

## Iconographic Analysis of the Nigerian The Punch Newspaper's Expression Section

**Ife AJEPE Ph.D.**

[Ifeajepe@abuad.edu.ng](mailto:Ifeajepe@abuad.edu.ng)

ORCHID NO: 0000-0002-8675-7914

Department of Languages and Literary Studies,  
AfeBabalola University, Ado –Ekiti.  
Ekiti State. Nigeria

**OYEDIJI, Benjamin Adekunle**

[oyedijibenjamin@gmail.com](mailto:oyedijibenjamin@gmail.com)

Institute of Distance Learning and Centre for Continuing Education  
University of Medical Sciences, Ondo City,  
Akure Campus , Ondo State, Nigeria

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15384061>

### ABSTRACT

This paper explored the meanings of both the written and unwritten words through the Ten (10) visual images which were randomly selected from one of the Nigerian Newspapers: The Punch newspaper, since there is a particular part of the newspaper (at the back page) that is designated to these pictures tagged: *Expression*. The selected images were analysed using Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) multi-modal analysis as a theoretical framework, which was anchored on social-semiotic representation as the framework for this study. The study, therefore, reveals that images and visual expressions together with modes are constructs and they serve as records of reality, as documentary, evidence of the people, places, things, actions, and events they depict. These images are used most of the time as symbols and references to time, place, people, or a representation of a particular issue or scenario. This study also shows that the analysed images are sources of factual information, even though the images may not have been specially produced for such purposes. The use of the visual and the written modes as the situations may require has the potential to present facts and actual situations of life. This will also be an awareness call on international societies, philanthropists, and other NGOs to come to support the people who are in need of life supports in various areas of the society.

**Key words:** Iconography, Visual expression, Communication, Images, Pragmatics.

## Introduction and Background to the Study

The general feelings and attitudes of readers or audiences who are interested in the message are influenced by the use of color, clothing, and other visual materials that can express a special message, depending on the appropriate illustrations and media used. This is one of the most important components of traditional media communication, containing many symbols, to clearly convey various concepts, and the advantage of visual communication is that it can be achieved using the speed of impact, thus freeing the message from linguistic constraints usually associated with writing and speaking.

According to Liu (2013:1259), "We communicate in a variety of ways, and language is a single part, if not an essential part. The use of various semiotic resources in public communication shows that meaning can be realized not only through language but also through the integrated use of a wide range of semiotic resources, including static and dynamic resources. Liu's reality is clear in different ways today: computer interfaces, graphic novels, children's cartoons, magazines and other ads and instructional manuals use visual, written and spoken language to gain conviction. Importantly, any type of message to be understood by any of the available modes depends largely on the mutual understanding and culturally shared experience of the encoder and decoder (Language user). It should also be noted that the term image used in this particular study refers to any visual representation or expression we refer to, because images evoke different meanings and contexts, and it is therefore important to point out that the term used in this study refers to any visual representation or expression. Numerous scholarly works have explored iconography, with a significant number of them concentrating on the aesthetic and religious dimensions of artistic expressions. Works such as Panofsky, (1955) *Meaning in the Visual Arts* and Gombrich, (1960). *Art and Illusion*. Erwin Panofsky, in particular, laid the foundation for modern iconographic analysis by emphasizing the interpretative layers of visual art, especially in religious contexts. Similarly, E.H. Gombrich's inquiries into visual representation underscore the interplay between form, content, and cultural meaning in art. However, while these studies have richly illuminated the symbolic and devotional functions of imagery, less attention has been paid to the linguistic and communicative aspects of contemporary pictorial messages, especially those embedded in popular media.

In the context of Nigerian print media, visual expressions—such as the satirical and symbolic images often found on the back page of *The Punch Newspaper* offers a unique site for semiotic and iconographic inquiry. Despite their potential for socio-political commentary and linguistic interpretation, these images remain underexplored within scholarly literature. This study, therefore, proposes a focused iconographic analysis of *The Punch Newspaper*, aiming to bridge this gap by examining how pictorial representations function as visual rhetoric and vehicles of expression in a contemporary Nigerian context.

Verbal-visual signals are currently pervasive in news reports published in newspapers, both online and offline. This is simply because the combination of visual images and written or spoken words has the power to convey information and real-world circumstances. The explanation for this is not fanciful, Leeuwen, (1996) asserts that visual analysis provides a detailed and explicit method for analysing the meanings that are established by the syntactic relations between the people, places and things depicted in images and that these meanings are not only representational, but also interactional. Images are believed to be doers to or for the viewer (audience and readers), then, invisible messages through these images and their meanings and how we recognised what they meant, even when the words are partially spoken or not actually spoken. The need to fathom the spoken and unspoken words through visual illustration therefore, calls for exploration.

The importance of the interaction between various communication modalities, particularly when attempting to decipher the meanings underlying a particular image decorated with other communication modalities like signs, colour, images, and the like, cannot be overstated. A multimodal approach is required for a practical investigation into these meanings. This was the exact opinion of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), they emphasise that making meaning as messages on blogs, writing is used together with images, still or moving; with colour; with sound in various forms (as music or sound-track); with actions and movements; with 3D objects. That makes one question inevitable, namely what work are the modes which are chosen and co-present here, doing in the message overall? They assert also that, all are resources for making meaning evident, visible, and material, and thus raise the question of what meanings each of the modes present is called on to bring to any overall ensemble of modes into the message as a whole.

### **Relationship between Iconography and Multimodality**

Multimodality is becoming increasingly important in different fields of study, including linguistics, education, psychology, and communication studies. As a concept therefore, multimodality involves the use of various modes of communication, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, to show meaning and ease of understanding. It also refers to the diverse ways in which several distinct semiotic resource systems are both co-deployed and co-contextualised in the making of a text-specific meaning. Baldry and Thibault, (2006) cited in Liu (2013:1262). Iconography, on the other hand, simply means the study of visual symbols and their meanings. According to Liu (2013:1263),

*“Panofsky (1955) an art historian devised this method that is now known as iconography and iconology” Panofsky gives three levels to the perceptions in art history: “the conventional meanings and the underlying philosophical meanings and interpretations constructed within the given socio-cultural context. He held that there are three levels of meaning: The first level, pre-iconographic, is the denotative level, mainly focusing on the interpretation of the elementary or natural meaning, which involves the identification of visual materials such as the objects known from daily experience. The second level, iconographic, is the connotative level, mainly focusing on the interpretation of secondary or traditional meanings, and during the interpretive process, the viewers need to move beyond the natural or surface meaning of the image to consider their knowledge and experiences. The third level, iconological, mainly focuses on the interpretation of ideological meanings of an image constructed in particular social, cultural political, and historical contexts”.*

It is therefore important to realise that there is a very strong connection between iconography and multimodality because visual symbols and pictures are commonly employed in multi-modal communication. Additionally, visual pictures can be used in conjunction with other forms of communication, such as speech, writing, and sound, to convey meaning. By complementing and assisting other forms of communication, such as those described by Birthes (1967) cited in Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:17), “the meaning of images (and of other semiotic codes) is always related to, and in a sense, depended on the verbal text”. Communication becomes more successful and engaging when images are utilised to build visual narratives and the way, they complement and aid other means of communication and thereby make communication more effective and engaging. Pogonson and Akande(2013) also assert that photography/images can further clarify the written literature beyond simple words and explain historical ambiguities, by presenting a comprehensive narrative. The author stated that photography/images were not limited to entertainment, but were used since the colonial

period of Nigeria as a tool for clarifying the reports of colonial history and documenting historical events.

Also, multi-modal communication can be enriched by the use of iconicity, which is the principle that the form of a sign or symbol should resemble its meaning. Eco (1976) argues that iconicity can be used to develop a visual language that is simple to comprehend and recall by given an instance that everyone would identify a red octagon as a stop sign, and because of its iconicity, it is simpler for people to comprehend and follow traffic laws.

Iconography and multimodality are also significant in the study of language and in education as a whole. Supporting this view, Mayer (2014) asserts that multi-modal learning is more effective than conventional uni-modal approaches because it uses a variety of communication modalities to promote learning and understanding of a given concept. Additionally, it usually brings a more interesting and memorable method of presenting the information. Visual imagery and iconography can also be employed to improve the learning experience. In a similar view, Paivio (1990) and Leahy (2003) argue that multi-modal communication and iconography are used to improve therapeutic interventions in the field of psychology. For instance, it has been demonstrated that using visual imagery in cognitive-behavioral therapy can effectively lessen the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Additionally, Sapolsky (2004) observed that multi-modal therapeutic techniques, like using visual imagery and guided meditation, were successful in lowering stress and fostering relaxation. Also worthy of note is the fact that multi-modal communication and iconography are important in the field of communication studies, where they are used to analyse and understand various forms of communication. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) note that images and visual symbols can be analysed in terms of their meaning, composition, and visual grammar. This type of analysis can provide insights into how visual symbols are used to convey meaning in different contexts, such as advertising, political campaigns, and social media. Iconography and multi-modality go hand in hand since visual symbols and images are frequently utilised in multi-modal communication. Particularly in education, psychology, and communication studies, the application of iconicity enhances the effectiveness of multimodal communication. Understanding how various forms of communication interact can improve meaning-making, facilitate comprehension, and serve as a tool for validating historical and temporal facts

### **Aim and Objectives of this Study**

The aim of this paper is to explore the meanings of both the written and unwritten words through the selected images. In order to achieve this, the following objectives are set:

- (i) To identify and categorise the various visual elements used in the selected images
- (ii) To discuss the intended messages of the unspoken words through the selected images
- (iii) To analyse the interplay of the visual and the written expressions and the possible implication they have on the readers.

## Methodology

**Data:** Images at the back of “The Punch Newspaper” are used as data for this study. The Punch Newspaper is one of the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria and it has a wide coverage about happenings in the nation too. At the back page of this newspaper, there is this particular caption that is tagged “*Expression*”. These iconography and other visual images are real-life images that are taken through photographs over time.

**Selection Procedures:** Ten (10) visual images were randomly selected from the piles of old newspapers considering the social phenomena portrayed in the visuals. The selection was done from the serial section (Library) of Model Secondary School Akure, Ondo State Nigeria. The selected old newspaper editions used as data are dated between June to September of the year 2018. Then, the contextual analysis was carried out on the pictures using Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2006) multi-modal analysis as a theoretical framework, which was anchored on social-semiotic representation as the framework for this study.

**Theoretical Framework:** This study adopts Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis as its theoretical framework. Multi-modality asserts that ‘language’ is just one among the many resources for making meaning. That implies that the modal resources available in a culture need to be seen as one coherent, integral field, of – nevertheless distinct – resources for making meaning. The point of a multi-modal approach is to get beyond approaches where mode was integrally linked, often in a mutually defined way, with a theory and a discipline. In such approaches writing was dealt with by linguistics; image by art history; and so on. In a multi-modal approach, all modes are framed as one field, as one domain. Jointly they are treated as one connected cultural resource for (representations) meaning-making by members of a social group at a particular moment. All are seen as equal, potentially, in their capacity to contribute meaning to a complex semiotic entity, a text, and each is treated as distinct in its material potential and social shaping. Each therefore needs to be dealt with as requiring descriptive categories that arise from that difference. “Modes are cultural technologies for making meaning visible or tangible, that is, evident to the senses in some way”. Jewitt (2004:184). We can therefore say that Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) were the first to outline methods for the analysis of the textual layout in images by proposing three main systems of meaning-making potential: composition, framing, and salience. The first system is achieved through the principle of information value compositional zone layout. The justification for the use of Kress and Leuwen’s 2006 multimodal analysis for this study are: The framework gives a comprehensive approach to analysing multimodal texts and images. This framework helps in the understanding how visual elements contribute to the overall meaning of an image and the framework considers the social context in which the image is used and how it communicates meaning.

**Analysis Procedures:** The images were tagged alphabetically, from plate A to plate J for easy identification in our analysis. The images were also grouped broadly into two major parts: (i) Social phenomena group, images here are used to show or convey the social ill or to place emphasis on certain “good” societal issues, (II) Environmental and other natural phenomena group. The data were thus analysed based on the interactions between the images, the captions and the intended messages.

## Analysis and Discussion of Findings

### Identification and Categorisation of the selected Images

The data selected are broadly categorised under two major groups:

(i) Social phenomena group, images here are used to show or convey the social ill or to place emphasis on certain “good” societal issues, Plates A, B, and C fall into this category.

(II) Environmental and other natural phenomena group. Plates D, E, F, G, H, I, J, and I fall into this category. The medium of all of these visual expressions is the newspaper (The Punch newspaper) while different modes are employed to carry out the visual message. The first mode that is constant to them all is linguistic mode. The choices of words, vocabulary, grammar, and structure match with the visual modes that comprise different images, symbols, and layouts. From all of the selected data, no one is expressed with aural mode since the medium of all of the selected data is from the newspaper. Gestural modes are portrayed in the various images used with either interaction with others or a kind of facial expression showing acceptance or dissatisfaction. Then, the positions, spacing, and distance between elements in the slates show a spatial mode in all of the images selected as data for this study.



(PLATE A: showing Stray rams on Ojuelegba Road in Lagos)

SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper



**Intended Message from the Picture**

From picture A above, one will notice that the images in this picture were used to illustrate a kind of social issue. Here, we see the motorist's "okada" riders and their motorbikes in motion with passengers on them, a car, and some rams straying on a popular road in Lagos. Here we can deduce that the picture was used to call the attention of the people to this irregularity. Most especially, in a time like this when there are issues of "herds and the herdsmen" and other security challenges.

**Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words**

From the picture above, the images-motorbikes, the riders, the passengers, cars, and rams on the popular street in Lagos connote a deeper message. The rams on the street of Ojuelegba in Lagos without anyone directing them, signify absurdity and it calls for carefulness. Ojuelegba in Lagos is a very popular place and it is well known for its crowd. It is a crowded place and it may not be so easy for rams ordinarily to walk that street. One thing that comes to mind is questions like how did they get here and from where? Then, one may also infer that rams walking on the street, maybe it is "Sallah period". The combinations of these modes- visual and written reinforce the need for carefulness and watchfulness since this is a strange occurrence in a normal day. Also, it is important to emphasize that in a country like Nigeria, occurrences like this may be considered normal in certain areas—especially in villages where animals are reared on a free range. However, in a developed country, such an incident would typically prompt an alert to residents. The modes used in this context were combined for emphasis.

(Plate B showing school children and their teacher that were out on excursion at Agege area of Lagos State)

SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper



### **Intended Message from Plate B**

Picture B shows a social phenomenon. One can clearly see the pupils of a certain primary school in Agege Lagos who were on an excursion with the school buses and some of the teachers with them. The image also shows the site of the excursion.

### **Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words**

The words were used to reinforce the pictures that were shown. The written words serve the purpose of publicity for the school in the plate shown above. This is because the school's outing or excursion is portraying to the public that the learning activities of the school are not only done on the school site but also outside the school environment. One can, therefore, assume that such a school operates a wholesome curriculum. Apart from this, the students in uniform, their coordination, and the written words indicating the place of excursion also, in a way have implications for the readers or audience. The readers/audience would be able to infer that this particular school is not just known for academic work alone, but that they also have time to play (outside classroom learning) or what we can call a time-out and extracurricular activities. This, invariably will enhance learning and contribute to the pupils' all-round development.

**(Plate C showing: Members of National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives during a medical outreach in commemoration of the international Day of the Midwives/ International Nurses Week at DutseAlhaji Market in Abuja)**

**SOURCE:**The Punch Newspaper





### **Intended Message from Plate C**

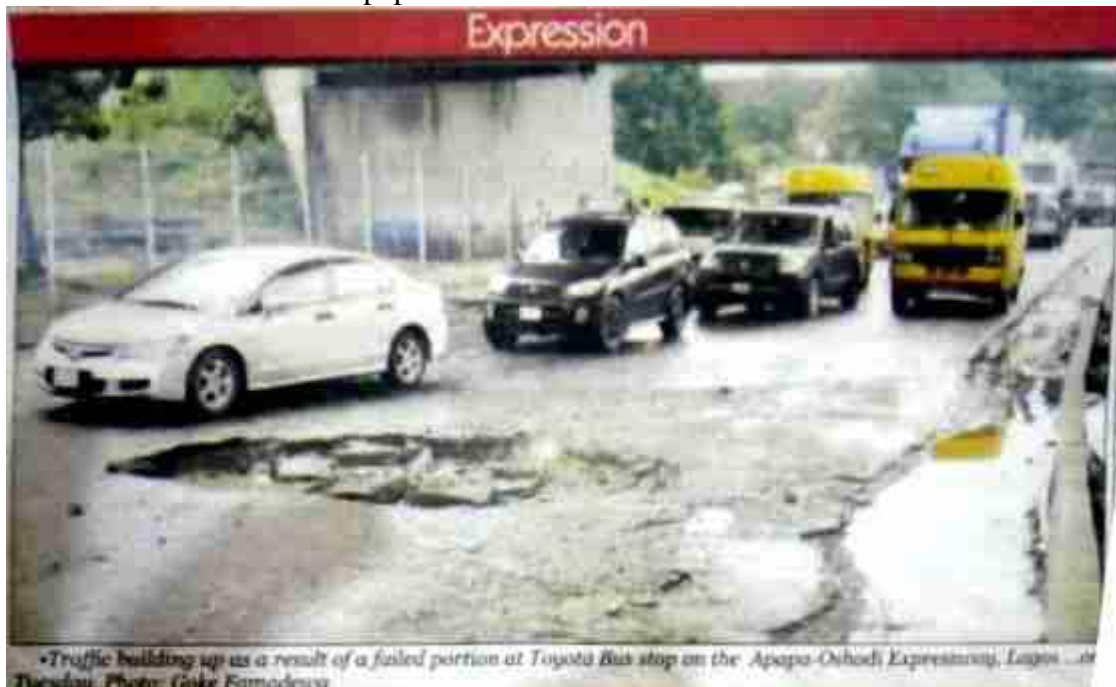
Plate C above, is a picture portraying a social function; the pictures showed some set of women with unique dresses and caps, one will also notice that they have rubber gloves on their hands. The caps, apron, and gloves can be seen as signifiers of the medical profession or action on this particular occasion. They sat at the table and were busy attending to some people in front of them. The message here depicts the activities of these women in giving medical attention to those who need it. This has a socio-cultural impact since the deeds here may challenge a cultural value, norm or attitude and in a way bring about a form of mobilization for the people to take their medical issues so serious. It is impactful because the image raises awareness about social issues and it inspires change in values and norms

### **Interplay of the Visual and Written Words**

Anyone who will not easily understand what they were up to, would through the written words that reinforce the message by telling the audience or readers that these are nurses and people from the Midwifery Association of Nigeria in Abuja commemorating the International Day of the Midwives/International Nurses Week at Dutse in Abuja Nigeria by reaching out to the people of the area, giving them free medical attention. The modes in this image give a fuller message when combined than when used individually. The implication of this is not only to create awareness and sensitise the people of Nigeria but it will also be an awareness call on international societies, philanthropists, and other NGOs to come to support the people in the area who need medical treatments. It is also a signal to the entire populace about the need for general medical check-ups. The image also, by the way, promotes the activities of the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives of Nigeria. The plate and the information given here serve or may serve as a record of time for this particular association and the world at large.

(Plate D: Showing: Traffic Build-up as a Result of a Failed Portion at Toyota Bus Stop on Apapa-Oshodi Express Road, Lagos)

SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper



### Intended Message from plate D

The intended message from the plate D is to show the deplorable condition of some of the major roads in the country. In the plate, One can see some motorists-both private and commercial vehicles trying to avoid the bad part of the road. The different mode of transportation shown here are symbolic as well. They are showing that all motorists and not one of them is left unaffected by the condition of the road. We can also see a deep pot hole at the centre of the road and at the side of the road as well. The plate here is a signal and it is giving a form of awareness to other road users. Directly or indirectly, this is a call as well for the authorities' attention for a quick response

### Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words

Different modes (linguistic, visual, and others) employed here were used to create awareness for the road users to know what they may be facing going through this particular area of Lagos. Apart from the fact that pictures reveal to the audience or readers the condition of the road in this particular part of Lagos, the written words serve as a form of warning to the people who may want to use this particular road, that one may certainly get into traffic hold up, this may make an individual to either set out early or to avoid going through the road that is revealed. The implication of this is that the visual and written words give unsolicited calls to the government, community, and other agencies to come for rehabilitation of the road.

**(Plate E showing: Protesters barricading the Kaduna- Zaria Road during a protest against alleged killing of a trader by policemen in Kaduna Metropolis)**

**SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper**



### Intended Message from Plate E

From the plate above, the visual mode revealed the fire burning, some tricycles parked, some vehicles also parked, and on the bridge were the people looking at the scene. The scene posed a sort of danger. The fire and the smoke here are pointers of the danger and this scene obviously alerted the people that something wrong was going on and it called for caution.

### The Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words

If not for the use of the modes (Fire, smoke, the firemen, protester, and onlookers) here, one would not easily realise that the scene was created by the protesters. The visual aroused the audience's interest while the written words reinforced this by revealing the actual situation that was shown in the picture. The written words read: "Protesters barricading the Kaduna-Zaria Road during a protest against alleged killing of a trader by policemen in Kaduna Metropolis...on Monday". The implication of this is that the image will be able to serve as a form of evidence to the civil society, that the brutality of the policemen in Nigeria through this scene was mildly portrayed. This will also serve as a form of record to validate police excesses in a society like Nigeria. This may also call the attention of the people in authority who are in charge of the concerned commission to throw a form of check on their excesses(Plate F showing: Heaps of refuse on Agege Pen Cinema railway, Lagos)

**SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper**



Heaps of refuse on Agege Pen Cinema railway, Lagos ...on Tuesday. Photo: Olukayode Jaiyeolu



### **Intended Message from Plate F**

From plate F, we can see the heaps of refuse. By looking closely, one will realise that there is a foot path so close to this place. On this path was a woman hawking her wares and another man following closely behind her. One can equally decode that this is close to a particular neighbourhood because some houses can be faintly seen at the rear. The message here can be easily deduced, the encoder here was trying to give warning on the hazards of environmental pollution. One, for the people to desist from dumping of refuse carelessly in the neighbourhood, and two for the dwellers of such environment to watch out in cautioning those that will turn a deaf here to whatever warning that may come from this plate, and that local government authority, individuals and the community at large all have roles to play in creating this awareness.

### **The Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words**

The combination of these two modes (visual and writing), enhanced the clarity of the message that is being passed across to the general public. The combination of these two modes therefore, helped in understanding that the heaps of refuse are not just dumped or seen in an ordinary place, but on the railway that connects Agege and Pen Cinema-a very popular area in Lagos, Nigeria. The implication of these is to call on the concerned individuals, community and the government to find a solution to this. The solution will reduce the environmental hazards that can result from this. Then it will give a thorough passage to the trains that may be using the railway. The image also has an implication on the people in this neighbourhood as they can be tagged “dirty” therefore, the need to be cautioned and to put up a measure to restrict the people from dumping refuse in this particular area and to watch for those who will trespass and mete out the necessary punishment for them.

(Plate G showing: Residents of Ahmed Muhammed Street, Oja-Oba scooping water off the flooded street in Lagos)

SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper



### Intended Message from Plate G

From Plate G, we can see the picture of men scooping dirty water from the ground into the drainage. We can also see some shops and some on-lookers. Well, the intention of the encoder would be to reveal the deplorable condition of the people living in this area, most especially, living in such area during the time of continuous rain. By merely looking at the action of men in the plate, the message intended could implied that: (a) the dwellers of this area are “common people” that society may regards as ordinary and so they are neglected to face all of these struggles alone without coming to their aids, (b) the environmental degradation of this area and the conditions under which people are living as they can be tagged “neglected” by the government or society is shown here to the readers

### The Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words

It was the written mode that accompanied this image that actually revealed to us that there was a flood in the area. It may therefore mean that the place is not naturally dirty but that the flood made it so. The implication of the message here may be to call for help for the dwellers of this area, so as to make improvement on how to make the place better before the condition of this area goes from bad to worse. Also, it serves as a signal to prospective person(s) that may want to come and live in this area that this place may be prone to flood. It will also alert the government and other concerned authorities to realise that “Residents of AhmeedMuhammed street, Oko-Oba in Lagos are prone to flood and there is need for the government and other agencies to rise to their aid. The people of this area may not be able to reach the government or concerned authority on their own, but through this medium and the caption attached, the concerned authorities would have gotten the intended message of the encoder.

**(Plate H showing: A refuse dump in front of Jahum Primary School in Bauchi metropolis of Bauchi State)**

**SOURE: The Punch Newspaper**



**Intended Message from plate H**

From picture H, we can see refuse, the scavengers (i.e. the people that were busy in the site looking for scraps). We see mainly boys or young men. One with wheel-barrow while others are with sack bags positioned not quite far away from them, this shows that they were up to something, a serious search for that matter. The message here is that of struggle for survival.

**The Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words**

The interplay of the visual and the written words here revealed to an environmental pollution caused by dumping of the refuse in a public area. One might have thought it was just dumped in an ordinary area without much concerns but, a closer look will make one to realise that it was done in a public place. The refuse seen here were dumped in the front of Jahun primary school in Bauchi, Bauchi State. The implication of this is that, the people didn't care where they dumped their domestic wastes and other household wastes. Here, at the front of a primary school, turned to a dunghill for the people show the people's nonchalant attitudes towards the health of others. It show no one among those that dump refuse there that is really concern about what hazards this kind of environment can cause for others. This also calls attention of the people concerned to administer justice and preserve the lives of the young ones that may be attending this primary school for their elementary education and the people of this immediate community at once.



(Plate I showing: Natural water channels blocked by plastic wastes at Onopa, Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa)

SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper



### Intended Message from Plate I

From image in plate I, we can see a stream with some refuse on top of it, two dirty huts on both sides of the stream; one looks habitable while the other one is dilapidating gradually. The image here suggested: (a) an impoverished environment and (b), a neglected or an unkempt environment.

### The Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words

The visual and written messages in the plate revealed a dangerous environment that people artificially created for others through their negligence. The stream shown here was reportedly blocked by empty plastics. Used Plastics that were supposedly thrown from the neighbourhood and carelessly disposed, this brought about a form of blockage on the passage of this particular stream. The implication of this is that, the blockage might eventually cause a flood in the nearest future and thereby lead to environmental hazards for the immediate environment and the people living there. Showing a picture like this may sound a note of warning to those who will carelessly dispose their used and unused plastics and other wastes carelessly in the stream or on the run-off water, that one day this will eventually create problems and environment risks for all, if the people do not caution

(Plate J showing: Children in Makoko Community, Lagos)

SOURCE: The Punch Newspaper





### Intended Message from Plate J

Plate J reveals a riverside area, the plate is advocating for two things, child labour (unguided children) and the environment. Here, we can see the boats of the fishermen parked and the children playing with these boats and the fishing nets. We can also see the bamboo houses typical of those living by the riverside. The meaning of this is that the children here have no fear of water, this may be a love for adventure since they had been properly mentored by the industry of the parents.

### The Interplay of the Visual and the Written Words

The interplay of picture and text in Plate J illustrates the power of multimodal communication in conveying layered meanings. Visually, the image captures a riverside scene featuring parked fishermen's boats, playful children interacting with the fishing tools, and bamboo houses typical of riverine communities. The textual mode complements this by drawing attention to two central themes: child labour and environmental context. The **visual mode** shows children engaging with boats and nets-elements of adult labour-suggesting familiarity, perhaps even responsibility, in handling tools of the fishing trade. Simultaneously, the **linguistic mode** (the accompanying description) interprets this visual engagement not merely as play, but as evidence of informal apprenticeship shaped by parental influence. The image further emphasizes the children's **fearless proximity to water**, which the text frames as both a cultural norm and a learned behaviour, hinting at a deeper connection to place and occupation. Thus, the picture and the text work together to produce a **multimodal narrative** that explores both socio-economic realities (child labour, environmental adaptation) and cultural transmission (mentoring through observation and participation). This combination of modes creates a more holistic and emotionally resonant message than either could achieve alone.

### Conclusion

This study underscores the significance of integrating visual images with written texts and other communicative modes in representing real-life situations and conveying layered meanings. It affirms that such multimodal combinations are powerful tools for presenting factual content and contextual

realities in a more accessible and engaging way. By examining the strategic use of images in newspapers, the study highlights the intentional roles played by photojournalists, editors, and writers in positioning visuals to complement or even substitute textual content, thereby enhancing message delivery and reader engagement.

A key contribution of this research is its demonstration that images and iconographies are not merely decorative elements but are rich with symbolic meanings and references. These visuals often serve as representations of specific times, places, people, and events, making them effective documentary tools and carriers of cultural memory. The study shows that images, even when not produced for explicit informative purposes, can serve as authentic sources of factual and socio-cultural data when analysed within context. As a result, it has been shown that the use of visual and written modes can provide a clearer and more complete understanding of specific messages, such as historical documents, as pictures or photographs can be used to record time and events, but not only to be limited to leisure time.

The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge in multimodal discourse analysis by reaffirming that visual and textual modes are co-constructors of meaning. They offer a clearer and fuller understanding of messages when interpreted together, especially in media and communication contexts.

For future research, scholars may explore how audience interpretation of multimodal texts varies across different cultural and social contexts. Additionally, further studies could investigate the ethical implications of visual representation in news reporting, or examine how emerging digital platforms are reshaping the roles of visual and textual modes in contemporary communication.

## References

- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press.
- Gombrich, E. H. (1960). *Art and illusion*. Phaidon.
- Jewitt, C. (2004). Multimodality and new communication technologies. In P. LeVine & R. Scollon (Eds.), *Discourse and technology: Multimodal discourse analysis* (pp. 184–195). Georgetown University Press.
- Karthick, D. S. (2013). Pragmatic and language communication. In V. Bite & M. Bite (Eds.), *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 4(3), 1–9.
- Knox, J. S. (2009). Punctuating the home page: Image as language in an online newspaper. *Discourse & Communication*, 3(2), 145–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481309102450>
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Arnold.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Leahy, R. (2003). *Cognitive therapy techniques: A practitioner's guide*. Guilford Press.
- Liu, J. (2013). Visual images interpretive strategies in multimodal texts. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4(6), 1259–1263. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.4.6.1259-1263>
- Riemer, N. (2010). *Introducing semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mayer, R. E. (2005). Cognitive theory of multimedia learning. In R. E. Mayer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning* (pp. 31–48). Cambridge University Press.
- Ogungbe, E. O., & Alo, M. (2014). A critical study of selected verbal-visual news in Nigeria e-newspapers. In S. Adekoya, R. Taiwo, K. Ayoola, & A. Adegoju (Eds.), *Currents linguistic and literary issues in digital communication in the globalised age* (pp. 51–80). Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- Paivio, A. (1990). Dual coding theory. In *Mental representations: A dual coding approach* (pp. 583–605). Oxford University Press.
- Panofsky, E. (1955). *Meaning in the visual arts: Papers in and on art history*. University of Chicago Press.
- Panofsky, E. (1993). *Iconology and liturgy at St Mark's*. Cambridge University Press.

Pogoson, O. I., & Akande, A. O. (2013). Photography: A tool for historical records in Nigeria. *ABIBISEM: Journal of African Culture and Civilization*, 5 & 6, 92–113.

Pütz, M., & Neff-van Aertselaer, J. (Eds.). (2008). *Developing contrastive pragmatics: Interlanguage and cross-cultural perspectives*. Mouton de Gruyter.

Sapolsky, R. M. (2004). Stress and cognition. In M. S. Gazzaniga (Ed.), *The cognitive neurosciences* (pp. 1031–1042). MIT Press.

van Leeuwen, T. (1996). The representation of social actors. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Text and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis* (pp. 32–46). Routledge.

Wharton, T. (2004). *Pragmatics and non-verbal communication*. Cambridge University Press.

Yule, G. (1996). *The study of language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

### Authors' Details

**Dr. Ife Ajepe**, a distinguished university scholar with extensive teaching experience, holds a Ph.D. in English Language. Her research expertise spans Multimodal Communication and Multimodal Studies, with a focus on semiotic research, cultural analyses, and the intersection of language and applied linguistics. Dr. Ajepe has authored numerous scholarly articles on multimodal discourse analysis across diverse genres, showcasing her dedication to advancing interdisciplinary research in English Language and Linguistics.

**Oyediji Benjamin Adekunle**, a dynamic researcher and language coach, offers a unique blend of expertise in semantics, digital humanities, and iconographic studies. His scholarly work delves into the intricate construction and communication of meaning, utilising innovative digital tools to document and analyze socio-cultural heritage. Adekunle's research bridges tradition and technology, inspiring a deeper understanding of language as both an art and a science.

Together, Dr. Ajepe and Oyediji Benjamin Adekunle combine their rich academic backgrounds and interdisciplinary insights to explore iconographic analysis, offering fresh perspectives on the

representation of meaning and culture within *The Punch* newspaper. Their collaboration highlights the evolving intersections of language, media, and visual semiotics.

### **Public Statement**

This study explores how images and visual expressions convey meaning and influence our understanding of messages. By analysing pictures from a Nigerian newspaper, we uncovered how visual and written messages work together to create a clearer and more complete understanding of a message. Our findings have important implications for how we communicate and interpret visual information, particularly in the context of news reporting and public awareness. Moreover, this study highlights the need for government and humanitarian organizations to respond to environmental disasters and provide support to affected communities.