

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Newspaper Cartoons on the Nigerian 2024 Minimum Wage Discourse

Chika Kate Ojukwu & Grace Ezinne Ajunwa

Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This study examines selected Nigerian newspaper cartoons on the Nigerian 2024 minimum wage discourse. It investigates how the combination of visual and verbal resources in the cartoons generates humour while conveying critical socio-political messages. The paper analyses six editorial cartoons purposively selected from the *Vanguard* and *Guardian* newspapers, using multimodal techniques to critique minimum-wage discourse humorously. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to analyse the cartoons using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. The findings reveal that the cartoons utilise multiple modes of communication, combining visual and textual elements to create humour while critiquing the socio-political issues in the 2024 Nigerian minimum wage discourse. Techniques such as gaze, angle, and proximity actively engage viewers. Cartoons in *The Vanguard* newspaper depict confrontations between workers and government officials, whereas *The Guardian* employs symbolic devices such as metaphors and irony to criticise the Federal Government's indifference toward workers. Despite stylistic differences, both newspapers effectively communicate their socio-political messages. The analysis further shows that editorial cartoons use humour and semiotic strategies to address key themes, including government inaction, worker struggles, power relations, and economic realities. The study concludes that editorial cartoons use humour and critical visual and verbal techniques to challenge government insincerity and convey general dissatisfaction. These cartoons not only entertain but also engage audiences and contribute significantly to socio-political debates such as the minimum wage discourse, demonstrating the power of multimodal humour in political criticism.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse, newspaper cartoons, representational meaning, interactive meaning, compositional meaning, and Nigerian minimum wage

Introduction

Multimodal Analysis investigates phenomena that extend beyond mere verbal communication. Jowett (2008) characterises Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as the examination of the interplay between various communicative modes (including images, language, gestures, and sounds) in constructing of meaning within a specific context. At times, words assume a greater significance in constructing meaning, whereas at other instances, they hold less importance. In certain instances, the text and images within a message may not communicate the same meaning. Cartoons are humorous creations intended to provoke laughter (Bren, 2004, as cited in Onugha & Ezeifeka, 2024). "They often encompass various stereotypical metaphors, myths, satire, and sarcasm, which capture the complexities and ambiguities of societal perceptions, emotions, attachments, memories, and interpretations". (Onugha and Ezeifeka 2024, pg. 42). These authors highlight that political cartoons represent a distinctive combination of visual editorials and inventive commentary, allowing cartoonists to critically examine societal issues in manners that

transcend written expressions. Cartoons, as a semiotic domain and a type of multimodal discourse, adeptly combine diverse semiotic resources to communicate meaning.

Editorial cartoons function as an effective medium for communication, utilising humour through the integration of visual and textual components to provide satirical insights on societal matters. Newspaper cartoons, characterised by their distinctive combination of visual and textual components, offer an accessible and engaging medium for exploring intricate socio-political matters. The interaction of images, words, and symbols in these cartoons not only entertains but also educates and shapes public opinion. Editorial cartoons in Nigerian newspapers, such as The Vanguard and The Guardian, captured these socio-political tensions through humour, satire, and symbolism. As multimodal texts, they combine visual and verbal resources to critique the government's stance and amplify the public's frustration with systemic economic hardship. Such cartoons serve not only as entertainment but as a form of media discourse that mirrors and critiques governance, power relations, and workers' welfare within Nigeria's socio-economic context (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; O'Halloran, 2004).

The 2024 Nigerian minimum wage discourse has been one of the most contentious socio-political debates between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC and the Federal Government (FG). The NLC demanded an upward review of the national minimum wage from ₦30,000 to ₦250,000 to reflect the soaring cost of living, inflation, and fuel subsidy removal. In contrast, the Federal Government initially offered ₦62,000, citing fiscal constraints and the need to balance wage increases with economic sustainability (Adebomi, 2024; Vanguard, 2024). This disparity led to a prolonged negotiation process marked by strikes, protests, and heated public commentary. The debate represents a microcosm of Nigeria's broader struggles with economic inequality, governance, and accountability. The Federal Government's perceived reluctance to meet labour's demands was seen as emblematic of a leadership disconnected from workers' realities (Onugha & Ezeifeka, 2024). Conversely, the labour unions' insistence on a living wage was viewed as a legitimate demand for social justice and workers' dignity. The tension between both parties—manifested in public dialogues, policy statements, and media portrayals—revealed the fragile nature of Nigeria's labour-government relations. Newspaper cartoons combine visual and verbal elements to reflect public opinion and critique political and economic issues. Using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), this study examines how these cartoons portray and challenge narratives surrounding Nigeria's 2024 minimum wage debate, revealing how humour and imagery shape socio-political discourse and public perception.

The study is motivated by the need to understand how Nigerian cartoonists use humour and multimodal strategies to critique government actions and highlight workers' struggles in the minimum wage debate. Although newspaper cartoons play a vital role in shaping public opinion, little research has examined how they use humour and visual symbolism to critique socio-political realities in Nigeria's minimum wage discourse. Previous studies have focused on multimodal discourse in advertisements and health communication (Adebomi, 2024; Kehinde & Ogar, 2023; Omesebi, 2021), but no known work has explored how editorial cartoons reflect the tensions between labour and the Federal Government. Given the persistent economic hardship and widening inequality, this study investigates how Nigerian newspaper cartoons employ visual grammar and humour to expose power relations and critique the Federal Government's handling

of the 2024 minimum wage negotiations, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar framework.

It examines how visual and textual components work together to convey meaning, engage audiences, and highlight socio-political concerns in print images like cartoons. The aim of this study is to carry out a multimodal discourse analysis of cartoons on the 2024 minimum wage discourse. The specific objectives of the study are to: identify how visual and verbal elements in selected newspaper cartoons create humour and analyse the socio-political messages and response about the Nigerian minimum wage conveyed through these cartoons.

Review of Related Literature

Discourse analysis examines language use within social and institutional frameworks, emphasising the construction of meaning, identity, and power (Atlasti, n.d.; Delve Tool, 2023). This study analyses how newspaper cartoons integrate captions and graphics to communicate meaning. Media Discourse Analysis examines media texts and their framing of events, influence on public perception, and reflection of ideologies (O'Keeffe, 2011; Talbot, 2013). Newspaper cartoons, as media artefacts, convey the 2024 minimum wage discourse through commentary and visual representation. Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) examines the interaction among multiple semiotic modes—text, picture, layout, and colour—in the construction of meaning (Jones, 2012; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2023). Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) examines how discourse shapes or contests political power and ideology (De Souza, 2018; Wilson, 2015). This study employs a multimodal media-political discourse approach to analyse how Nigerian newspaper cartoons utilise visual and verbal elements to convey political significance in the context of the minimum wage debate.

Adebomi (2024) examines the research entitled "Surviving Covid-19: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of New Media Covid-19 Vaccination-Related Pictorials". The study analyses the communicative strategies used in COVID-19 vaccination images shared on digital platforms. We intentionally selected seven internet images to examine their communicative functions and generic structure. The set of data obtained from the World Health Organisation, the Centres for Disease Control, the Pan American Health Organisation, and Facebook was subjected to qualitative analysis. The research is based on van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Yuen's Generic Structure Potential. The results demonstrate that multimodal communicative acts within the images fulfil instructional, illustrative, informative, persuasive, inviting, and advisory roles. Identified essential categories include Lead, Emblem, Announcement, and Enhancer, with Display also noted. The study argues that the semiotic resources in these COVID-19 images not only convey messages but also seek to shape attitudes and foster greater acceptance of the vaccine.

Onugha and Ezeifeka (2024) examine the "Visual Grammar Approach to Socio-semiotics: A Study of Selected Cartoons in Nigerian Newspapers." Their research asserts that cartoons, often regarded as mere entertainment, possess considerable socio-semiotic importance, serving as effective instruments for addressing societal issues. The research analyses cartoons from Vanguard and Daily Trust newspapers through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. The study reveals concealed meanings within the cartoons by concentrating on the representational and interactive metafunctions. It emphasises how images and symbols communicate messages that captivate audiences and reflect societal issues. Moreover, the research

highlights how cartoons broaden viewers' interpretative frameworks, encouraging critical reflection on political, economic, and social issues. The study demonstrates how cartoons affect audiences through visual grammar, utilising techniques such as gaze, angles, and action depictions to foster dynamic viewer interaction. The findings underscore the increasing significance of cartoons in Nigerian public discourse, depicting them as vital semiotic instruments for societal critique and public engagement.

Unuabonah and Oyebode (2021) conducted a study entitled "Nigeria is Fighting Covid-419: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Protest in Nigerian Coronavirus-Related Internet Memes." This study examines political protest in 40 deliberately chosen internet memes disseminated among Nigerian WhatsApp users during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research examines the main themes, beliefs, and how people and events are portrayed in these memes using a method called multimodal critical discourse analysis. The results indicate that the memes function as instruments for opposing corruption, governmental dishonesty, insecurity, hunger, and inadequate healthcare and social infrastructure. These portrayals reject anti-welfare ideologies and highlight the negative representation of the government.

Omesebi. (2021) examines "Multimodal discourse analysis of the implicature in certain political cartoons related to the 2020 presidential election." The research investigates multimodal communication within the political sphere, concentrating on cartoon imagery that represents political figures, ideologies, and concepts. The analysis is limited to cartoons from the 2020 U.S. presidential election to ensure a defined scope. The study begins by examining the function of multimodality in political discourse and subsequently investigates political cartoons as a multimodal genre employed for persuasive and communicative purposes. It subsequently analyses the chosen cartoons to reveal their underlying significance. The research combines Cooperative Principle Theory and Relevance Theory while also introducing "emotive signifiers" as a tool for analysing cartoons. Different theories from pragmatics and multimodal discourse analysis are used to understand the messages in the selected political cartoons.

This section has reviewed key concepts like multimodal discourse analysis, media discourse analysis, political discourse analysis relevant research on multimodal discourse analysis. The works comprise Adebomi's (2024) "Surviving COVID-19: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of New Media COVID-19 Vaccination-Related Pictorials" and Onugha and Ezeifeka's (2024) "Visual Grammar Approach to Socio-Semiotics: A Study of Selected Cartoons in Nigerian Newspapers", among others. Nevertheless, none of the reviewed literature examined Multimodal Discourse Analysis in relation to the selected 2024 newspaper cartoons on the Nigerian minimum wage discourse. Furthermore, no one considers how various semiotic modes work together to generate a comic effect while conveying a message.

Theoretical Framework

The research uses Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar (2006) as its theoretical framework. Visual Grammar (VG), formulated by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), is derived from Michael Halliday's functional linguistics and the broad domain of social semiotics. Halliday viewed language as a socially constructed system influenced by communicative requirements. In contrast, Robert Hodge and Kress (2006) broadened the definition of language to encompass all modalities of sign-making, highlighting that societies mould semiotic resources to

mirror values, discourses, and power dynamics. Visual Grammar applies these principles to multimodal discourse, examining how visual components function similarly to language in the construction of meaning.

Visual Grammar, as multimodal discourse theory, emphasises the interaction of images and other visual signs within social contexts to communicate intricate meanings that extend beyond verbal or written language. Kress and Van Leeuwen contend that various modes of communication—such as text, visuals, colours, and layouts—interact to generate meaning and should not be examined in isolation. Additionally, they assert that similar to language, visual and multimodal texts possess structured Grammar with defined rules for meaning organisation. Their Visual Grammar (1996, 2006) details this concept, delineating three principal metafunctions that bear similarities to Halliday's linguistic framework, albeit with modifications. For example, they substituted the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions with representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, respectively, as new terminology for the former.

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar articulates representational meaning through diverse elements that illustrate the world. Participants, comprising individuals, objects, and environments, are fundamental to representational meaning and propel the visual narrative. A caricatured labourer in tattered clothing symbolises the plight of workers. Participants engage with one another via transactional processes constituted by vectors. Vectors are lines of direction generated by gaze, gestures, or the positioning of participants, guiding the narrative and signifying movement or interaction. Transactional processes can be actional, involving physical actions that connect participants, or reactional, where a gaze functions as the vector. A bi-transaction entails reciprocal engagement between two parties, depicted by a negotiation between a labour leader and a government official. In transactional workflows, participants take designated roles, including Actor and Goal. The Actor performs an action, whereas the Goal receives the action. In certain instances, the Actor may remain anonymous, suggested but not clearly depicted. Narrative propositions represent the storylines or events illustrated through transactional processes, imparting meaning and context. Reacters and phenomena are essential elements in representational meaning. A Reacter is an individual whose gaze creates a vector directed towards a Phenomenon, an object, or another participant. Circumstances provide additional contextual information, including time, location, or conditions, thereby enriching the visual narrative with additional layers of meaning.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

The interpersonal function of visuals examines the connection between portrayed participants and the audience. This relationship is established through interaction, social distance, and power dynamics. Interaction occurs via participants' gaze, where direct eye contact (demand) captivates the viewer, while averted gaze (offer) conveys information. Social distance is conveyed through framing, particularly in terms of shot size. A close-up frame emphasises the participant's face and shoulders, fostering an intimate atmosphere. An extreme close-up focuses intently on particular features, such as the eyes or lips. A medium close-up captures the participant from the waist up, striking a balance between intimacy and context. As the image enlarges, a medium shot captures

the participant from the knees upward, providing a more impartial viewpoint. A medium to long shot captures the whole body, conveying the participant's posture and environment. A full-body shot depicts the participant from head to toe, frequently employed to convey detachment, context, or setting. A long shot ultimately depicts the participant within their surroundings, a technique frequently employed to convey a sense of space or atmosphere.

Power dynamics are established through the use of camera angles and positioning. High angles portray participants as powerless, low angles imply dominance, and eye-level angles signify equality. Horizontal angles and frontal or oblique orientations also show the relationship between the observer and the person being observed. Finally, modality, or the extent of reality, serves an interpersonal function. Cartoons frequently employ low modality, exaggerating characteristics to generate humour or satire, captivating the audience and imparting meaning.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

The compositional structure emphasises the organisation of elements to generate meaning, direct interpretation, and create a visual message. **Value of Information:** The arrangement of elements inside the frame determines what they mean. On the left-right axis, the left side typically represents what is known, and the right side represents what is new. A cartoon depicting politicians on the right and workers on the left illustrates the distinct old problems and new promises. The upper axis denotes idealised concepts, whereas the lower axis signifies reality or practicality. For example, illustrating workers' aspirations at the top and their harsh realities at the bottom shows the disparity between expectations and actual conditions.

Salience refers to factors that attract attention and are influenced by dimensions such as colour or contrast. A brightly coloured "minimum wage" placard in a colourless cartoon immediately captures the viewer's attention. **Framing** outlines relationships among elements. Thick borders or vacant areas imply separation, whereas overlapping components imply unity. A cartoon depicting the gap between workers and officials highlights the division between the two groups. **Composition-Balance** in composition signifies harmony or tension. Symmetry implies equality, whereas asymmetry highlights disparity. For example, placing large, well-dressed officials next to small, dirty workers creates an unbalanced composition and draws attention to the inequality.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design, appropriate for an interpretive examination of the humour and socio-political significance inherent in Nigerian newspaper cartoons. This method facilitates a comprehensive examination of the multimodal features—visual and verbal components—that jointly construct meaning and humour in the 2024 minimum wage debate. The data comprises editorial cartoons from The Vanguard and The Guardian, two renowned Nigerian newspapers known for their comprehensive political coverage and for regularly incorporating editorial cartoons to address national matters. Their selection guarantees equitable representation of viewpoints from both mainstream and independent media sources.

The cartoons were created between January and December 2024, during the peak of public discourse on the new minimum wage. This period was intentionally selected to encompass cartoons created during the peak of public engagement and media discourse on the issue. A

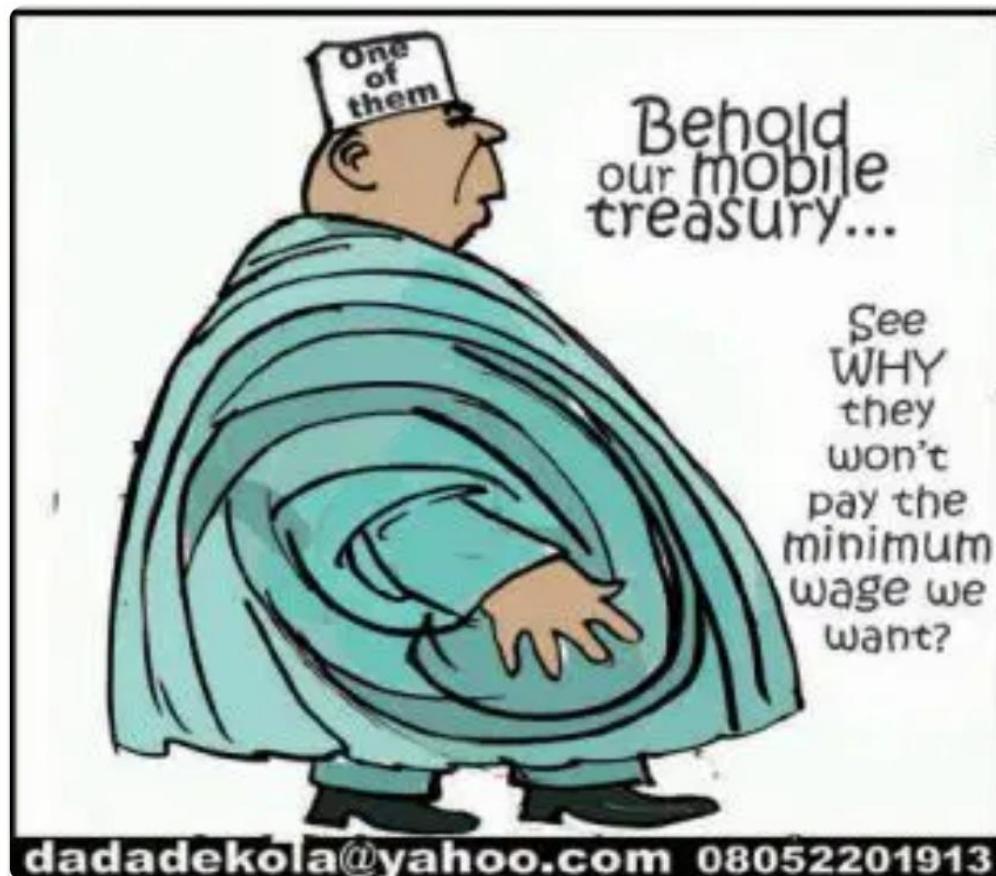
purposive sampling method was used to select six cartoons—three from The Vanguard and three from The Guardian. The sample size was deemed sufficient for a comprehensive qualitative and multimodal analysis, prioritising depth over breadth. The inclusion criteria mandated that each cartoon openly engage with the 2024 minimum wage discussion and demonstrate clear visual-verbal interaction pertinent to the study's subject.

All chosen cartoons were sourced from the official online versions of the two newspapers and digitally stored for systematic study. The analysis employs Kress and Van Leeuwen's methodology, emphasising the interplay between visual imagery and textual content in conveying humour, critiquing governance, and shaping public opinion about Nigeria, which collaboratively creates meaning and humour in minimum wage discourse.

Data Presentation and Analysis

1. Analysis of Multimodal Elements

This section presents and analyses the data collected for the study, focussing on a multimodal discourse analysis of humour in six editorial cartoons addressing the Nigerian 2024 minimum wage debate.



<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/06/cartoon-where-minimum-wage-went/>

Figure 1: Where minimum wage went

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

The representational structure in Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar refers to how visuals depict meaning through narrative processes (showing actions or events) and conceptual processes (depicting stable, timeless characteristics). As shown in figure 1, the cartoon showcases a solitary individual—a man—participating in a narrative process, a non-transactional action that lacks a clear objective. His oversized, curved robe symbolises wealth and greed, while his gaze forms a vector guiding his movement and drawing attention to his exaggerated body labelled, "Behold our mobile treasury." The oblique curvature of his garment further emphasises his bloated figure, reinforcing the notion of excess.

Additionally, the cartoon features a large, exaggerated politician, identifiable by the text on his hat: "one of them," signifying the political elite known for wealth accumulation. His slightly raised hands, with wide-open fingers, suggest secrecy or control over something valuable, implying that politicians hoard national wealth for personal gain. The phrase "mobile treasury" metaphorically represents politicians as walking banks, humorously personifying them as embodiments of stolen wealth. The utterance, "See WHY they will not pay the minimum wage we want?" employs irony, with the capitalised "WHY" highlighting the actual reason behind wage disputes—not financial incapacity but elite greed. This contrast between political affluence and workers' struggles strengthens the narrative, exposing the hypocrisy of leaders who amass wealth while refusing to pay a fair wage.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

Interactive meaning, as defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen, refers to the way visual forms create and maintain relationships between the producers of an image and its viewers, emphasising the social dynamics and engagement that occur during the viewing process. The cartoon is an offer image, as the actor's averted gaze avoids direct engagement with the viewer. This indirect contact fosters detachment, positioning the audience as observers rather than participants, thereby allowing for a critical interpretation. His posture and expression reflect indifference or arrogance, reinforcing the satirical critique of political corruption.

The informal, conversational tone of the text—"Behold our mobile treasury..."—directly addresses the audience, fostering a shared sense of frustration. A medium shot maintains social distance by balancing intimacy and detachment, ensuring the satire remains both recognisable and critically engaging. A neutral, frontal eye-level angle places the viewer and the represented participant on equal footing, making the absurdity of the situation relatable while inviting critical reflection. The cartoon employs flat, simplistic colors to emphasise satire rather than realism. Muted tones, such as blue and grey, contrast with the striking message, symbolising corruption concealed in plain sight.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

Compositional meaning, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, is about how the way visual elements are arranged in an image communicates meaning through three main parts: information value (the importance of where elements are placed), salience (how noticeable certain elements are), and framing (how elements are grouped or separated), all of which affect how the viewer understands the overall message. The central placement of the man highlights the theme of

corruption and resource hoarding. The accompanying text on the right serves as "new information," offering a satirical explanation of the visuals. The absence of panel boundaries ensures an uninterrupted focus on the exaggerated figure, enhancing the satire.

The oversized garment, dominating the frame and underscoring wealth concealment, achieves salience. The bold, enlarged "text"—"Behold our mobile treasury..."—further directs attention to the politician's bloated figure, symbolising immense but hoarded wealth. This contrast between elite affluence and workers' struggles strengthens the critique. In terms of information structure, the cartoon in figure 1, juxtaposes the ideal (government accountability and fair wages) with the real (corruption and greed). Humour emerges in this stark contrast. **The reading path** naturally progresses, beginning with the exaggerated size of the man and then transitioning to the text, which guides interpretation.

2. Analysis of Multimodal Elements in figure 2

Minimum Wage: 'I go add small for 2nd Missionary Journey'



Vanguard News

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/11/minimum-wage-i-go-add-small-for-2nd-missionary-journey/>

Figure 2: Minimum Wage: 'I go add small for 2nd Missionary Journey'

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

As illustrated in figure 2, the cartoon presents two represented participants: the government, symbolised by a speeding car labelled "FG," and a worker knocked down and struggling on the ground, representing labourers harmed by oppressive policies. The absence of a visible government figure erases direct accountability, making the car an anonymous yet powerful force. Motion lines and exhaust fumes create a strong vector extending toward the fallen worker, emphasising the reckless nature of government action.

The worker's body forms a counter-vector, symbolising resistance or suffering under pressure. His tattered clothes highlight the struggles of Nigerian labourers, while the mocking laughter ("he, he, he!") from the car amplifies the government's apathy. This expression is a transactional process where the car (the actor) actively impacts the worker's goal, reinforcing the humour in the exaggerated power imbalance—the government speeds off carelessly while the worker lies defeated. The phrase "I go add small for 2nd Missionary Journey," written in Pidgin English, adds humour and cultural relatability. It mocks insincere government promises of minimal wage increments, reinforcing the satire on superficial governance.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

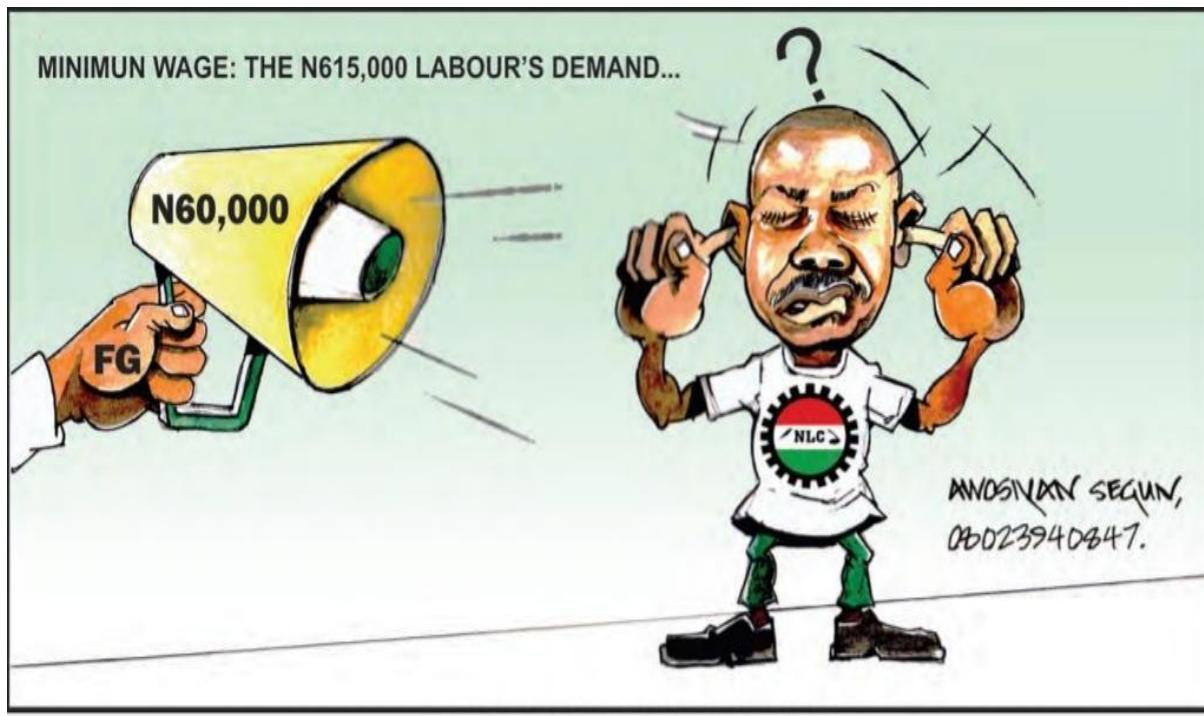
Neither the car nor the worker in figure 2, makes direct eye contact with the viewer, maintaining a detached stance and encouraging critical observation. The medium-long shot captures both figures, allowing the audience to recognize the satire while fostering empathy for the worker. A low camera angle on the worker enhances his vulnerability, while a slightly elevated perspective positions the viewer as an onlooker to his suffering. In contrast, the horizontal perspective of the car reinforces its dominance and recklessness. The exaggerated motion lines and simplified, flat colors reduce realism, focussing attention on the symbolic representation of oppression rather than its literal details. The humor emerges from the absurd contrast—the government's gleeful indifference versus the worker's helpless state.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

The cartoon in figure 2, visually reflects a cause-and-effect relationship: the left side (the worker on the ground) represents the given—the existing struggles of laborers—while the right side (the speeding government car with mocking laughter) represents the new—the government's disregard. The viewer's reading path naturally follows this structure, first noticing the worker's suffering, then the car's motion, and finally, the text clarifies the satire. The open framing (without panel boundaries) emphasises the ongoing and systemic nature of the issue. **Salience** is achieved through bold motion lines, the exaggerated collapse of the worker, and the large, bold "FG" on the car, directly linking the satire to the Federal Government. The loud "he...he...he...!" further amplifies the humour, portraying the government's indifference as almost cartoonishly villainous.

The composition also reflects a power imbalance: the bottom of the frame (the suffering worker) represents the real—the harsh reality of workers—while the top (the carefree government) exposes the idealised indifference of those in power. The humour lies in this stark contrast—the government, despite its destructive actions, remains amused and unaffected, emphasising the irony of governance

Analysis of Multimodal Elements in figure 3



<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/06/cartoon-raise-minimum-wage-not-your-voice/>

Figure 3: Raise Minimum Wage, Not Your Voice

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

In figure 3, the cartoon features two participants: the Federal Government symbolised by a megaphone, and a worker wearing a labour union shirt, demanding higher wages. The loud proclamations of authority represented by the megaphone in figure 2, contrast with the worker's frustrated expression and folded arms, symbolising resistance. The phrase "See no evil, hear no evil" emphasises the government's inaction.

A speech line from the megaphone creates a visual vector, directing attention to the meagre ₦60,000 wage offer. Meanwhile, the worker's posture and defiant stance critique leadership. The government remains invisible, represented only by a hand, making it an anonymous yet active participant, which reinforces a transactional process where an authority impacts the worker.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

The image serves as an **invitation**, with the worker looking indirectly at the viewer, encouraging reflection rather than confrontation. A frontal horizontal angle engages the viewer directly, while the proximity makes the message urgent and personal. **High modality**, reflected in realistic colours and clear text, enhances the seriousness of the wage debate. The humour arises from irony—the government amplifies its rhetoric instead of addressing economic concerns, highlighting misplaced priorities.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

The megaphone on the left (Given) represents the government's position, while the worker on the right (New) introduces the demand for change. The top (Ideal) hints at better wages, while the bottom (Real) reflects economic hardship, reinforcing the humour of contrasting expectations with reality. An open framing unifies the elements, ensuring clarity. The juxtaposition of raising voices versus raising wages deepens the satire. **Salience** is created by the bold ₦60,000 text and the worker's expressive posture, directing focus to the wage issue. Red and green, associated with Nigeria's labour unions, emphasise national identity and urgency. The humour lies in the contradiction—despite loud government proclamations, real change remains elusive, exposing the disconnection between rhetoric and action.

Analysis Multimodal Element in figure 4



<https://guardian.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CARTOON-FRIDAY-9-8-24.jpg>

Figure 4

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

In figure 4, the cartoon presents two participants (a couple) dialoguing about the impracticality of a proposed ₦70,000 minimum wage, illustrating a bi-transactional process where each participant alternates between the roles of actor and goal. The narrative revolves around the struggle to survive on a ₦70,000 minimum wage. Vectors are created through their gestures and interactions, symbolising tension and irony about wage insufficiency. Specifically, the lady's outstretched palm and gaze towards her husband while lamenting and questioning him forma vector. Notably, humour arises from the woman's lament about the high cost of basic goods (e.g., rice at ₦40,000), which leaves them with only ₦30,000 for other expenses, and the husband's sarcastic suggestion to explore corruption as a means of survival ("avenues of collecting kickbacks"). Along the same lines, the price tag of rice reflects economic hardship, which emphasises the disproportionate cost of living relative to wages. On the other hand, "kickbacks" symbolise corruption. Participants' exaggerated expressions and the dialogue emphasise their frustration and disbelief, which aligns with the humour derived from relatable struggles.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

Participants appear to interact with each other rather than have direct contact with the viewer, creating an "offer" image where the viewers are invited to observe and empathise with their struggles or situation objectively. Regarding the angles of view, the frontal view focuses on the contrast between participants' appearance and the absurd cost of goods. At the same time, the horizontal and eye-level perspectives suggest equality, making the critique more accessible and understandable. Also, for the social distance, the medium shot or proximity creates a relatable and conversational tone, inviting viewers to empathise with the characters' plight, which humanises the issue, evoking both humour and empathy.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

Regarding the **Informational value** of the 4th cartoon above, the left side (given) presents the problem of survival, while the right side (new) proposes corruption or kickbacks as solutions. This juxtaposition highlights societal critique. In terms of **salience**, the bright yellow price tag draws the viewer's attention, highlighting the impact of economic hardship. The focus is on dialogue, and the bag of rice draws attention to key economic challenges, making the humour impactful. Here, the depiction of rice costing N40,000 signifies inflation, while the characters' distressed expressions underline economic struggles. About the image framing, the single frame unifies and connects the couple's dialogue and the socioeconomic critique; it also emphasises cause-and-effect relationships, reinforcing the systemic irony of wage inadequacy.

Analysis of multimodal Elements in Figure 5



<https://guardian.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Cartoon-6-478x598.jpg>

Figure 5

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

In figure 5, the cartoon presents three participants: a government official (symbolising authority) and two workers (representing minimum-wage earners). The central props include a large sack carried by the official, symbolising wealth or resources, and a sign labelled "₦70,000 Minimum Wage." The scene depicts the official instructing workers to "say cheese" while holding the wage sign. At the same time, a bystander humorously remarks that the official spends more on daily catfish pepper soup, adding, "After we finish saying cheese, let us say peanuts." The transactional process is established through the act of taking a photo, symbolising the government's performative actions rather than substantive change. The workers' reaction—marked by confusion and disbelief, emphasised by "?!" above their heads—is non-transactional but expressive, reinforcing their scepticism. The humour emerges from the wage's supposed significance and its trivialisation in comparison to a meal expense. Vectors direct attention within the image: the camera's lens creates a vector from the official to the workers, emphasising the performative nature of the act, while the

workers' body language and gaze form a reactional vector toward the governor, highlighting their shock and critique of the wage policy.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

The frontal and slightly elevated camera angle places the viewer in an observational role, allowing equal focus on both the official's authority and the workers' reactions. This positioning makes the satire accessible and engaging. Eye contact is deliberately avoided by the official, who looks through the camera rather than at the workers or audience, symbolising detachment from the real economic struggles of citizens. The workers, however, engage the viewer indirectly through their exaggerated reactions, inviting empathy and reinforcing humour. The image employs medium modality, blending realism with exaggeration. The oversized bag, expressive faces, and bright colours enhance the cartoonish nature, making the satire more striking while distancing the image from strict realism. The exaggerated proportions highlight the economic disparity, deepening the humour by visually contrasting wealth and the struggles of workers.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

Information Value:

Left (Given) symbolises the government official, and the "GOV" label symbolises the established power structure. Whereas the right (new) symbolises the workers, and their reaction critiques the minimum wage, exposing the gap between governance and the workers' realities. The sack in the top-left corner represents hidden wealth, subtly contrasting with the "₦70,000" sign in the foreground, which is meant to be the supposed relief for workers but ironically proves inadequate.

Framing: The cartoon lacks rigid borders between participants, reinforcing the interconnected nature of governance and economic struggles. The framing highlights how policies affect ordinary citizens while those in power remain detached.

Salience: The official's blue attire and large sack make him the most visually prominent figure, emphasising authority and resource control. The "₦70,000" sign is another focal point, drawing attention to the central issue of wage inadequacy.

The exaggerated size difference between the official and the workers underscores the power imbalance, making the humour sharper by visually emphasising disparity.

Colour Usage: Bright, engaging colours make the cartoon easily understandable. Blue (authority), yellow, and pink (workers) contrast effectively, ensuring that the main themes—power, wealth, and economic disparity—stand out.

Analysis of Multimodal Elements in Figure 6



<https://guardian.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CARTOON-TUESDAY-13-8-24.jpg>

Figure 6

Representational Meaning (Ideational Metafunction)

In figure 6, the cartoon features three participants: a large legislator labelled "JuPay", "holding a cash-filled suitcase, and two more miniature figures representing citizens or workers. The citizens engage in dialogue to critique the legislators' failure to cut salaries, with one citizen humorously attributing this failure to "bellecracy," a satirical play on "bureaucracy" that mocks greed. The legislator's exaggerated size and overflowing wealth symbolize excessive wealth and self-interest, contrasting with the leaner citizens and reinforcing the disparity. A bi-transactional process unfolds as critique and justification shifts between participants. The government official's gaze and protruding belly create an oblique line toward the citizens, forming a **vector** that reinforces the power dynamic. The citizens' body posture and expressions generate **reactional vectors** towards

the government official, **emphasising** their disbelief and frustration. Hence, they are both reactors and actors (bi-transaction). The suitcase of money acts as both a prop and a symbolic vector (formed by the cash flowing out of the bag), reinforcing the themes of corruption and inequality. The humor in this depiction arises from the stark visual and textual contrasts. While the legislator hoards wealth, the citizens expose the absurdity of his justification, highlighting the disconnect between governance and public welfare.

Interactive Meaning (Interpersonal Metafunction)

The characters in figure 6, do not directly engage the viewer; instead, they draw the audience into an observational role, prompting reflection on the satire. The mid-shot framing makes the citizens feel relatable while allowing them to focus on their conversation. The frontal presentation of the legislator suggests confrontation, while the angle of the citizens emphasises their dual roles as observers and critics. The neutral eye-level perspective puts the audience in an equal position and reinforces their shared frustration. The legislator's imposing size dominates the frame, visually reinforcing power imbalance, while the more miniature figures highlight vulnerability and lack of influence. The blend of realism and exaggeration enhances the satirical effect—real enough to be recognisable and exaggerated enough to amplify the critique.

Compositional Meaning (Textual Metafunction)

The left side (Given) features the legislator, representing entrenched power and wealth. The **right side (New)** features the citizens, their critiques of governance, and the speech bubbles that deliver the satirical punch. The suitcase spilling cash further emphasises excess wealth. **Framing** isolates the legislator, reinforcing detachment from the people. The speech bubbles bridge the gap between the groups, linking the critique to the source of the issue. The citizens' proximity visually represents their shared plight.

The most **salient** elements include the legislator's bloated form, vibrant clothing, and the dark suitcase labelled "JumboPay." The exaggerated size disparity between the participants sharpens the contrast, visually underscoring the contrast between greed and hardship. Unique terms, like "bellecracy," enhance the humour while reinforcing the socio-political critique. The upper half of the image (speech bubbles) represents **the ideal**—a humorous yet pointed commentary on governance failures. The lower half, **which includes characters and props, represents the real problem**—the tangible inequalities between legislators and citizens.

It is pertinent to note that excluding other forms of multimodal elements, such as memes or satirical videos, narrows the study's scope, missing their significant influence on contemporary discourse. Despite these limitations, the study highlights the significance of incorporating multimodal humorous elements as a medium for advocacy and resistance. It demonstrates how visual and textual elements combine to challenge authority and engage the public in meaningful socio-political discussions.

Discussion

This study investigated how multimodal resources in Nigerian newspaper cartoons construct and critique socio-political meanings surrounding the 2024 minimum wage discourse. The discussion is anchored in Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2020) Visual Grammar, which explains how visual

structures function as forms of communication similar to language. The analysis revealed that Nigerian editorial cartoons rely on semiotic modes such as image, text, colour, and spatial arrangement to construct meaning, emphasising how multimodality enables socio-political commentary beyond verbal discourse. This finding aligns with Kress (2010) and O'Halloran (2016), who maintain that multimodal texts, through visual salience and compositional framing, reinforce ideological positions and guide audience interpretation.

The study also shows that cartoons use humour, irony, and exaggeration as pragmatic strategies to critique political actors and expose systemic injustices. This supports earlier findings by El Refaie (2009) and Taiwo (2007), who observed that political cartoons in African contexts employ satire to challenge power and express public frustration. In this study, visual metaphors—such as the depiction of corrupt politicians as “mobile treasuries” or impoverished workers as victims of economic violence—demonstrate how multimodal discourse embodies socio-political resistance. These representations exemplify Kress and van Leeuwen’s concept of representational meaning, where depicted participants and symbolic attributes encode ideological positions.

Furthermore, the integration of linguistic humour (e.g., Pidgin English) and symbolic imagery aligns with Bateman’s (2014) view that multimodality extends communicative potential by layering textual and visual meanings. Such integration positions cartoons as critical sites of resistance that mediate between state power and public sentiment. The study also corroborates Okeke’s (2020) observation that Nigerian media discourse functions as an avenue for citizens’ social criticism and negotiation of identity through humour and irony.

Overall, these findings reveal that Nigerian editorial cartoons serve as multimodal narratives of protest that combine visual grammar, humour, and cultural symbolism to construct political meaning. Through exaggeration, spatial composition, and intertextuality, they embody the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions described by Kress and Van Leeuwen. Thus, the cartoons transcend entertainment, functioning as visual arguments that challenge governmental insincerity, question socio-economic inequality, and amplify collective dissatisfaction—affirming the potency of multimodal discourse as a persuasive instrument of socio-political critique in Nigerian media.

Conclusion

The study concludes that editorial cartoons are essential for challenging government insincerity and a nonchalant attitude towards their workers, and they reflect societal frustrations due to government negligence towards their workers and Nigerians at large. They serve as tools for humor and socio-political critique, with Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar proving effective in analysing their multimodal elements. This study contributes to multimodal discourse analysis by showing how humour in editorial cartoons critiques socio-political issues and engages audiences. Editorial cartoons are a powerful multimodal medium that combines visual and textual elements to humorously and critically engage with socio-political issues. By leveraging the interplay of these modes, they provide a unique platform for public discourse, reflecting societal concerns, challenging authorities, and fostering meaningful engagement with issues such as the Nigerian minimum wage debate.

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