Pragmatic Analysis of Mood in Selected Editorial Social Cartoons

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Abstract

Editorial Cartoons have shaped public opinions on societal issues over the years, usually resulting in reverberating consequences. In 2015, twelve people were killed in the Charlie Hebdo magazine offices attack in Paris. In 2017, Bala, an India journalist was jailed, while Triveldi, another journalist was arrested and jailed earlier in 2012 for cartoon related issues. These and other events like it show that cartoons are a potent force in depicting societal issues. This study examines the role played by cartoons columns in depicting the social mood in Nigeria. Some random three cartoons in October, 2017 are analyzed and explicated, using the tools of presupposition and context to explicate the mood of each cartoon, thus determining the language use. The analysis carried out reveals that cartoon columns reflect the mood of disbelief, dejection, and despair. The existential presupposition is prominent, thus affirming cartoons play important role in documenting, and shedding light on social issues.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Presupposition, Context, Mood.

Introduction

Cartoons are basic drawings generally used to pass information using symbols and written words, without being too serious even when stern matters are portrayed in the drawings. In other words, Cartoons are typically humourous drawings, which employ language for expression and the presentation of the cartoonist point of view. Sometimes, it is presented without lettering, in which the reader is allowed to make suitable inference Cartoons have satirical disposition mostly, and it is indeed a potent social instrument, because it serves as indirect commentary on political, historical, socio-economic, and cultural issues. Cartoons use language for apt expression. Osisanwo (2003) describes language as 'human vocal noise or the arbitrary representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for the purposes of communication' (1). Language is concerned with utterances and Malinowski (1923) opines that, 'utterances are meaningful only when they are related to the context of their use'. Context is imperative in cartoons. The scope of context includes the "cultural occupation" and "preoccupation" of the people speaking the language. Abisanra (1998) defines mood as prevailing feeling or frame of mind (1). Such feelings could be of love, romance, joy, anger, hatred, pessimism, hope, or bitterness. Mood is demonstrated through action, inaction or language use.

This paper investigates mood in selected editorial cartoons of the Punch Newspapers with distinct attention to the prevailing presupposition and context, in order to establish the roles and usefulness of cartoon communication in the society. While many studies (including this paper) use the terms 'cartoon columns' and 'cartoon' interchangeably, others differentiate between comic strips with political content and single panel cartoons that make commentary on politics, socials and economics in the society. The latter would generally appear on the editorial page of a printed newspaper, and are the focus of this paper.

Statement of the Problem

Cartoons serve as an outlet of commentary for issues that are too vulgar or sensitive to appear in written editorials. However, when a particular cartoon gets circulated, it is usually suggestive of more than what the text say, pointing to the need to understand the background information in the way that the cartoonist thought of it. In view of this therefore, can we safely query if the mood of cartoon columns (i.e., the message)truly reflects the societal position on any issue.It is imperative to determine as well, the effect of presupposition and context on reader's ability to decode the writer's message.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to establish that cartoons reflect prevailing social mood, and presupposition and context play vital role in decoding the mood of cartoon columns.

The objectives of this paper include;

a. To make a case for the notion that, cartoon columns reflects social mood, thus effectively filling journalistic void in news reportage.
b. To explicate that the mood of the selected cartoons and how they play significant role in the society, especially in the re-awakening of the thought process (i.e. to make the public reflect more on the identified issues).
c. To affirm that cartoons can serve as valid reference material.

Research Questions

Since usefulness of language is related to its functionality in different context, this study will attempt to answer these questions:

i. To what extend does cartoon column reflect social mood?
ii. To what extent does the presupposition and context identified explicate the understanding of the cartoon message?
iii. To what extend is the social mood reflected in the selected cartoon determinable?
iv. To what extent do cartoon columns serve as valid reference materials?

This study throws more light on the role of cartoon columns in addressing the void created by newspapers, because of editor's inability to include everything in the usual pages. .Also, as there is a shortage of research in this area, this paper will contribute to knowledge in the area of language use in cartoon columns, in raising social awareness, significantly depicting mood, contextual structure, and the role of editorial cartoon in the Nigerian social scene. The research explicates and interprets selected cartoon columns from the Punch Newspapers. The reference period is within a random month reflecting a particular time i.e. October 2017. It will be limited to the selected Newspaper, out of the whole lot in circulation in the country. The study serves as a representation of the totality of language use in cartoon columns generally. This study is justified as it offers ample opportunity to enlarge the knowledge of language use investigation, and also expand the field of Linguistics.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative analysis of the selected three cartoons as data. Each cartoon is analysed to identify the mood indicated (that is, showing the text that points to mood),

with the existing presupposition and context explicated. The selected cartoons shall reflect cartoons depicting stories indicative of social life.

Theoretical framework

The paper adopts the theory of pragmatics as a guide, (with mood, context, and presupposition as tools of analysis), because pragmatics is concerned with speaker meaning and reader's interpretation. Pragmatics, according to Watson and Hill (1993) is "the study of language from the view point of the user, especially the choices he makes, the constraints he meets with, in employing the use of language and the effects the use of language has on other people in the communication situation (146).

Mood: This is described as feeling or frame of mind, subjective of congruent judgement. Pragmatics accounts for the role of Linguistic mood in utterances by describing how the information encoded by mood markers interacts with contextual factors to arrive at the interpretation intended by the speaker. Such feelings could be of love, romance, joy, anger, hatred, pessimism, hope, or bitterness. Mood is demonstrated through action, inaction or language use.

Presupposition: According to Yule (2010), Presupposition refers to 'what speaker or (writer) assumes is true or known by a listener or (reader). In other words, it is the shared background information between the speaker and listeners (133). It is also described as 'an implicit assumption about the world or background belief, in respect of an utterance whose meaning (truth) is taken for granted. The speaker and listener must have a mutual understanding of presupposition before an utterance is considered appropriate or otherwise. The negation of an expression does not change presupposition. For example, the sentences, 'My husband is slim and   'My husband is not slim, presupposes that, the speaker has a husband.

Yule (2010) identified six types of presupposition as pragmatic tools of analysis. These are:

   a. **Existential Presupposition**: This refers to a situation where a definite noun phrase is used in a statement e.g. the Oba of Lagos, the Obi of Onitsha, the Queen of England, the car, etc.
   b. **Factive Presupposition**: This involves the use of some verbs such as 'know', 'realise''regret' etc before a particular presupposed information.
   c. **Lexical Presupposition**: This refers to a situation where a speaker's expression presupposes an unstated concept. E.g. Expression with words like 'stop' 'again' 'start' etc.
   d. **Structural Presupposition:** This refers to the use of WH- question construction in English Language to show the existence of traditionally recognized presupposition in a statement. E.g. 'who travelled to Lagos? (A trip was made to Lagos)
   e. **Non-Factive Presupposition**: When an expression reflects fantasy, using words like 'pretend', 'visualise' 'imagine', and 'dream'etc.

f. **Counterfactive Presupposition**: These are expressions that are contrary to facts and usually untrue.

Context: Mey (2001) defines context as the continually changing surroundings, in the widest sense, that enable the participants in the communication process to interact, and in which the linguistic expressions of their interaction become intelligible (39). Mey affirms that, context is significant in the study of pragmatics because, it determines the means by which we express our intention. In the same vein, Allot (2010), the speaker and hearer cannot be sure of coordinating on the same interpretation unless they share mutual knowledge of all relevant facts.(p.128) This is also described as 'an implicit assumption about the world or background belief, in respect of an utterance whose meaning (truth) is taken for granted.

Context can be any of the following:

a. Physical: This refers to the **Participants** (i.e. who, age, sex, or occupation), **Activities** (what is happening, i.e. party, game, or reading), **Place** (is it a school, hospital, or market) and; **Time** (i.e. the time of the day determines the language use. Also includes the season, rainy, dry, or harmattan).

b. Sociological: This acknowledges that, Language belongs to the society, and factors such as beliefs, habits, heritage, religion, and value system play important role in the interpretation of message.

c. Psychological: This refers to the psychological disposition of the participants, the message and its interpretation. An example is the issue and receipt of a Quit Notice.

d. Linguistic: This refers to the peculiar language use, how appropriate is it and, how is the decoding? For example, the elderly use more of proverbs while, the youths use more of slangs. Also, the choice of English to communicate with people at Mushin market is inappropriate.

Literature Review

Cartoons

Cartoon is derived from the Italian word 'cartone' which means paper. The term was used by painters for sketches on paper which were then transferred, either through tracing or punching, on to a surface which may be a ceiling, a large canvas or a wall. According to Adekanbi (2000), the word cartoon is used loosely to describe any drawings published originally in a periodical that makes its own point, with or without a caption. He posits further that, the uniqueness of a cartoon can be clearly distinguished from an illustration, which simply illuminates a scene or point, accompanying an extended text in a publication.

The first picture to be called a cartoon was John Leech's drawing in 1843 in the 'Punch' Newspaper in Britain. The word was first used when a great exhibition of cartoons were given for a competition, devised by Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert, to prepare designs for Frescoes for the new House of Parliament. From the entries which were naughty and ridiculous in subject matter, John Leech drew a series of imitations in Punch, coming up with the most captivating entry (Popoola, 1985).

According to Akinloye (2010), Cartooning in its present mode in Nigeria had no indigenous provenance and was part of colonial modernity, as he believes it is attributed to the contact with the west. However, Jegede (1991) submits that, the functional concepts of cartoons werepreviously established in some Nigerian societies as satire in which traditional societies found expressions in verbal and visual elements which include, abusive and mocking songs during traditional festivals such as Eyo, Kilajolu, Oke Ibadan. Gelede, Okoosi and Egungun facial expressions.

In December 1959, Lash's cartoon depicted the Action Group, a major opposition political party to NCNC, being guarded by five wild dogs, each portraying the party as a 'Violator of Human Rights', 'Destroyer of Parliamentary Democracy' and Inventor of Mass Deceit' (Jegede, 1991). The image of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the party's stature was diminished in inverse proportion to the meteoric rise of Dr. NnamdiAzikwe, 'defender of the oppressed', the Nigerian 'David' who successfully confronted the 'imperial Goliath' and the greatest 'political evangelist'.

Review of related Literature

Akinloye (2010) explicated the role of Editorial Cartoons in Democratization Process in Nigeria: A study of selected works of three Nigerian Cartoonists. The study employed qualitative analysis of data, using a descriptive and historical method of analysis based on Halliday's 'Systemic functional Theory' as a guiding theory. The study revealed that the period (1983-1999) being a military regime era, witnessed a clamp down on the press, as courageous journalist were harassed, intimidated, imprisoned or silenced; but the cartoonist got away with a lot. It was affirmed that, Editorial cartoons reflect socio-political realities of Nigeria; the cartoonists were able to 'freeze' these realities in a snapshot of images which serves as reference points, and the cartoons were able to piece the industry of the era together.

Edwards (2005) examined the impact of editorial cartoons on public opinions, using cartoons with presidential election themes. The findings reveal that, "negative caricature of voters' contributed to public apathy toward the electoral process. Josh Greenberg (1991), in his research, 'The Power of Comic Art to Influence Public Opinion', found that cartoons may help people to have a clearer idea of events. However, Culmartin & Bum (1998) submitted evidence indicating that, cartoons do not necessarily reflect general view in the society or serves as historical text of such period.

The study hopes to fill the gap by analyzing cartoon from the perspective of mood and explicating the role of presupposition and context in its interpretation. Thus, affirming its usefulness in the society.

Analysis of Data

The working of moods at play as cartoonists, goes beyond phrases and sentences as they endeavour to make sense or draw attention to issues that abound in the society. The deep themes and the relative background of the cartoons are identified and discussed. The cartoon samples are single-frame and multi-frame narrative illustrations, reflecting different themes leaning towards the similar widespread subject matter: expression of the socio-mood situation in the country.

Datum 1. Corruption Vs NNPC (Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation). *The Punch*. **October 6, 2017**

Mood: The mood depicted here is that of failure and hopelessness (as represented by 'Frail NNPC being underneath a huge and powerful Corruption (opponent)'), because NNPC is loosing the fight against corruption.

Context: The context is social and psychological context, indicative of the spectators and the participants in the ring of battle.

Presupposition: This is an existential presupposition, where definitive noun phrase (i.e. Presidency, Kachikwu, and Baru) is used. The cartoon is based on these presuppositions:
a. There is corruption that is 'very strong'
b. The NNPC stinks.
c.The referee (i.e. Presidency) is unconcerned.
d. The spectators are helpless and dejected
(because they metaphorically have their hands placed on their heads.)

Pragmatic Import: The NNPC is obviously in a very bad situation, as depicted by the loosing battle, where there seems to be no hope because the referee who should **c**ome to his rescue is nonchalant. The setting points to a catastrophic and irredeemable situation, as the 'tap-out' by NNPC (a surrender move in wrestling) is not effective..

Datum 2. Police Road Block.The Punch. October 9, 2017.

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Mood: The mood depicted inthis cartoon is that of disregard, lawlessness, disdain and disbelief. The policemen are obviously displaying a disregard for the law (by asking the driver to 'call the IG' for 'confirmation'),although they are expected to uphold the law at all times.

Context: This is a social and psychological context, reflecting the travails of ordinary citizens in a stereotypical Nigerian environment.

Presupposition: The cartoon depicts a factive and existential presupposition because of the reference to the IG (Inspector General of Police) and expressions like 'thought', 'confirm' and so on. These presuppositions are also evident:

a. There is an illegal roadblock.
b. There is a law against such roadblocks.
c. The Police are unaware of the law prohibiting roadblocks.
d. The driver is rather in disbelief.

Pragmatic Import: The policemen have no regard for constituted authority, and as such they result to emotional blackmail because, it is clear the driver cannot call the IG.

Datum 3. Presidency rules out Diezani's Extradition.The Punch. October 10, 2017
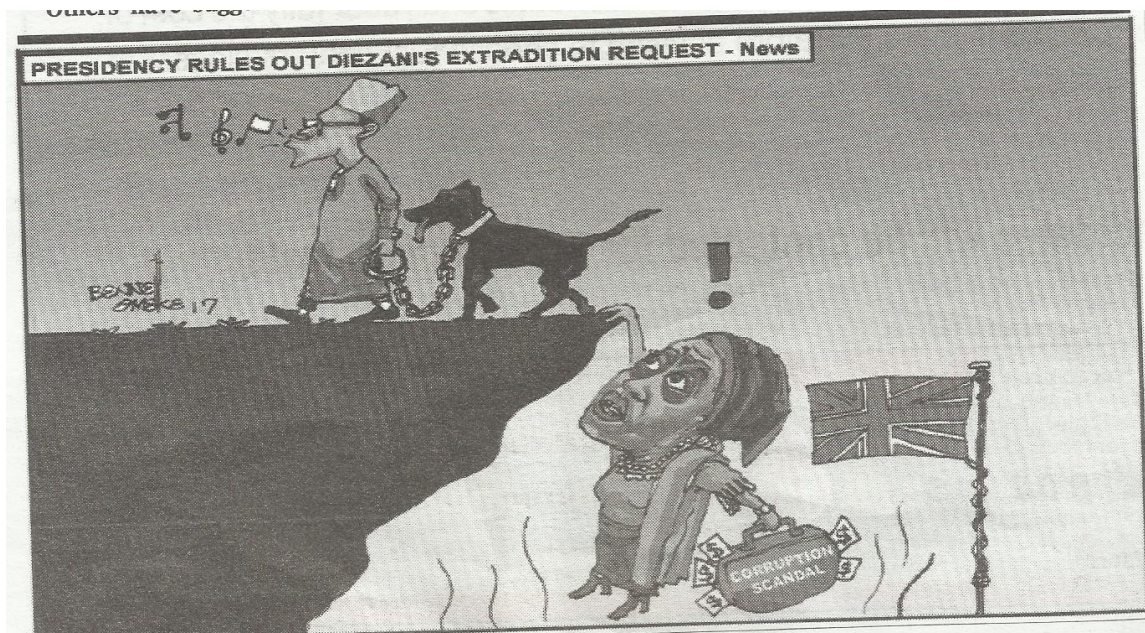
Mood: The cartoon depicts the mood of desperation, misery, nonchalance, and despair, as indicated byDiezani holding on dangerously to a cliff-end with one hand!.DiezaniMaduekewas

Nigeria's former Petroleum Minister in the Goodluck Jonathan's Administration. She is presently facing corruption charges in Nigeria and Britain.

Context: This is a psychological context, reflexive of the lady's dilemma and emotional state.The exclamation mark shows she is dejected.

Presupposition: The cartoon depicts existential and factive presuppositions, because of the reference to Diezani and the Presidency. Also, the expression 'request' suggests a fact. These presuppositions are also evident:

a. There is a woman, named Diezani.

b. She is accused of corruption.

c. There is an extradition from Britain request by Diezani.

d. There is a rejection of the request from the Presidency.

e. The status quo remains.

f. Diezani is dejected.

Pragmatic Import: The cartoon depicts a falling Diezaniholding desperately to the edge of a rock, and a joyous (whistling) President who would rather save a dog than grant her request. Hence she must remain in Britain because the Presidency will not grant her request for the extradition. It is safe to assume she is trying to avoid the fate that befell Ibori (a former governor of Delta State in Nigeria) who was also accused of corruption and was acquitted in Nigeria, but later convicted of the same offence in Britain.

Findings

a. The language use in cartoon columns reflects prevailing social experience in Nigeria.

b. Existential presupposition and socio-psychological context are prominent, and are vital to decoding the mood.

c. The social moods reflected in the cartoons are of desperation, disbelief, dejection, and despair.

d. Cartoonists leverage on the use of satire, to draw attention to societal issues in a humorous manner.

e. The findings also reveal that, cartoon columns can serve as valid reference materials.

Conclusion

In explicating the language use in cartoon columns in the selected Newspapers, it can be deduced that the messages have deeper meaning. The three cartoons analysed indicate the presupposition and context identified explicate the understanding of the cartoon message.Also, there is always more to the 'surface' message as presented. It is confirmed from the findings that, language is used in different social context to achieve certain goals. Cartoon columns presented in economical and satirical use of language does serves as valid reference material, and the selected newspaper cartoons aptly reflect prevailing social experience in the society.

Recommendations

In line with the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made;

i.   Cartoon columns should not only present the perceived shortcomings of the system, it should point to solution.
ii. It should serve as a tool for solving societal-ills in Nigeria.
iii. Insensitive or abusive words should be avoided, as cartoon is capable of shaping opinion.

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