

Contextual Beliefs in Online Political Cartoons on President Buhari

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Abstract

Cartoons, be it political or comic stripes, have been famed for addressing issues using multi-resources, given the spatial limitations. Cartoonists thus bear the crucial responsibility of effectively conveying their intended messages within the affordances of these constraints. Serving as a form of social commentary, cartoons skillfully tackle weighty societal issues in a subtle yet incisive manner, leaving no ambiguity regarding their targets and messages. This study delves into the pragmatic strategies employed by cartoonists to conceptualize and craft their cartoons, aiming to achieve their communicative objectives. For data, 20 cartoons focused on President Buhari and his handling of various political and economic matters were purposefully selected and analyzed. Drawing upon Odeunmi's Contextual Beliefs Theory and Kecskes's dynamic model of meaning, the analysis highlights the reliance of cartoonists on shared beliefs as a pragmatic resource in their creative process. The study also explores how the background knowledge of both cartoonists and readers, alongside societal conventions and shared assumptions, converge to ensure the communicative efficacy of this medium. The findings underscore the influence of socio-political and economic realities on the shared knowledge depicted in the cartoons. Moreover, the deliberate selection of certain lexical items is noted for its reliance on the communal common ground shared by both the subjects and viewers of the cartoons. In conclusion, contextual beliefs play a pivotal role in elucidating the communicative intentions of cartoonists and unpacking the nuanced meanings within cartoons, given their dynamic nature.

Keywords: Contextual beliefs, cartoons, shared knowledge, contextual dynamism, dynamic model of meaning.

Introduction

Communication extends beyond the literal meanings of words and expressions, encompassing the interpretation of implicit, underdetermined, and underspecified forms. This involves a process of unraveling and enriching, through inference, to discern the intended meaning behind propositions. Central to this process is a reliance on shared experiences, previous joint activities and the common ground shared among communicators. These elements are contingent upon the contextual framework that provides the backdrop against which meanings are situated and accessed.

Context has been variously described as the spine of meaning, knowledge held, prior to the speech event can help in the understanding of the utterances in the present interaction, and a dynamic, not a static concept, continuously evolving (Mey 39; Odeunmi 1; Saeed, 181; Huang 13). Mey holds that context is characterized by its dynamic nature, facilitating interaction among communication participants, and rendering the linguistic expressions of their interaction comprehensible.

Advancing the essence of context in communication, Odeunmi explains that:

Context is the spine of meaning. It is, in fact, extremely difficult to proceed with any reasonable search for meaning without considering contextual pressure on word usage.... For communication to be effective, participants have to be sensitive to the cues that are given off by the entirety of the locale in temporal, spatial, cultural, psychological and physical terms. In fact, context provides the background from which the meaning of a word springs. It is the totality of the environment in which a word is used... and is constructed in interaction.... (22).

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This implies that delving into the contextual nuances of meaning entails harnessing the entirety of temporal, spatial, cultural, and psychological cues inherent in the interaction. Kecskes emphasizes that context can manifest as either prior (comprising individual backgrounds and beliefs) or current situational experiences (situated cognition), which may evolve or become enriched during conversation (154). Kecskes further distinguishes these as *apriori* and actual situational contexts.

These insights underscore the pivotal role of context, whether construed in its traditional sense as the physical environment or in its more dynamic manifestation as the emergent actual situation. Context is recognized as a fundamental factor in any communicative endeavor, exerting significant influence on the elucidation of pragmatic meaning.

Contextual beliefs theory has been extensively utilized in various fields to analyze data (Faleke and Alo 51, Unuabonah 92, Adeoti & Filani 274, Olajimbiti 755) in nurse-patient interactions in selected hospitals in a south-western state in Nigeria, in a Nigerian Quasi-Judicial Public Hearing, Contextual jokes in Online Jokes and in Antenatal Classes in Selected Nigerian Hospitals, respectively. Understanding the role of contextual belief in research is essential for comprehensively analyzing data and drawing meaningful conclusions across different disciplines.

Therefore, this study investigates the significance of contextual resources in both the conception and interpretation of cartoons centred around President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria. It aims to elucidate how cartoonists leverage the shared knowledge of their audience and the dynamic nature of context to effectively convey their messages.

Political Cartoons

Political cartoons, sometimes used synonymously with editorial cartoons, hold a crucial place within newspapers (and other media), offering a platform for expressing opinions that may not be explicitly conveyed in editorial pieces due to various constraints. Cartoons are famed for serving as visual commentaries on contemporary issues and events, howbeit in a satirical and humorous manner. They not only reflect the political perspectives of the cartoonist but also contribute depth to the editorial stance of the newspaper. Utilizing caricatures, political cartoons play a significant role in influencing public opinion. While imbued with satire and humor, political cartoons serve broader purposes beyond entertainment. They serve as instruments for information dissemination, education, and the creation of socio-political awareness, contributing to mass mobilization. Moreover, they serve various functions such as praise, encouragement, denunciation, enlightenment, and dissuasion, among others. Adeoti highlights the communicative power of visual images, emphasizing their ability to convey messages swiftly and clearly while retaining their capacity for free expression (3). This succinct nature of cartoons does not diminish their expressive potential; a single cartoon strip can convey a wealth of meaning.

The economic nature of cartoons lends them an underdetermined quality in terms of explicit communication. Consequently, the cartoonist's awareness of socio-cultural norms and conventions is paramount in encoding messages, with the interpretation by readers heavily influenced by the shared common ground between cartoonists and audience. This common ground comprises assumptions derived from shared prior experiences, both linguistic and otherwise, the immediate context of the speech event, and information provided during the interaction.

Theoretical Orientation

The process of constructing meaning relies heavily on various forms of background knowledge and socio-cultural conventions (Spencer Oatey and Zegarac 74). The extent of shared knowledge among participants can either facilitate or impede the fluidity of communication. Levinson describes this shared knowledge as

contextual assumptions, encompassing spatial, temporal, and social facts, along with participants' beliefs and intentions in engaging in verbal exchanges (49). This underscores the importance of the vast array of encyclopedic knowledge brought into conversations for co-creating meaning in interactions, including, pertinent to this study, the interpretation of political cartoons. The depth of shared beliefs among conversational participants greatly influences the ease of successful communication. Effective interaction hinges on the efficacy of shared beliefs, norms, and expectations between speakers and listeners, which can be updated as the conversation progresses.

Several authors have conceptualized shared beliefs under different terminologies, such as mutual contextual beliefs (Bach & Harnish, 15), contextual assumptions (Levinson, 18), and shared contextual beliefs, among others. Odebumi addresses this concept as 'contextual beliefs,' defining them as "beliefs and assumptions held prior to or during occasions of interaction that facilitate the communicative process"(24). Context presupposes mutual contextual beliefs, which serve as the foundation for participants to relate to and draw inferences from during communication (Odebumi 39).

Odebumi delineates two levels of beliefs: the language level and the situation level. The language level pertains to participants' access to the same language of interaction within the discourse. In contrast, the situation level involves shared assumptions based on participants' shared code (linguistic or non-linguistic) and experience (24). Contextual beliefs, according to Odebumi, are influenced by individuals' experiences of the world, which may occur at either the individual or group level (24). This notion aligns with Clark's assertion that language users, when acting based on their Common Ground, are essentially acting on their individual beliefs or assumptions about its contents (105). These experiences, initially individual or personal, become shared experiences when the situation demands. The situation level beliefs encompass three key aspects: shared knowledge of the subject/topic, shared knowledge of word choices, referents, and references, and shared socio-cultural experiences, whether previous or immediate.

Shared knowledge of the topic serves as the foundation for comprehending the core issues in conversations or, in the context of this study, the content depicted in political cartoons. This shared understanding enables readers to grasp and interpret the cartoons' meanings effectively. Additionally, shared knowledge of word choices, references, and referents involves an awareness of the denotations and connotations of specific words and expressions within Nigerian parlance. This familiarity facilitates the identification of the referents within the cartoons, regardless of whether the accompanying images explicitly suggest them.

Furthermore, shared knowledge of previous and immediate socio-cultural experiences encompasses an understanding of the culture, norms, socio-economic factors, and socio-political experiences shared among participants. This includes collective awareness of events within the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, past governmental actions and inactions, among other relevant aspects.

Shared contextual beliefs play a vital role in comprehending utterances, with the degree of sharedness being crucial in unpacking the meanings conveyed in political cartoons. These beliefs inform the conceptualization of cartoons and facilitate interpretation for readers. This study adapts these categories of situation-level contextual beliefs to analyze political cartoons effectively.

The Dynamic Model of Meaning and Common Ground

Context in the linguistic sense is usually taken to refer to the factors that inform and, ultimately, affect the interpretation of expressions. This broad description can include linguistic, physical, social, cultural and other variables that are taken to constitute the epistemic or physical situation of any interaction. This perception of context has, however, been further explored to cater for the possibilities of emerging context,

created right in the process of particular talk endeavours, or as Clark puts it, in the course of the joint action. Such dynamic property of context and its propensity for meaning has informed Kecskes' submission:

Meaningfully expressed in the linguistic interactional context is created on the spot, and is the result of the interaction and mutual influence of the private contexts represented in the language of the interlocutors and the actual situational context interpreted by the interlocutors (385).

This explains the emergent nature of the emergent context as put forward by Kecskes. The Dynamic Model of Meaning (DMM) considers the communicative process as a structured whole, but which might be viewed from different perspectives. The holistic approach of DMM does not neglect the existent internal and external approaches to the study of context. Rather, it is a blend of both approaches for a comprehensive understanding of the construction of meaning in interaction. Consequently, DMM accounts for the influence of linguistic expressions on context, as well as the import of context on the choice of lexemes in any given speech situation.

The DMM states the need for a broad understanding of context which considers world knowledge, both prior and present, given that both encoded private context and actual situational context participate in meaning construction (Kecskes 393). The implication of this is that prior/existing contexts serve as the basis for actual situational contexts. Kecskes further makes a distinction in the DMM. Two facets of the meaning value of a word exist: Coresense and Consense. Coresense is a denotational, relatively stable and objective feature which is abstracted from prior contextual occurrences of a word and has the ability to reflect changes in the speech community. Consense on the other hand is actual, situated, referential and connotational which changes, based on actual situational contexts (Kecskes 393).

Although the DMM is essentially a model which accounts for lexical items' representation of the world in context, it is considered apt for this analysis as it captures the societal specificities in its approach. The contextual beliefs model and dynamic model of meaning intricate vistas of language, e and context, which make them suitable for investigating pragmatic resources and the dynamism of context in cartoons about President Muhammadu Buhari. A blend of the two offers two broad interrelated perspectives for this linguistic endeavour: language as representation of shared social, cultural, experiential and world knowledge and how these forms of knowledge account for language uses and meaning. The objectives of the study therefore are to:

- i. analyze contextual beliefs in online cartoons about President Buhari using Odeunmi's model of contextual beliefs and Kecskes (5) Dynamic Model of Meaning;
- ii. examine how shared knowledge of actors in the political stage contribute to understanding of the under-meaning in the cartoons;
- iii. account for how a priori and actual contexts coalesce in meaning interpretation in the cartoons;
- iv. examine how the lexical choices index shared experiences and beliefs.

Methodology

The dataset for this study comprises 20 cartoons featuring Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, sourced from online platforms. From this pool, ten cartoons were selected for in-depth analysis, while conclusions were drawn from the entire dataset. These cartoons were sourced from various newspaper websites, including www.punchng.com, www.herald.ng, guardian.ng, and legit.ng. Data collection employed

a purposive random sampling method, focusing specifically on cartoons featuring the Nigerian President as the subject.

Analysis of the data was conducted using Odeunmi's (26) model of contextual beliefs and Kecskes's (5) Dynamic Model of Meaning as the framework. This approach accounts for both linguistic and situational aspects of contextual language use, elucidating how the choices of lexical items, slang, and expressions convey meaning in the cartoons. The utilization of these linguistic devices reflects shared knowledge and beliefs among both cartoonists and the reading public. Additionally, references to past events and experiences shared between cartoonists and readers highlight the level of shared contextual knowledge essential for understanding the cartoons. The analysis considered both the textual and visual elements of the cartoons, providing a comprehensive examination of their content.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The shared contextual beliefs depicted in the political cartoons featuring President Buhari revolve around three main aspects: shared knowledge of the key players in the Nigerian political landscape; shared knowledge of the prevailing socio-political realities in Nigeria, and shared knowledge of the expectations of the people and government responsibilities. They are discussed in turn:

Shared Knowledge of the Key Players in the Nigerian Political Landscape

Cartoonists rely on contextual beliefs rooted in the shared knowledge of key players within the Nigerian political system. These cartoons are crafted with the understanding that readers are familiar with these figures and can not only identify them within the cartoons but also relate them to the issues being addressed. Various individuals constitute the key players in Nigeria's political arena, but certain members or actors hold more visibility and popularity due to their positions. At the national/federal level, prominent figures include the President, Vice-President, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and ministers. Similarly, at the state level, governors, their deputies, and commissioners hold significant roles. However, it is evident that the President and Vice-President, given their positions and responsibilities, enjoy greater popularity than other cabinet members, making them easily recognizable in cartoons by Nigerian and international observers. The shared knowledge of these individuals, their contributions to governance, and their political ideologies enable readers to grasp the contextual message of the cartoons more readily. For instance, Cartoon 1 provides a clear illustration of this concept:



Example 1

The cartoon in example 1 above has the images of the Nigerian President and Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu who is the All Progressive Congress Party's (APC) national leader. The APC is the ruling party in Nigeria as the President belongs to this party. The background knowledge of who the president and Asiwaju Tinubu are establishes a basis for the main issue in the cartoon which is communicated in the text. Nigerians are

aware of the role that Mr. Tinubu played in ensuring that the president won the 2015 presidential elections as he was all out with his support during the elections campaign. Mr. Tinubu is known, not only as a party leader but also a political magnate - a former governor of Lagos state and a kingmaker in the politics of Lagos state. He is therefore not only politically relevant but also affluent. This information is shared by Nigerians and thus serves as the contextual resources for the interpretation of the message of the cartoon. The text of the cartoon holds the essence of the cartoon:

Speaker 1: Why is it that when you beg somebody for money, they will say “in this Buhari period”.

What’s that...?

Speaker 2: It’s the new national anthem.

In this cartoon, Speaker 1 is depicted as President Buhari, while Speaker 2 represents Asiwaju Ahmed Tinubu. Both figures are dressed in simple attire, which contrasts with the commonly held knowledge of how Nigerian politicians and political office holders typically dress. Mr. Tinubu is portrayed wearing a shirt and trousers with a tie, along with his traditional cap, and is depicted without shoes while seated on a small stool. Similarly, the President is presented in a t-shirt and trousers, also wearing his cap.

The activated context in this cartoon diverges from the usual perception of Nigerian politicians' affluence, reflected in their attire, often comprising traditional garments such as a top, trousers, and flowing gown (agbada). The simplicity depicted in this cartoon aligns with the text's suggestion of a situation of lack, attributed to Buhari's own simplicity and his governance style. It is uncharacteristic for the President to appear in such clothing, as he typically dons traditional attire like a top, trousers, and flowing gown (agbada). Mr. Tinubu's shoeless appearance further accentuates this departure from the norm.

Moreover, the utterance "in this Buhari period" triggers shared knowledge of word choices and referents, prompting reliance on the situational meaning of the expression rather than its literal interpretation. "Buhari period" conveys not only the current dispensation but also carries wider connotations of hardship and deprivation associated with this era. This is reflected in the attire of the cartoon characters, suggesting that even for them, times are challenging. Such interpretations are rooted in shared experiences among Nigerians, exemplified by the realities faced by these prominent figures in the Nigerian government. The shared knowledge of the political players in Nigerian politics is also suggested in example 2:



Example 2

The cartoons portray past presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Abdulsalam Abubakar, and Goodluck Jonathan removing President Buhari from the field on a stretcher. President Buhari, holding a ball, is depicted saying, "Look, I assure you guys, I can finish this game." Understanding the identities of these former presidents is crucial for interpreting the cartoon. Their emergence onto the field to remove President Buhari carries pragmatic significance, as it violates the rules of football, the metaphorical framework used in the

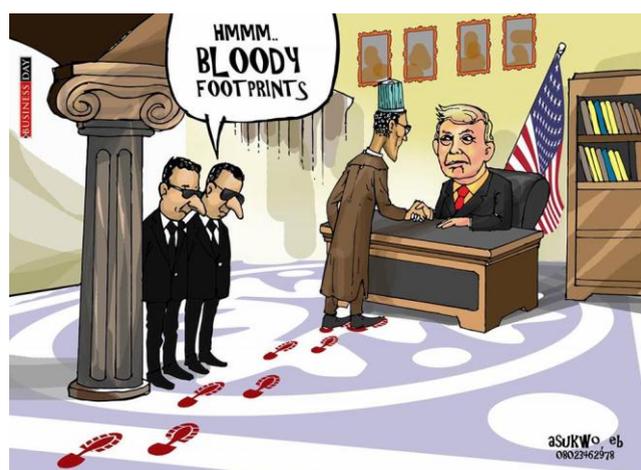
cartoon. In football, only players and officials are permitted on the field of play, with paramedics and medics allowed to enter in case of injuries. However, the attire depicted in the cartoon does not conform to these specified dress codes. The activated shared experience thus implies an emergency necessitating the intervention of the past presidents.

The depiction of Nigeria as the football field, with President Buhari as a player (in non-football-game-compliant clothing) being removed on a stretcher, evokes shared experiential knowledge of the game of football. The metaphor employed in the cartoon also implies certain connotations:

1. That the president is injured and cannot continue to play
2. The president's dressing (i.e. jersey with a pair of glasses and traditional cap) shows a lack of wherewithal for the game.
3. That the president believes that he can continue playing when it is obvious that his injury has left him debilitated and no longer fit for the field of play.

Drawing from the shared socio-cultural, political, and economic realities of Nigerians, the intervention by the past presidents is depicted as being in the interest of the Nigerian people. This is evident as onlookers observe President Buhari's plea to continue playing with quizzical expressions, indicating skepticism towards his ability to do so. In addition to referencing key political players within the national political landscape, cartoonists sometimes incorporate knowledge of international political figures to convey their message. An example is provided below:

Example 3



The example above features President Buhari and President Donald Trump, both serving as presidents of Nigeria and the United States respectively at the time of the cartoon's publication. The cartoon addresses a prevalent socio-political issue at the time—the killings of innocent Nigerians by terrorist sects like Boko Haram and bandits. There were concerns in certain quarters about President Buhari's perceived lackadaisical attitude towards addressing these issues, particularly given his northern heritage and the fact that the terrorist sect originated from the northern region of Nigeria.

The caption accompanying the cartoon, "Hmmm, bloody footprints," serves as an exophoric reference to the actual acts of terrorism occurring in Nigeria. Ironically, these issues have followed President Buhari to

America during his visit to President Trump. The utterance relies on the consense, or the actual situated context, to convey its intended meaning rather than relying solely on a priori context. As Baker elucidates, such references "trace participants, entities, events, etc. in a text," contingent upon readers' knowledge of current events in Nigeria and the president's stance on these issues, despite the physical setting of the cartoon being in America (181).

The shared experiences of both Nigerians and the international community regarding the violence and killings in Nigeria serve as a knowledge frame for deciphering and unfolding the implicit meaning embedded within the cartoon.

Shared knowledge of the Socio-political realities in Nigeria

Shared knowledge of socio-political realities encompasses the collective experiences shared by Nigerians concerning various events and issues within the social and political spheres of Nigeria. These realities include: Incessant attacks on the lives and property of Nigerians by terrorist sects and bandits; hardships faced by Nigerians due to increases in the prices of goods and services; alleged attacks on the lives and farmlands of people in certain states of Nigeria by herdsmen, and perceived inaction of the Nigerian government regarding the general welfare of Nigerians, among other pertinent issues.

Examples 4



Example 5



In Example 4, the cartoonists and readers share knowledge of the ongoing herders' crisis in Nigeria and are also aware of the president's stance on the matter. Nigerians also have, as part of their common ground, the significant position that the President holds as the grand-patron of herdsmen in Nigeria. Consequently, there arises a conflict of interest between the President's duty to protect lives and property and his

allegiance to his group, given his personal involvement as a cattle rearer.

The accompanying caption, "The president is quietly dealing with the Fulani herdsmen," requires an understanding of both the core-sense (literal) and con-sense (situated/ referential/ situation) meanings to decipher its intended message. There exists a contradiction in terms of the President's action—depicted as dealing with the herdsmen—and the manner in which this action is portrayed in the cartoon. The herdsmen, insulated from any effects of the action, wrapped in cushioning, symbolizes a perceived lack of genuine resolve in addressing the matter, despite its significance.

The situation depicted in the cartoon relies on shared socio-cultural and political experiences, as well as an understanding of word choices and implied premises such as the oxymoronic phrase "quietly dealing with," and the identification of the subjects and referents—the President and the herdsmen.

In Example 5, a reporter challenges the President on the Federal government's assertion that the terrorist sect Boko Haram has been "technically defeated." This challenge is rooted in the shared understanding of the term "technically defeated" and the collective experience of the President, the reporter, and Nigerians regarding Boko Haram's continued activities, particularly in the northeastern part of the country.

The reporter's inquiry, "then, sir... where did these ones that are still technically wreaking havoc come from?" is based on the immediate context of the cartoon, depicting skulls, wreckage, and ongoing violence. This portrayal contradicts the government's claim of technical defeat, and the reporter's repetition of "technical" serves as a satirical device, questioning the veracity of the claim and insinuating that the President and his administration may be misleading the public.

Given that Nigeria practises democracy, the actions/ decisions of the government are usually reported to the government. Some of these decisions are, however, considered to be inimical to the progress of the nation. A case in point is presented below:

Example 6



The caption, "President Buhari presents N13tn budget for 2021," serves as an accommodation strategy to ensure that readers share the information conveyed in the cartoon. The cartoon portrays a boat representing Nigeria, with five individuals on board, including President Buhari. Three sacks of debt—labeled "N19.65 Trillion Domestic debt," "11.36 Trillion External Debt," and a smaller bag (third sack) labeled "N4.28 Trillion NEW Debt"—are shown being added to the pile by President Buhari.

The contextual significance of this scenario is crucial for interpretation. The existing debt has already

tipped the boat, symbolizing the precarious financial situation. The individuals on one side of the boat, dressed in attire representing various regions of Nigeria, express concern, as evidenced by their facial expressions and body language. Meanwhile, President Buhari appears confident as he adds another load of debt, oblivious to the impending danger of sinking the boat completely.

The disparity in the expressions of the Nigerians and the President highlights their differing perspectives. While the Nigerians anticipate the detrimental effects of additional debt on the country, the President seems undeterred, stating, "we need to add this to survive." This statement is ironic, as mounting debt is not a sustainable solution for survival. The survival of Nigerians, depicted in the cartoon's representation of the Nigerian situation, hinges on reducing the debt burden rather than exacerbating it. The shared basis of the cartoon is the debt situation of Nigeria and its potential to sink the country, reflecting the collective understanding of the financial challenges faced by Nigerians.

Shared Knowledge of the Expectation of the People/ Government Responsibility

There exists a shared understanding of the concept of showing concern and the corresponding actions that typically accompany genuine concern. The division of the cartoon into two parts, with one side featuring the word "showing" and the other side featuring "concern," effectively conveys the message. Additionally, the images depicted on each side of the cartoon serve to reinforce this argument.

Example 7



Example 7 features a single-frame cartoon divided into two parts: one depicts a caricature of Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari showering in London, while the other shows a map of Nigeria with flames representing areas of unrest due to terrorist attacks, bandit invasions, or herdsmen crises. Understanding the context of Nigeria's hotspots is crucial for interpreting the cartoon's intended meaning.

The literal interpretation, or core sense, of the symbols and lexical choices used establishes a foundation for the situated, or connotational, meaning conveyed in the cartoon. Water, traditionally used to extinguish fire, serves as a poignant contrast. The irony lies in Nigeria ablaze while the President indulges in showers, seemingly squandering resources that could be allocated to address domestic issues. This irony is accentuated by the hose connecting the "London" context to Nigeria.

Moreover, the shared lexeme "showing concern" between both parts serves as a critique of the President's actions. While he is ostensibly "showing concern" in London, Nigeria is engulfed in turmoil, suggesting a disconnect between his actions and the needs of his country. President Buhari's interpretation of "showing concern" is thus called into question, as greater expectations are placed on a leader whose nation is in crisis.

Example 8



Example 9



Data 8 and 9 highlight shared expectations of the government among the people. In example 8, the cartoonist references two prior contextual experiences: the President's perceived sluggishness in addressing important matters and the scandal surrounding the then Minister of Finance, Kemi Adeosun's NYSC certificate. The caption "Presidency reacts to Adeosun's NYSC certificate scandal" serves to ground the information underlying the cartoon. A placard reading "Over 60 days have gone" further reinforces the expectation of a swift response from the President. This expectation stems from shared knowledge of the importance of integrity in leadership. The cartoonist utilizes contextual beliefs at the language level, indexed by phrases like "reacts to" and "over 60 days have gone," as well as the President's response, "Don't worry, I'm on it." The President's means of transportation—a snail symbolizing slowness—coupled with his perceived tendency to procrastinate, align with shared socio-cultural experiences of Nigerians.

Similarly, example 9 portrays the President in his office dialing heaven, requesting saints to be sent to Nigeria urgently as ministers are needed. This cartoon draws on the prior contextual experience of the President's delay in appointing ministers to his cabinet. The use of the term "saint" reflects the President's purported desire for incorruptible individuals in his administration. The cartoon satirizes the President's failure to swiftly establish a functioning government, evident from the empty list of ministerial appointments on his desk. In both examples, the cartoons articulate the disappointment of the people when their expectations of efficient governance are not met.

Example 10



The principle of the supremacy of law upholds equality before the law, requiring both citizens and governments to adhere to established laws. This ensures that no one, including the president, is exempt from legal obligations, regardless of personal interests. However, example 10 portrays a different narrative where the president places "The Govt." above the "Rule of Law," suggesting several implicatures:

1. The president considers himself above the law.
2. The president lacks respect for the rule of law.

These implications are drawn from shared assumptions rooted in common linguistic codes and experiences. For instance, the president's past as a military Head of State may influence his beliefs, favoring military rule over democracy. Moreover, instances where President Buhari disregarded court orders further support these implications: a. He refused to release the Zakzakys despite a court order in December 2016. b. He neglected to set debt limits as required by the Fiscal Responsibility Act in 2018. c. He also declined to release Nnamdi Kanu on bail and grant him access to legal counsel, contrary to a court ruling. These examples serve as stable referential sources, reflecting prior contextual experiences and establishing the implicit premise depicted in the cartoon.

Conclusion

Understanding the shared beliefs and assumptions among interlocutors is crucial for interpreting communicated messages effectively. Adeoti emphasizes that successful communication relies on shared knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions (73). In the context of cartoons about President Buhari, both cartoonists and readers are taken to share contextual understandings for the proper assigning of meaning of the cartoons.

This study explored how cartoonists and readers leverage shared contextual beliefs in conveying messages. It revealed that cartoons often exploit shared knowledge of socio-political issues in Nigeria, such as the herdsmen crisis and economic challenges prompting the closure of borders. Through this, the cartoonists convey nuanced meanings beyond explicit content. The socio-cultural and political realities shared by Nigerians, including awareness of major events and the president's governance style, influence cartoon contexts. Shared contextual beliefs facilitate clear identification of cartoon referents and interpretation of implicatures. Moreover, shared contextual beliefs allow for implicitness and economy of expression, as shown in the cartoons examined in this paper, aligning with Unuabonah's notion that they ensure efficient communication (13). Olajimbiti underscores the role of language in demonstrating shared beliefs, emphasizing the importance of understanding sociocultural experiences and this aligns with one of the submissions in this paper that the choice of linguistic expressions is heavily reliant on shared assumptions that the cartoonists share with the readers on the one hand and the contextual beliefs held by Nigerians and

by extension, international readers on the other hand (755). These shared experiences are crucial to the appropriate unpacking of meaning in conversations in the cartoons.

In conclusion, contextual beliefs are indispensable for maximizing space and words in cartoons and accurately conveying their overall meaning.

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