Pragmatic Study of Photo Captions on the Àmòtèkùn Security outfit of South West Nigeria

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Abstract:

Communication is central to human existence and this is made possible by employing not only verbal language but also visual images as both are mediums of information dissemination. This study investigates the pragmatic elements in photo captions on the Àmòtèkùn security outfit of Southwest, Nigeria in tandem with the pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001) and complemented with Hoyer's and Kaiser's visual act theory (2007). Data for the study were judgements selected from the social media platform, Twitter, in January 2020. Fifteen photos were originally sampled but only eight met the objective of this study. Data was subjected to a qualitative interpretation and the result of findings revealed that five (05) of the sampled data were assertive allopracts, two (02) expressive allopracts and one (01) a directive allopract. The paper concluded on the note that the Àmòtèkùn is a welcome development in the region as the result of findings revealed but cautioned that the major objective for the creation of the outfit should not be for personal gratification or to achieve political goals by Governors of the region rather it should be for the protection of lives and properties of people in the six states that make up the region.

Keywords: communication, Àmòtèkùn, pragmatic act, visual act.

Introduction

Communication is the central force of human existence as it is used for information dissemination and the creation of awareness and in doing so language becomes its driving force as social realities are shaped via it. Effective and successful communication entails that the encoder must articulate his message clearly so that the receiver can decipher meaning and relay appropriate feedback. Communication takes different forms such as visual, verbal, gestures. Visual communication entails the use of symbols for expressing meaning and intent. Conversely, verbal communication has to do with spoken words/words of mouth in communicating intent. Gestural communication involves the use of signs in sending meaning. Such signs can be waving of the hand, winking, and others. This

paper, however, is intended to look at a singular perspective and that is visual communication.

Visual as against verbal communication is a fast-rising medium of communication which is triggered by globalization and the creation of new-fangled technologies and applications. It is, therefore, impossible to separate verbal from visual communication as both are meaningful in their own way. The historical precedent of visual communication as a subject of scholarly enquiry can be traced to the "late 1980s and 1990s when a number of authors realized that meaning is generally communicated not only through language but through other semiotic modes" (Machin and Mayr, 2012). The argument here, therefore, is that images can be analysed using language/linguistic theories same way words are analysed. No wonder, Kress (2002) and

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) opine that “all communications have always been multimodal” as they infuse “at least two of these modes of communication”. The point here is that language is a fusion of different modes of communication such as verbal, visual, gestures, etc for meaning production (Jewitt and Jones 2008, Norris 2018).

Visual symbols represented in photos can be deciphered by the educated and non-educated and as such different shades of meanings are realised due to the “complexity of visual communication as meaning construction in man depends largely on different social variables” (Omolabi & Durosimi, 2018). Photographic representations most often than not are used by the generality of people to capture images that cannot be expressed in words. No wonder the assertion that pictures is “worth thousand words”. Barret and Barrington (2005) also opine that visual representations can be more influential in the assessment of individual or event than verbal ones.

This study intends to explore the pragmatic acts in online photos generated from tweets surrounding the Àmòtèkùn security outfit of Southwest Nigeria in line with the pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001) and complemented with the visual acts theory of Hoyer and Kaiser (2007).

Background to the Study

The security challenges in the Southwest geo-political zone of Nigeria is the key factor that ignited the birth of a security outfit. It is worthy of note to mention the death of two prominent Nigerians who were killed in this zone precisely in Ondo State in 2019- Mrs. Funke Olakunrin (Nee Fazoranti), the second daughter of the Afenifere leader, Pa Reuben Fazoranti, who was gunned down by marauders along Ondo-Ore road on the 12th of July, 2019 and Professor Gideon Okedayo of the Ondo State University of Science and Technology (OSUSTECH), Okitipupa who was kidnapped on his way to Igara, Edo State and found dead some days later. These two deaths among the scores of others recorded in the region necessitated the launch of Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) otherwise called Àmòtèkùn in Ibadan by the

state governors of Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Lagos and Ogun on Thursday January 9th, 2020. The outfit has as its motto: zero tolerance to crime. Àmòtèkùn is a Yoruba word for leopard and an outfit that seeks to complement the effort of the federal government and not a replacement to an already existing security system. This fact was succinctly captured by Governor Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State when he stated that “Amotekun is a complement that will give our people confidence that they are being looked after by those they elected into office. So, we do not want this to create fear in the mind of anybody as we are not creating a regional police force and are fully aware of the steps, we must take to have state police. We do not want anybody to misconstrue the concept of Amotekun”. This, the Governors, say is the possible lasting solution to the ravaging menace caused by armed bandits, kidnappers and herdsmen terrorizing the zone.

A Survey of Previous Works

There exists plethora of works home and abroad based on pragmatic study of visuals as this phenomenon has dominated the media space in recent times. Ademilokun & Olateju (2015) investigated the multi-modal discourse analysis of some visual images in the political rally discourse of 2011 electioneering campaigns in southwestern Nigeria. Data for the study comprised visual images which were purposively chosen from political parties across the six Southwestern states in Nigeria- Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo, Ogun, Lagos and Osun States- and analysed using the Halliday's systemic metafunctional principles (1985) and Barthes (1977) concept of anchorage and relay. Lirola (2016) focussed on the multimodal discourse analysis of selected political posters in Ireland during and after the Celtic Tiger, with the aim of analysing key political posters made for the campaigns of Irish political party Fianna Fáil framed in the Celtic Tiger (1997-2008) and post-Celtic Tiger years (2009-2012). Omolabi and Durosimi (2018) investigated the photo news report on the abducted Chibok girls in Nigeria which aimed at explaining the pragmatic act in these photos and the construction of act or meaning through visual codes. The study revealed that pictures have the capability of performing

various pragmatic acts such as urging, accusing, protesting, challenging, shaming, and a host of others. This paper takes its cue from this study as its framework is the foundation on which this study is hinged.

Agu (2015) explored the pragmatic elements in leadership cartoons in selected Nigerian dailies, Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2013) examined the importance of a multimodal analysis to meaning interpretation as embedded in political campaign advertisements of former President Jonathan's re-election in 2012. Gbadegesin and Onanuga (2018) explored the multimodal interaction in selected Nigerian election campaign adverts, Solomon-Etefia (2018) investigated the pragmemes in outdoor HIV/AIDS campaign messages in Benin metropolis, Osisanwo (2017) looked at the pragmatic acts in the inaugural speech of President Buhari and Bi (2019) explored the multimodal discourse analysis in news pictures.

A closer look at these existing works of literature point to the fact that much has been done in the study of visuals especially from the angle of multimodality. However, a dearth exists in the study of visual images/photos on the Àmòtèkùn security outfit using the pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001) and the visual grammar of Hoyo and Kaiser (2007).

Analytical Framework

Mey's dissonance with the theory of Speech Act led to the creation of the Pragmatic Act Theory. Mey opines that not all speech acts have a corresponding speech act verb except for the obvious ones which are performatives in nature: to pronounce as husband and wife, to baptise. According to Hoyo and Kaiser (32) as cited by Omolabi and Durosimi (2017), Mey's area of strength is "on the abstract idealization of the intentional speaker and hearer and not on social reality". In other words, the speaker/writer and the listener/hearer cannot be distanced from the speech act processes as speech act cannot act on itself as it needs participants and a situational context to exist. Odebunmi (157) affirms this fact when he stated that pragmatic act "is not on conditions and rules for an individual speech but on characterizing a general situation prototype, capable of being executed in the situation". The major difference, therefore, between speech acts and pragmatic acts is that pragmatic act does not depend solely on utterances (actual speech) like speech act rather it focusses on the "circumstances that led to, and accompany these words... its focus on use, users and context" (Omolabi & Durosimi, 2018).

Pragmatic act is made up of pragmemes which is the generalized pragmatic act and its instantiation in utterances/context is a pract.

Figure 1 : Mey's schematic representation of the pragmatic acts theory

The above schema is a representation of the parts of a pragmeme: the activity and textual part which must coexist in every communication process. In other words, for communication to be possible, the interactants draw from speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational (dialogue) acts, psychological acts, prosody, and physical acts and these are placed in a co(n) text which manifests itself in INF inference, REF reference, REL relevance, VCE voice, SSK shared situation knowledge, MPH metaphor, and M metapragmatic joker. The interaction/synergy between the activity and textual parts results in a pract or an allopract.

Since this study involves visual representational analysis of data, it is paramount

therefore, that a visual theory be used. In the light of this, the Visual Acts theory of Francis Hoye and Ruth Kaiser (2007) comes to the fore. This theory is a follow-up to the pragmatic act theory of Mey which takes into cognisance visual mode of communication thereby filling the lacuna created by Mey's theory. In the opinion of Hoye and Kaiser, "what the visual image means and does are determined by specific users, in specific contexts, in historical and material world" (2007). What this means is that to understand visual representations, one must take into consideration the whole situation in order to grasp the encoders' viewpoint when they make use of visuals.

Figure 2: Hoye and Kaiser's schematic representation of the visual acts theory

Research Methodology

Data for this study comprised eight images which were purposively collected from an online social media platform, Twitter, on the 20th of January 2020. The sampled data were then subjected to qualitative analysis employing the theoretical tenets of Mey (2001), and Hoye and Kaiser's theory (2007).

Data Analysis

Image 1:

Allopract: Assertive visual pract of announcing, stating and informing.

Analysis: Twitter was agog with several images of the Àmòtèkùn and the above is one of such. With this photo, the Governors of the Southwestern states unanimously adopted the logo for the new security outfit. The logo has some verbal acts (four in particular) which performs the assertive act of stating. Àmòtèkùn is a regional outfit covering the six states of Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos, Oyo, Osun and Ogun with the sole aim of defending the territorial integrity of the region from all external and internal forces. It has as its motto 'Zero tolerance to crime' which reinforces its onus as a defender of the region.

This photo explicitly informs the public that as governors in the region saddled with the primary responsibility of securing the lives and properties of her citizens, they will not let any stone go unturned in carrying out this great task. Implicitly, it sends a stern message to bandits, insurgents and all criminal elements operating in the region that the government is on their toes.

Image 2:

Allopract: Assertive visual pract of describing and informing.

Implicit visual pract of warning and advising

Analysis: Image 2 is a synopsis of the mission and vision of the security outfit whose major responsibility is to secure the lives and properties of people in the region from all 'miscreants'. This is visibly represented in this image with the cubs of the leopard hidden under her and anyone who dares go near will feel her wrath.

The image also has an implicit visual pract of warning and advising. The above image sends a stern but straightforward message to persons wreaking havoc in the region that the Àmòtèkùn does not spare those who play with her children hence they either desist or dance to the tune of misfortune.

Image 3:

Allopract: Expressive visual pract of mockery, condemning

Analysis: Image 3 contains an image of Senator Bola Asiawaju Tinubu, a stalwart of the All Progressives Congress (A.P.C) and ruling party in Nigeria. The illocutionary force inherent in this pract is underscored by inference which means that as a great party leader and from the Southwest, whatever he says can either be make for peace or destroy an already existing peace. Therefore, his physiognomy depicted in this image cannot salvage the situation as he cannot be mute in a delicate matter as this.

This pract therefore, performs the expressive act of mocking and condemning Senator Tinubu who ordinarily can calm the raging storm but chose to remain silent in a delicate matter that involves the protection of lives and properties. i

Image 4:

Allopract: Assertive visual act of describing and informing

Implicit visual act of warning

Analysis: Image 4 captures the leopard and its prey- a cow. The leopard is seen dragging this prey on the ground to a serene terrain where it will be devoured. It is shared situational knowledge that the leopard is known for its strength, speed and agility. The author of this image deliberately uses this caption to pass an audacious warning to bandits, kidnappers, ritual killers and all who have sinister motives to desist from such act or be caught in the claw of the Àmòtèkùn.

Image 5:

Allopract: Assertive visual act of stating

Implicit visual act of requesting and pleading

Analysis: Image 5 is a caption of the voices of the people in the Southwestern region of Nigeria. This photo speaks volume in terms of the words captioned and the colour of the caption itself. The author uses the colour red deliberately to depict the lives of those who have gone to the great beyond due to restiveness in the region occasioned by incessant killings, kidnapping, rape and gruesome murder. They go further by stating that the lives of the people in the region and that of Nigerians in general matter and underneath this allpract is the implicit visual act of requesting that the Àmòtèkùn bill be enacted without delay to forestall further killings in the region.

Image 6

Allopract: Assertive visual act of stating

Implicit visual act of guaranteeing

Analysis: Image 6 is a photo whose author is seen asserting his opinion of the view that the Àmòtèkùn has come to stay. Inherent in this caption is the implicit commissive act of guaranteeing that his prediction of the permanency of the Àmòtèkùn in the region is sure. It is a shared situation knowledge by Nigerians that the introduction of the Àmòtèkùn in the western region met forthright rejection especially by the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) who saw it as dead on arrival because regional security outfit is unconstitutional. However, the Yorubas saw the need for the creation of this outfit as they only can stem the tide of killings in the region.

Image 7

Allopract: Expressive act of celebrating

Implicit visual act of stating

Analysis: The author of this image expresses

his psychological state by celebrating the uniqueness of the Àmòtèkùn. He does this by employing the adjectival elements 'pride' and 'fear' and modifying them with 'our' and 'their' respectively. The intentionality of the author in describing the Àmòtèkùn as such is seen in the use of the collective pronoun 'our' with 'pride' thereby distancing those who fight the creation of the Àmòtèkùn with the pronoun - 'their' and the adjective 'fear'. The author sees the Àmòtèkùn as the pride of the Yoruba nation which is meant to instil fear in those who are not law-abiding.

Image 8

Allopract: Directive visual act of warning

Implicit visual act of threatening

The head of the leopard, its whiskers, teeth and stern eyes were deliberately captured in the image to underscore the seriousness of the issue at hand. With this, the author of the visual explicitly warn deviants who would intend to constitute nuisance in the region that any misdemeanour on their part would lead them dancing to the wrath of Àmòtèkùn as the security outfit was created to maintain law and order in the region.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has tried to investigate the photo captions of the Àmòtèkùn security outfit, which was generated from the social media platform, Twitter. Theoretical underpinnings for the analysis of data were the pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001) complemented with the visual act theory of Hoyer and Kaiser (2007). This study is significant because it tends to shed

light, linguistically, on the opinions of the masses and to expose the level of acceptance of the new security outfit in the region. The study analysed eight images of which five (05) images manifested the allopract of assertiveness, two (02) expressive allopracts and one (01) directive allopract. All the images analysed depicted that the new security outfit, Amotekun, is a welcome development in the Southwestern region of Nigeria as many have lost their lives due to the incessant butchering in the region. The people believe that with the presence of this outfit, those who have sinister agendas will desist from them or be caught in the claws of the Àmòtèkùn.

Conclusively, the lives of the people should be paramount to all political leaders and they should therefore, enact laws to safeguard the life and properties. This, the researcher believes, is the reason for the creation of the Àmòtèkùn. It should not therefore, be used as pawn in the hands of the high and mighty in the society or for personal vendetta, rather the primary onus and mandate for which it was established should be at the front burner of the outfit.

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