Linguistic Analysis of Political Cartoons Published During the 2015 General Election in Nigeria

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Abstract

In communication, different methods are used in transmitting information, one of which is the cartoon. Cartoons are the artistry metaphoric expression of messages pictorially and in words. Cartoons were widely exploited during the 2015 election in Nigeria to subtly inform, educate and entertain the politicians, their supporters, the electorates and the general public. The trust of this paper is to critically analyse some political cartoons from selected national dailies. The objectives of the study are to investigate the patterns of communication used in the cartoons and the linguistic features. A total of 15 cartoons were randomly selected from 3 national dailies, representing 5 from each source. Since cartoons are metaphorical codifications, connotative theoretical frame is adopted as our theoretical frame. The analysis shows that the pattern of communication used are pictorially with verbal illustrations. Different pan methods are used which

are single, double and triple pans. Linguistically, the cartoonists adopted different features such as ellipses, phrases, contracted words, various sentence structures and functional types of sentences, idiomatic/metaphorical expressions to transmit their messages to the general public. It is recommended that adequate attention be paid to the editing of cartoons as part of editorial columns.

Keywords: Linguistics, Cartoons, Metaphorical, Satirical, Semantics

Introduction

Cartoon is one of the satirical methods of transmitting ideas, emotions, feelings, thoughts, information and messages to others through illustrated visual arts of drawing or painting for caricature or humour with scanty or no words. It is usually more serious in tone and commonly uses irony. Passing messages to others is at the heart of communication and in cartoons this takes the form of a caricature and humorous drawing to illustrate a point of view on current social or political issues.

The Encyclopaedia (1995, p. 216) defines cartoon as "a drawing or series of drawing that tells a story or expresses a message with the aim of entertaining, teaching or commenting about a person, event or a state of affairs". In capturing the attention of the audience, the cartoon expert employs catchy phrases, different pen strokes and pans to depict a particular character or event. To achieve these some cohesive devices would be adopted for information flow such as lexical devices,

(reiteration, collocation), grammatical devices reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction) and pictorial devices (semantic mapping). These devices would make the information content of cartoons (according to Fosu, 1986, p. 8) to be provocative, simple with symbolic meanings that make it easy for the average reader to understand.

In the 2015 political campaigns and elections, cartoonist were not left out in expressing their ideas, emotions, feelings, thoughts to the generality of the public, the politicians and the electorates. Because this method of communication is always apt, brief and straight to the paint, it has more patronage than the actual news as reported. These cartoons are more easily understood both by the educated and the non-educated. Those that are educated use their prior knowledge of the political situation together with the written words and the illustrated pictures to get a clearer view of what the cartoonist is trying to say, while the uneducated counterpart rely basically on their prior knowledge and the pictorial illustrations to decipher the cartoonist intended meaning.

In cartoon communication, the major patterns utilized by the cartoonist are pictorial illustrations and usage of scanty words. The methods of information differ from one media to the other. For example *The Guardian newspaper* uses double pans for detailed information and illustrations, while *The Punch and The Daily Sun* utilize single pans.

Recently, increased awareness and technological development in computer have brought in a new dimension in cartooning through cloning and photo-shopping. While the pictures are satiric and metaphorical, the wordings are codified and connotative. The pictures and the wordings could at times be simplified or exaggerated, meant to either compliment, insult or entertain.

Statement of the Problem

Cartooning as a means of communication has been in practice from time immemorial. The African traditional system had a way of criticizing, satirizing and depicting the social, economic and political scenario through drawings, paintings, engravings on rocks, poems, drama, songs and cultural displays. With the inception of colonialism, western education, language and culture contact a new way of criticism or eulogizing now evolved through cartoons.

According to Adejuwon & Alimi (2011) despite the introduction of printing press in 1846 and newspapers in 1859 in Nigeria, the use of cartoon as a means of portraying social realism did not gain currency until 1930's when the *West African Pilot* newspaper started using cartoons in its editorials. Akin Lasekan (1916-1974) of *West African Pilot* is known to be the first media cartoonist in Nigeria who used cartoon as a satirical weapon in the political struggle to liberate Nigeria from British colonialism. With the trail blazing by the *West African Pilot (WAP)* and the emergence of other newspapers like the *Daily Times, the Tribune Newspaper, the Guardian Newspaper*, *the Punch Newspaper, the Sun Newspaper* to mention but a few, cartoon as a means of communication started flourishing in the Nigerian media industry.

The introduction of Information Technology (IT) through internet and social media has brought in a trilling innovation in cartoons as a means of communication. These different media of cartooning are to inform, educate and entertain in a subtle but symbolic meaning. No matter the medium used or the purpose of the cartoon, everything else hinges on language use and the pattern of communication.

The trust of this paper is therefore to critically analyse some political cartoons from selected national dailies to find out the cohesive devices and the patterns used by cartoonist in relaying their messages to the general audience. Other objectives

include to investigate the patterns of communication used in the cartoons and to find out the linguistic features of these cartoons.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Though cartoon as a means of communication had existed in African society and Nigeria for some time now as a means of communicating feelings, ideas, emotion etc much attention had not been directed towards it when compared to other means of communication. Akindele (2006) investigates into '*Omoba*' cartoon series from 'Proverbs and Politics perspectives. She explores how proverbs are utilized in newspapers cartoon series through their usage of proverbial expressions to drive home some universal truths. In her findings, she discovered that proverbs have been used as a veritable tool for passing across important messages to those in authority that need to hear the agitations of the masses.

Babatunde (2011) carried out an investigation into 'Proverbs and Indigenous Political Institutions'. He examined the Nigerian indigenous political institutions at large across the nation's three major tribes namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. His findings show that the use of proverbs in indigenous languages by political institutions will strive to balance tradition with modernity. Adejuwon & Alimi (2011) also conducted a research on '*Cartoons as Illustration: Political Processes in Nigeria'*. Their data were mostly gathered from '*Tribune*' a regional newspaper in the Western region of Nigeria. They traced the history of cartoons in Nigeria from inception to 2011. In their work, they found out that cartoon has become pungent instrument of communication and illustration in Nigeria.

Considering Akindele's (2006) findings into Proverb and Cartoons, Babatunde's (2011) use of indigenous proverbs by political institutions as well as Adejuwon & Alimi's (2011) Cartoons as illustrated in Political Processes in Nigeria, it is evident that cartoons as a means of communicating ideas, feelings, thoughts and emotion on contemporary issues have come to stay in

Nigeria and will keep gaining popularity amongst its audience.

For any communication to be meaningful, the encoder, in this instance, the cartoonist must adopt lexical, grammatical and pictorial devices to achieve clarity, completeness, conciseness, correctness and consistency, which constitute the essential elements in communication. Osinsanwo (2008, p. 28) affirms, when we speak, write *or draw*, (italicized mine) there are different parts of the message which come out in bits. If the message is to be meaningful, the various parts or segments must be brought together to form a unified whole. These devices that bind text together to make a unified whole and bear meaning make cohesion in cartoon discourse.

Considering the extent of research so far in cartoon as a medium of communication in Nigeria, no research has been carried out in the area of 'Linguistic analysis' and specifically in the just concluded 2015 Political/electioneering campaign in Nigeria, thus the need for this research to fill in this needed and unexplored gap. The research is needed to raise awareness on salient linguistic features that can aid meaning and understanding of some of the language of the cartoonist. It is also significant to the cartoonist to note the areas they have been lagging behind in terms of communication strategies. This is very vital because some expert in communication satire are there either to placate, pacify, mollify, appease, propitiate or to provoke and goad them on their deeds to the electorate whom they are meant to protect.

The essence of any communication process is to make meaning. Pretending to communicate without meaning is tantamount to the biblical babbling (KJV, Gen.11:9). Ndimele (1999, p. 27) says that there are a number of requirements that any adequate theory of semantics must fulfil which are first; it must explain and clarify general characteristics of meaning. It must provide basic statements about meaning-dependent relations in terms of anomaly, contradiction, ambiguity, tautology, etc, as well as meaning-dependent relations between expressions taking

cognizance of meaning properties of words and sentences. He adds that an adequate theory of meaning should be able to relate meaning of words…to the situation in which the use of these words… would be appropriate. Ndimele (1999) quips that such a theory must generally record facts of meaning, linguistic references, and truth-conditions.

To achieve our set aims and objectives of the study, Leech (1981) 'Connotative Meaning' as modified by Ndimele (1992) is adopted as our theoretical frame. This theory focuses on 'real worlds' experience which an individual, society or a group of people associates with as expression when used, saw or heard. The meaning in this instance captures the conceptual significance of an expression and the individual's personal experiences which the communicators bring to bear upon what is communicated or expressed. In as much as our experiences differ, the underlying meaning we perceive of objects and situations can never be the same. Leech (1981) says that connotative meaning can be described as that type of meaning which expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. Meaning content of political cartoons can only be deciphered based on the audience' background knowledge of the displayed images, inscriptions and messages.

Method of Population Selection and Data Analysis

In a achieving our set goals the entire print media were surveyed and stratified into two cells: the state owned newspapers and the national newspapers. The national newspapers were chosen as the population of the study. Amongst the national newspapers, only 3 (three national newspapers were picked: *The Guardian newspaper, The Daily Sun Newspaper and The Punch Newspaper.* The choice of these papers over the state owned papers is that they are more independent and a bit free from politicians' influence. A period of 6 (six) months: January to June 2015 was used for data collection. This period is segmented into 'Pre-Election Period

(PREP): January to February, 2015, Election Period (EP): March to April 2015 and Post Election Period (PEP): May to June 2015. A total of 138 (one hundred and thirty eight) data were extracted from the selected national dailies. Only 15 (fifteen) were eventually used after random sampling. The sampling was based on the set objectives of the studies which are: patterns of communication used in the cartoons, the linguistic features of these cartoons and the impact it may likely have on the politicians and the electorates. The method of our analysis was strictly descriptive.

Data Presentation and Analysis
Campaign or Pre-Election Cartoons
The PREP period is the campaign time which covered 2014 to February 2015. This was the period the politicians went around canvassing for people's votes. During this period, they used all kinds of strategies in convincing the electorates to vote for them.
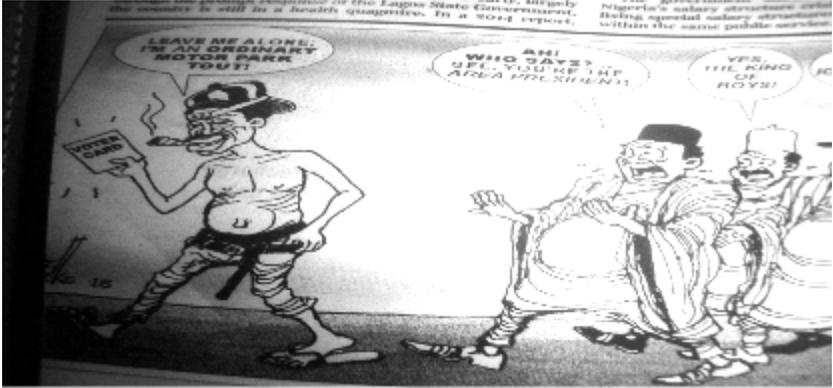
PREP Data Presentation
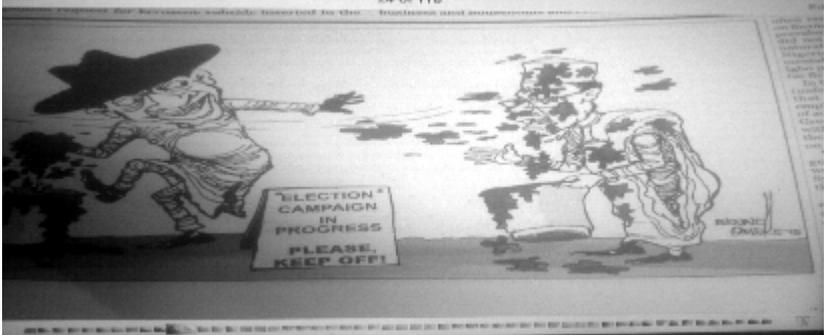The data that depict this period are as presented in the Pre-Election Period (PREP cartoons) in 1-5 below:
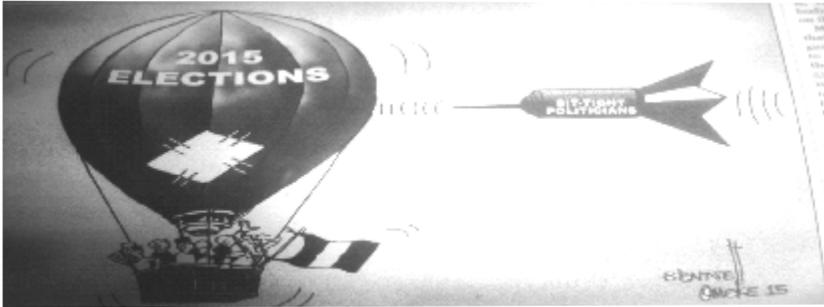## PREP Cartoon 1
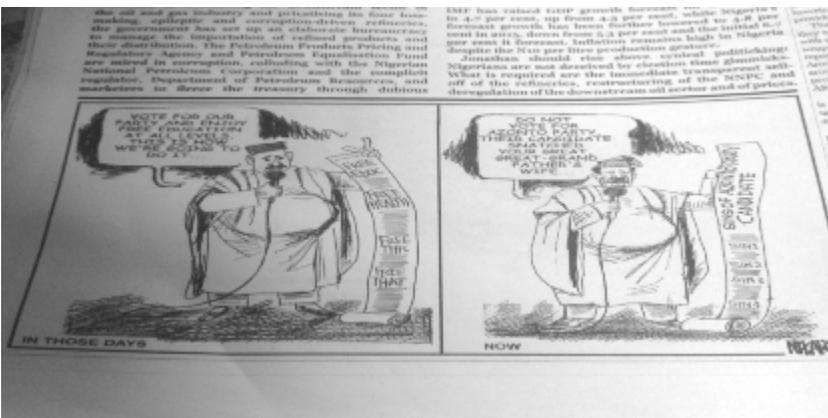
PREP Cartoon 2

PREP Cartoon 3

PREP Cartoon 4

PREP Cartoon 5

PREP Data Analysis

'PREP Cartoon 1' is a cartoon depicting the campaign period of two different periods in Nigerian political history. The information content of the cartoon consists of words and pictorial illustration of a typical Nigerian politician. The illustrative pattern of communication is presented in a vertical double pan and each pan has written and spoken forms of communication the politician presented to the electorates. The two major patterns of communication as observed in the cartoons of pre-election are pictorial illustrations and verbal communication. In the first pan, the spoken form has 2 sentences, 'i' Vote for our party and enjoy free education at all levels, 'ii' 'This is how we are going to do it', while the written aspect contains the list of their usual unresisting promises.   The first pan portrays sincerity and focus which politician of old exhibited on the party and its list of promises while the second pan shows the traits of our present day politician who has nothing to offer than present a list of purported sins of the opposition party tagged 'Azonto' (a form of dance) and the reasons it should not be voted for.

However, though the two pans show differences in language use and their levels of sincerity, the pictorial illustrations present the personalities of two different epochs the same way. The cartoonist displays his illustrative proficiency with calligraphic

thick style of presenting the two politicians with some iconic elements like elaborate garmented and rotund stomach individuals which depict wealth. The caps they put on exhibit their cultural affiliation or tribe. The cartoons were captioned in different structural types, functions and linguistic features.

   a) Imperative sentences comprise words that give directives such as commands, requests, prayers, abuses or give a piece of advice. According to Ekpe (2014) the subjects of imperative sentences are usually omitted as shown in 'i' below.

      i. Vote for our party   (PREP Cartoon 1)
      ii. Leave me alone   (PREP Cartoon 2)
      iii. Please, keep off!   (PREP Cartoon 3)

'Vote for our party can be imperative in this instance, because it has a covert structure. 'vote' as used in the sentence cannot start a sentence because it is a verb. It is possible for the sentence to be structured:

      i. My people vote for our party or
      ii. Please, vote for our party.

While 'i' is a declarative sentence, 'ii' is an imperative sentence. For the fact that there is no overt structure before the verb 'vote' one cannot exactly decipher the sentence type.

   b) Declarative sentences depict statement of facts, information or ideas. For example:
'

      i. Vote for our party and enjoy free education at all levels. (PREP Cartoon 1)
      ii. This is how we are going to do it… (PREP Cartoon 1)
      iii. Election campaign in Progress. (PREP Cartoon 3)

   c) Interrogatory sentence is a sentence type used in asking questions. This sentence type was largely employed by

the politicians during the 2015 Nigerian political campaign as shown below:

    i. A h !   W h o   s a y s ? (PREP Cartoon 2)

d) Exclamatory Sentences are utterances used in expressing sudden out-burst of emotion or feeling of anger, surprise, sadness, appreciation etc. The expressions as extracted from the data are presented below:

    i. I'm an ordinary motor park tout! (PREP Cartoon 2)

    ii. See, you are the area president! (PREP Cartoon 2)

    iii. Yes, the king of boys! (PREP Cartoon 2)

    iv. Please,   keep   off! (PREP Cartoon 3)

e) Capitalisation is mostly used for grammatical class and emphasis. In all the cartoon of PREP, the utterances are rendered in capital letters, showing emphasis and the importance of what are said.

f) Ellipses as a grammatical feature indicates some missing words or phrases. The missing word could have been ellipted by the writer to save space or to be filled by the listener or audience themselves. For example:

    i. This is how we are going to do it… (P R E P Cartoon1),

    ii. Ah! Who says...? (P R E P Cartoon 2)

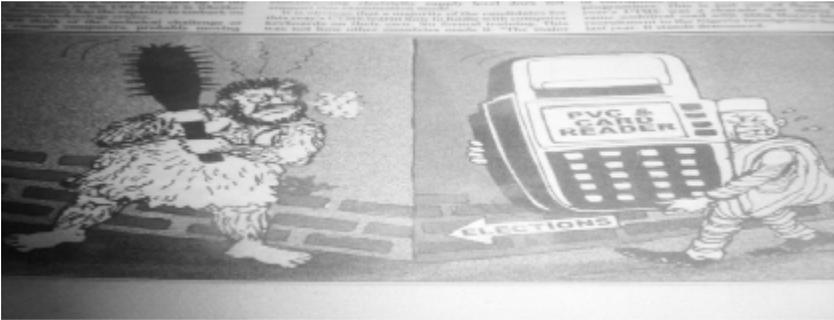g) Rhetorical style used for the audience to complete or answer the question. For example:

    i. Ah! Who says...? (P R E P Cartoon 2)
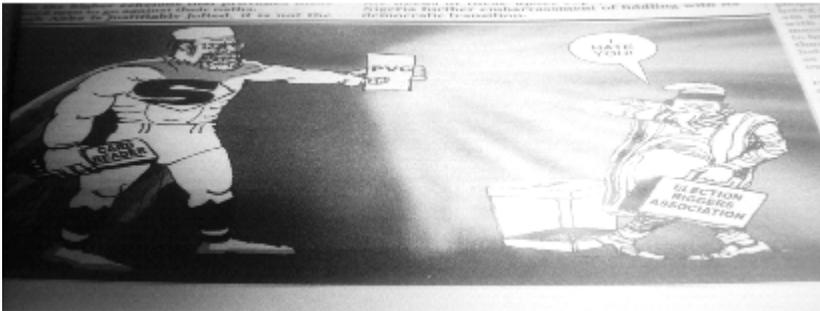
Election Period (EP) Cartoons
This covers the months of March and April 2015 when those that campaigned and solicited for votes were elected into the different political offices to represent the voters.

EP Data Presentation
EP Cartoon 1

EP Cartoon 2

EP Cartoon 3

EP Cartoon 4

EP Cartoon 5

EP Data Analysis

The pattern of communication and language use during this period was not as aggressive and verbose as compared to the PREP time. Out of the five cartoons selected, only one (EP cartoon 1) was captured in a double pan while others were in single pans. One would assume that because this period was a time of uncertainty as no one was sure of what the outcome of the election results would be like. Everyone was cautious, calculating and careful of what to say. The pattern of communication was mostly pictorial and less wordings or sentences. For example 'EP cartoon 1' has an illustration of a weird looking creature (political thug) wielding a pike malleable structure ready to destroy the 'Permanent Voters Card' machine (PVC). 'EP cartoon 2' has to do with PVC reader too, but with a superman securing the reader from being snatched or destroyed by a politician who is a member of 'Election Riggers Association" (ERA).

Linguistically, phrasal structures dominate the cartoons of

this period which are mostly Noun phrases. The party stalwarts were indifferent of what the outcome of the election results would be and secondly campaign had been stopped by the electoral body by this time. By electoral laws, it is an offence to engage in any form of activities that would woe voters to any political party or group. For example:

i.	PVC and Card Reader	- N + N	EP cartoon 1
ii.	INEC	- N	EP cartoon 3
iii.	Ethnicity, religion, politics, corruption	N + N + N + N	EP cartoon 4
iv.	Nigeria	N	EP cartoon 4
v.	Masses	N	EP cartoon 4

The only functional type of sentence found was declarative as shown below:

I.	I hate you	EP Cartoon 2
ii.	Hmmm. If our political parties can agree to work together, the country will definitely move forward	EP Cartoon 5

Like the cartoons in PREP all the written phrases and sentences were capitalized indicating emphasis.
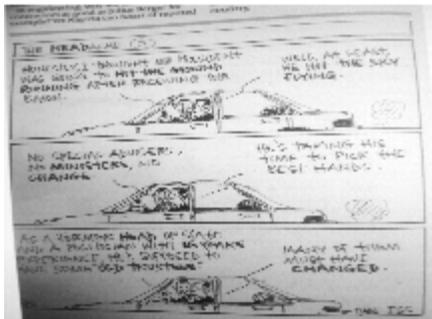
Post-Election Cartoons (PE)

The post election period covers from May till Date in 2015; this was the period after the election had been rounded off. The data are as presented in PE 1-5 below.
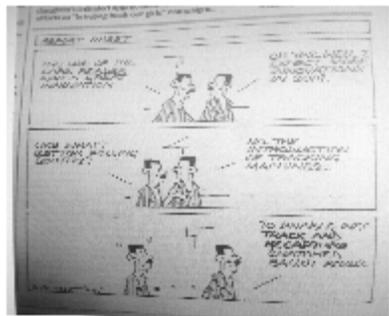
PE Data Presentation
PE Cartoon 1

PE Cartoon 2

PE Cartoon 3

PE Cartoon 4

PE Cartoon 5

NE Cartoon

PE Data Analysis

The pattern of communication in the PE period is an admixture of triple pans and single pans. Like the PEB, more of words, phrases, sentences and pictorials are adopted in their message content. By this time, election results had been declared and the political contestant/parties were sure of their political status. As such, the wining group or persons resort to being boastful, verbose and wielding threatening utterances as found in PE4. PE 2 and 3 were captured in double pans while others were presented on single pans.

The linguistic features were mostly declarative sentences, imperative sentences, phrases, ellipsis, metaphoric expressions as shown below:

a) Declarative Sentences
   i.   He is taking his time to pick his best hands   PE 2
   ii. Many of them must have changed   PE 2
   iii. The use of the card reader was a great innovation   PE 3
b) Imperative Sentences
   i.   Easy my dear, you're now a statesman   PE 2
   ii. Because you'll be the next president occupant doesn't give you the right to move things about here. I'm still in charge so drop that chair before….   PE 4
c) Interrogative Sentence

i.   Like what?   PE 2
    d) Metaphoric Expressions
i.   To your tent o' Israel   PE 1
ii.   Honestly, I thought Mr. President was going to
    hit the ground running…   PE 2
iii.   He is taking his time to pick his best hands   PE 2
iv.   He is taking his time to pick his best hands   PE 2
v.   Come back my foot!...   PE 5

    Metaphoric expressions in'd i-v' above cannot be understood in isolation. The reader has to go beyond the surface structure of the utterances into the deeper structure to decipher the exact or intended meaning of the speaker. This is where the application of the theoretical frame comes into play. For example 'i' is a biblical metaphor taken from 2 King 12:16. As the incumbent president returns the key of his administration to the newly elected president, he advised his political cohorts on what to do as the new president may not accept them and their associated characters (corruption, impunity, lawbreakers and subsidy thieves) into his cabinet. This biblically returned statement or advice is presently playing in the ongoing investigation, arrest and harassing members of the 'O-Israel group'.

Findings

In line with our set objectives of the study, the corpus presented and analysed show that the pattern of communication are similar in all the selected newspapers and cartoons. All the cartoons used words and pictorial illustrations to transmit their content of information to the audience. The only area of differences is in the number of pans used in presenting their illustrations and utterances. While *The Guardian* uses 3 pans for adequate illustrations, *The Daily Sun and the Punch* use 2 pans, respectively.

    In terms of linguistic features employed, the presented and analysed corpus show that lots of imperative sentences dominates during the pre-election period. Such sentences exhibit abuses, blames, prayers, pleas, promises. Elliptical and rhetorical phrases were employed during these periods as well. In the election period proper sceptical and statement of indifference dominated these

period as nobody was too certain of what the outcome of the election will be like. More pictorial illustrations were used than written words. This was a period of suspense and uncertainty, which nobody knows who actually would emerge as the winner of 2015 election. The post-election period witnessed factual utterances, threats and commands. Other linguistic features adopted by the cartoonist were ellipses, phrases, contracted words, various sentence structures and functional types of sentences, idiomatic/metaphorical expressions. Grammatical errors were spotted in some of the cartoons which is a glaring fact that though these cartoons appear on the editorial pages, little attention had been given to its editing as compared to the major content of the editorial pages which are the most grammatically thoroughly screened pages.

Recommendations and Suggestion for Further Studies
On the basis of our findings, it is recommended that adequate attention be paid to the editing of cartoons. Second, training and workshops should be scheduled for the cartoonist regularly on ethics of the profession and adequate use of language and pictorials so that they can meet up with the dynamic nature of language and information technology. The researcher in the course of gathering corpus for this work tumbled into a social media arts work, where pictures of politicians were cloned or photo-shopped (see NE Cartoon), research into this area of pictorials/artistry presentation of political communication needs to be researched into as this may overtake the present artwork of cartoonist in the nearest future.

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