) (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Cartoon of Nigeria government-sponsored flight evacuating Nigerians in the diaspora during COVID-19.

The images in the cartoon include a helicopter painted in ‘green, white, green’ which is the colour of the Nigerian flag hanging in the air, two cabin crew members climbing out of the helicopter via ladders, images of four people (meant to represent Nigerians in the diaspora who want to be evacuated to Nigeria) pictured in a deep river labelled to have been infected with coronavirus through the sign of the virus on it. The represented participants here are the cabin crew members and the Nigerians in the diaspora wanting to be evacuated to Nigeria. The linguistic resources that complement the communicative ideas in the cartoon are “COVID-19: evacuees to pay for airfares – FG” and “Hey! If you don’t have change, don’t join us!” The first linguistic

resource which is “COVID-19: evacuees to pay for airfares – FG” is written like a typical news headline in Nigeria. The “FG” in it means “Federal Government” and it can be interpreted as the federal government of “Nigeria” because the helicopter is painted in the Nigerian flag’s colour which is “green, white, green”. Its function in the cartoon is to serve as background knowledge (which constitutes the linguistic context) for why the second linguistic resource “Hey! If you don’t have change, don’t join us!” is necessary and helpful for its understanding. The cartoonist assumes that the Federal Government of Nigeria also ordered that the evacuees pay for the airfare before releasing the helicopter to evacuate Nigerians in the diaspora to save them from contracting the coronavirus because other countries, especially the Western countries of the world where most of these Nigerians are being evacuated from, are more affected by the virus than Nigeria. The second linguistic resource, “Hey! If you don’t have change, don’t join us!”, is portrayed to have been uttered by a member of the cabin crew implying that airfares are being required from Nigerians in the diaspora before they can be evacuated. The word “change” used by the cabin crew in the second linguistic resource is a popular street language in the Nigerian context when it comes to the issue of transportation fare. As a language of the street, Nigerians use “change” to mean fare. Therefore, it is sarcastic for the cabin crew to use the street language “change” while addressing the would-be evacuees. The evocation of situational reality is to mock the government for demanding airfares from Nigerians in the diaspora during the pandemic (Figure 8).

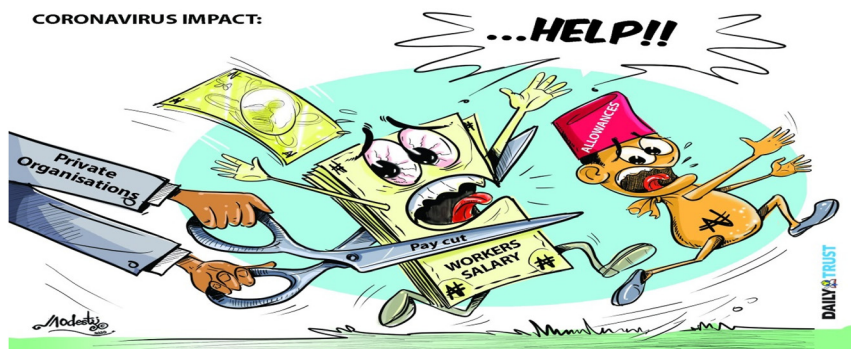


Figure 8: Cartoon of private organizations cutting workers’ salaries during COVID-19.

The image representations in the cartoon include workers’ salaries crying for help for being cut (implying that salaries are being reduced), allowances cut (reduced) from the salaries pictured to be running away, two hands of private organizations holding scissors labelled “pay cut” used to cut (reduce) workers’ salaries. These images and discourse participants complemented by the linguistic

resources (coronavirus impact, help, private organization, pay cut, workers' salary, allowances) in the cartoon are used to depict the socio-economic realities in the Nigerian context during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is inferable from the cartoon that private organizations also make use of a coping strategy during the pandemic. Since businesses especially the ones that could not operate online, were forced to shut down during the pandemic to prevent the spread of the virus, it is understandable that profit, if not stopped altogether, is reduced and it might be difficult for the organizations, especially the privately-owned ones to pay full salaries. This suggests that as a result of the pay cut, the private organizations are limited in their services rendering and goods produced thereby reducing their profits which necessitates the pay cut. Consequently, several private organizations resulted to reducing their workers' salaries and the workers as a result of the economic hardship suffered as a result of their salary reduction had to complain. This background knowledge guides the cartoonist to deploy the evocation of situational realities as a strategy to pass the message of how the pandemic affects Nigerian workers and salary earners. This graphic representation is captured to portray the seriousness of the economic impact of the pay cut on the affected workers during the pandemic.

4.4 Domain of politics and governance

The knowledge of politics and governance is reflected in cartoons in this category, as they seem designed, to satirize government policies and politicians' plight during the pandemic. The interpretation of the communicative acts captured here has a bearing on background assumptions relating to the effects of government actions on the people. Pragmatic sarcasm, orientation to government insensitivity, and insincerity are strategies deployed in cartoons in this category (Figure 9).

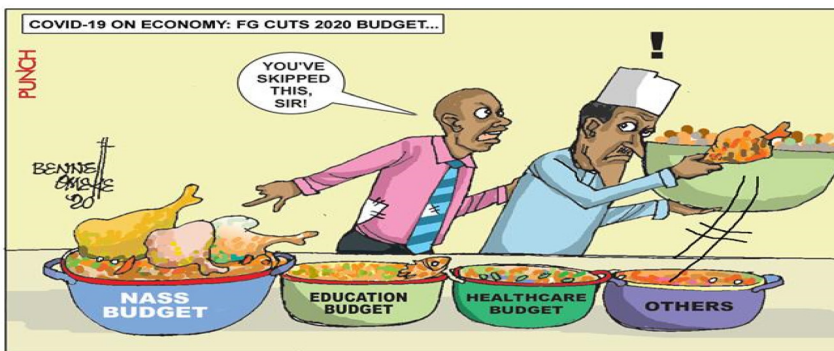


Figure 9: Cartoon of cuts in budgetary allocations during COVID-19.

The represented participants: one wearing “*senator style and cap*” popular among Nigerian politicians at the right side of the cartoon representing the Federal Government and the other wearing a shirt and trousers with a tie representing the Nigerian masses or the common people are captured in the image. Other semiotic resources include five containers, four of which represent the budgetary allocations of national assembly, education, and healthcare and one for other sectors of the Nigerian economy. The fifth container contains the accumulation of the reduced parts of the budgetary allocations for education, healthcare and other sectors of the Nigerian economy, leaving the National Assembly’s budget without reduction. The linguistic resources complementing the communicative intent of the images in the cartoon are “*COVID-19 on the economy: FG cuts 2020 budget ...*”, “*NASS budget, education budget, healthcare budget*”, “*others*” and “*You’ve skipped this, sir!*” The heading of the cartoon and its communicative essence provide the background knowledge and assumption of shared knowledge to and with readers. The linguistic resource “*NASS budget*” is used to label the biggest and the fullest of the containers for budgetary allocation. The linguistic resources such as “*education budget*”, “*healthcare budget*”, and “*others*” are used to label other containers for budgetary allocation for other sectors of the Nigerian economy that are not as big as that of the National Assembly and that have been cut (reduced) allegedly as a result of the situational economic reality brought to the country by COVID-19. To sarcastically demonstrate the insincerity of the federal government about the budgetary cut occasioned by COVID-19, the cartoonist displays images of containers for budgetary allocation for various sectors to project how the federal government cuts the budgets of other sectors and leaves that of the National Assembly without being cut. This indexes the socio-political context which provides reason for the preferential treatment because members of the National Assembly are saddled with the legislative power to appropriate the country’s budget. The cartoonist deploys orientation to government insensitivity as a strategy as the participant representing the masses calls the attention of the participant representing the government to the unequal treatment in the budget cuts. To demonstrate that the federal government could not defend why only the Assembly’s budget is not reduced, the cartoonist inserts an exclamation mark “!” which could depict the cognitive state of the participant representing the government as a response to the statement “*You’ve skipped this, sir!*”. The word “*this*” in “*You’ve skipped this, sir!*” refers to the NASS budget as the speaker points at the container for the NASS budget when uttering the statement. This exclamation “!” as the government’s response to “*You’ve skipped this, sir!*” can be interpreted to mean that government is not comfortable with the statement, perhaps because they don’t have any justification for reducing the budgets of other sectors and leaving only that of the National Assembly or they don’t expect anyone would call their attention to that insensitivity and as a result, do not prepare for any response to such statement capable of exposing their insincerity and insensitivity (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Cartoon of sick politician refusing to be treated in a government hospital during COVID-19.

The images in the cartoon include a hut labelled “*General Hospital*”, two health workers dressed in their uniform with nose covers and a politician being carried on a stretcher into the hut labelled “*General Hospital*”. The interactive discourse participants are the two health workers and the politician. The pragmatic sarcasm is deployed by the cartoonist by representing “*General Hospital*” which is a government hospital, with the image of a hut which is ordinarily used by only poor farmers, herders or people of other professions that have a very low standard of living in Nigeria. A hospital that is supposed to be a place of hygiene is sarcastically represented as a hut to satirize the bad state of general hospitals in Nigeria. The utterance (*No no noo.... You can't bring me here. I am a politician*) of the participant representing a politician declining to be taken to the “*General Hospital*”, a government hospital in poor condition that is not fit for medical services, is an attestation to the projection of government hospital being in a deplorable state. The background knowledge, that many Nigerian politicians have a record of normally travelling out of the country for medical treatment in other countries of the world which they believe have better medical facilities and care than Nigeria, guides the cartoonist to represent this experience graphically. It is common knowledge that during the time of the pandemic, many countries in the world, including Nigeria banned flights in and out of their countries. As a result of the flight ban, Nigerian politicians could not travel out of the country to seek medical attention. The only option for them is to be treated in Nigerian hospitals which are in a deplorable state. The politician's utterance – “*No no noo.... You can't bring me here*”. That “*I am a politician*” implies that the decline of Nigerian politicians to be treated in the hospital they build for other Nigerians; suggests their insincerity to Nigerians in policies and governance because they build substandard hospitals where they do not like to be treated. This inference is underscored in the use of indirectness as a strategy evident in the response of the medical officer, “*...but it's your project sir!*”.

The exclamation mark that ends the medical officer's response could mean that he is being emphatic or surprised that politicians build hospitals and would not like to be treated there (Figure 11).

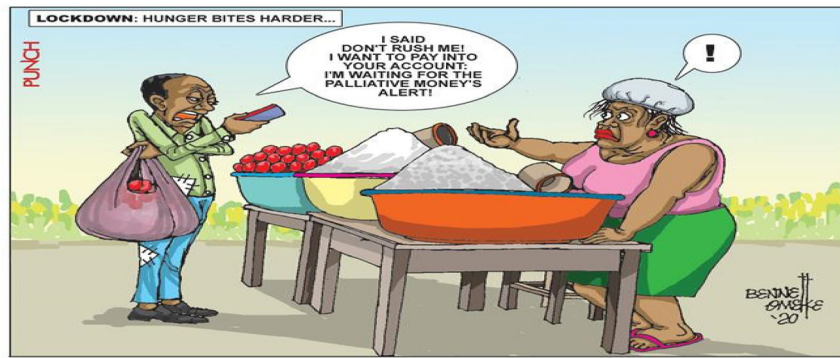


Figure 11: Cartoon of how Nigerians react to government palliative during COVID-19.

The semiotic resources in the cartoon include pictures of three big containers full of different food items placed on two big tables and two interactive participants. One is a fat woman who is the seller of the food items and the other is a very slim man who wants to buy food items. The linguistic resources that complement the communicative intent of the images include “*Lockdown: Hunger bites harder ...*” and “*I said don’t rush me! I want to pay into your account: I’m waiting for the palliative money alert!*” The first linguistic resource – “*Lockdown: Hunger bites harder ...*” contextualises the communicative function of the cartoon, which is to represent Nigerians’ socioeconomic experiences during the pandemic. The expression, “I want to pay into your account” demonstrates shared knowledge of the cashless policy many Nigerians were used to during the pandemic in order to avoid the spread of the virus. This is evident in the seller’s reaction. The slim man’s claim that he is expecting the alert of palliative money before he can pay reveals the insincerity of the government that announced that all citizens have been paid palliative money because of the effects of the COVID-19 virus. The cartoonist represents the slim man who has not received the government-promised palliative as an indication government’s failure to fulfil promises. The cartoon presupposes that most Nigerians were hungry during the pandemic and government-promised palliative did not get to them, thereby satirizing the failure of the government to fulfil the promise of palliative to the citizens.

4.5 Domain of family

Cases of marital infidelity, domestic managerial skills and effects of lockdown on women are captured in the domain of marriage. Punning, indirectness and evocation of situational reality are strategies deployed to capture the effects of the pandemic on Nigerians in this domain (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Cartoon of different ways women could come out of COVID-19 lockdown.

The cartoon presents three represented female participants, the slim one on the left side, the fat one in the middle, and the pregnant one on the right side. The linguistic resources that complement the images contextualise the intention of the cartoonist which is the assumption of shared knowledge of how women would come out of the lockdown. The background knowledge that the pandemic adversely affected people's businesses, and financial capabilities and therefore incapacitated them to eat three square meals indexes the category of women represented as being slim because one of the physical features of people without a balanced diet. Another category of women is those who have access to food at home during the lockdown. Because people in this category eat and stay indoors due to the lockdown and cannot go to work, they tend to be fat as represented by the woman in the middle. The third category is the women who remain indoors during the lockdown, either with their husbands, suitors, or any man with whom they could have sexual relationships. If these women have sexual intercourse, they are likely to be pregnant and come out of the lockdown as pregnant women. The thought-provoking question is therefore "How are you getting out?" of the lockdown. The cartoonist deploys evocation of situational reality to show the expected effect of the lockdown on women (Figure 13).

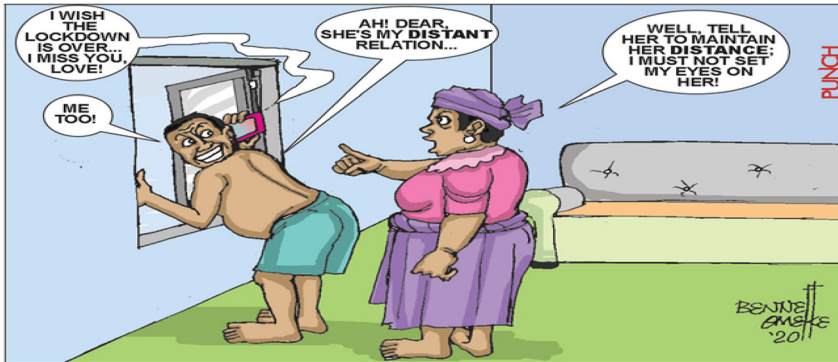


Figure 13: Cartoon of husband caught while phoning his concubine during COVID-19.

The three interactive participants presented in the cartoon and their interactions illustrate love affairs and the impact of COVID-19 during the pandemic. The combination of semiotic resources and lexical choices represents the cartoonist's assumption of shared knowledge of the experiences of lovers during the lockdown. The telephone conversation between the man and his lover, *"I wish the lockdown is over ... I miss you, love"*, and *"Me too!"*, presupposes the man's adulterous affairs before the lockdown period. The mention of "lockdown" wished to be over by the woman on the other end of the call, is a linguistic index inferring that there is an intention to continue the extramarital affairs between the two participants. The male participant is pictured stretching his head out through the window to prevent his wife from hearing his discussion with the other woman on the other side of the call. Despite the man's trick, the wife at home can hear the phone conversation and she warns the man (her husband) to tell the other woman outside to maintain her distance and that she (the wife) must not see her (the woman outside).

The interaction between the couple, *"Ah! Dear, she's my distant relation ..."* and *"Well, tell her to maintain her distance: I must not set my eyes on her!"*, illustrates two pragmatic implications. First, the shared belief that the man is on the phone call with another lover. The man realizing that his secret affair has been known by his wife, tries to maneuver his wife by tagging the other lover a "distant relation ...". The wife's response reflects a typical Nigerian housewife's sociolinguistic behaviour in such a context. Second, the pragmatic use of puns in their interaction. The playing on words here is demonstrated through the word "distant" in the husband's response to describe the same person that the wife cautions to maintain her "distance" which is humorous. It is a pun as the man's response could be interpreted to mean that the woman outside is already distant from you (the wife); there is no need for the warning that she must maintain her "distance" from

you (the wife). The central communicative intent of the cartoon is that the COVID-19 lockdown makes the secret affairs of family members revealed as they are conditioned to stay indoors thereby being prevented from having private time for themselves to enjoy the secret affairs.

5 Concluding remarks

The study has highlighted five socio-contextual domains, religion, health, economy, politics and governance and family, characterizing the social experiences of Nigerians during the pandemic as captured in the sampled data. Through the evocation of situational reality, pragmatic sarcasm, punning, and orientation to government insensitivity, the cartoonists evoke pragmatic functions of informing and warning about social behaviours in religion, family and health domains; recreating the situational realities of socioeconomic impact in the domain of economy; and satirizing government policies and mocking politicians' insincerity in the domain of politics and governance on sociopolitical experiences of Nigerians before and during the pandemic. Theoretically, the combination of multimodal discourse analysis features highlighted through representational, compositional and interactive meanings and pragmatic resources such as contextual nuances, presuppositions and strategies aided the cartoonists' communicative intentions in graphically depicting the impact of the Covid-19 virus on Nigerians in different domains. From the analysis, it can be inferred that the cartoonists fuse linguistic and semiotic resources in their depiction of social behaviour and experiences during the pandemic, thus representing a shared knowledge between the cartoonists and their readers. The findings of the study are consistent with previous studies in some areas. The use of interjections by discourse participants in cartoon-written texts to create satirical impressions about political leaders is similar to Sani et al. (2012). Similar to Oluremi (2019) decryption of cartoons' messages by the Nigerian audience becomes easier because of the shared socio-cultural knowledge and shared situational knowledge about the virus and its impact. As Chen et al. (2017) pointed out cartoons are cultural mirrors, the present study finds that cartoons are a mirror of the sociocultural experiences of people as shown in the analysis of how the impact of the coronavirus is recreated in the sampled cartoons by highlighting the social experiences of Nigerians. The study concludes that cartoons are a strong means of portraying societal realities and people's experiences comically and graphically; therefore, more scholarly attention should be paid to cartoon discourse.

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