

## A MULTIMODAL REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL REVOLUTION IN SELECTED CAMPAIGN POSTERS FROM PETER OBI'S PRESIDENTIAL RALLIES

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**Abstract:** Communication has become a multifaceted and intricate phenomenon of late, more and more dominated by multimodality. In this framework, several modes such as language, images, colour, gestures, typography, and spatial design are used strategically in different contexts to enhance communication and appropriately convey meaning. This movement acknowledges that communication is not usually confined to just verbal language; instead, meaning is created by the interaction of different semiotic resources in concert. The political sphere, as a critical site of social influence and power, has fully embraced this multimodal approach, utilizing it as a potent tool to engage, persuade, and mobilize the electorate.

This paper critically reviews the multimodal representation of political revolution as depicted in selected campaign posters from Obi's presidential rallies. By examining these visual artifacts, the research draws attention to the use and interaction of various modes, including symbolic imagery, colour palettes, typography, and composition, to express powerful messages about revolution and transformation. The analysis illustrates how these posters are not only communicative tools but also ideological vehicles that project and affirm the candidate's political vision and values. In this multimodal context, the paper examines how the campaign posters speak in terms of modes of resistance, offer transformation, and solicit voter identity and emotion.

The overall impact of this research is to add to the scholarly literature on multimodality and political communication, as it illustrates how modern-day political campaigns use various communicative resources to project public opinion and political discourse convincingly.

**Keywords:** *Multimodal Communication, Political Discourse, Campaign Posters, Political Revolution, Semiotic Modes, and Visual Persuasion.*

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## Introduction

Human social life of man, exploration and construction of his world are all made possible by language. Language is social and cultural which serves as a vehicle and instrument of transfer of ideas, opinions, and opinions. Language can be defined by Richards and Schmidt (2010) as a system of human communication in which sounds are organized into meaningful and coherent units (1). Communication is a social interchange in which one's thoughts are communicated to the intended recipient/listener. The communicator's aim is thus that the thoughts being

communicated across should be received and interpreted by the addressee.

Williams and Thompson (2022) note that communication has evolved, with a shift from the traditional use of spoken communication towards the embrace of multimodal communication (2). It is the key reason why one of the main causes of the transition is globalization and the widespread coverage of the virtual space, which has had a great impact on human beings and communication. The rise of the virtual world and the advancement of technology have shifted the traditional dominance

of spoken language in literacy. As Taylor (2023) explains, various elements of visual communication have now become integral to how we understand literacy (3). Communication today is increasingly multimodal, with creators of texts relying on diverse semiotic resources to convey meaning, as noted by Harris and Smith (2022) (4). Natharius (2004) also highlights this transformation, pointing out that, "never before in human history has the visual image held such a dominant role" (5).

The increasing role of visual images in modern communication has led to the growth of visual communication studies (6), as noted by Robinson and Adams (2022). Machin and Mayr (2012) recognize this shift, pointing out that the inclusion of visuality as a research field within academia began in the late 1980s and 1990s (7). During this time, many linguists realized that meaning isn't solely conveyed through language but also through various semiotic modes (p. 6). Scholars of visual analysis argue that images can be interpreted in a similar way to words, by applying language theories, as Harper and Stone (2021) suggest. The political arena is also not exempt in such visual representations. Political rallies and campaigns employ many multimodal sets to make people aware (8). The present paper takes into account some selected campaign posters at the rally of one of the presidential candidates.

Over time, political leaders and political supporters adopt images and pictures to back their argument and put emphasis on the message they desire to pass across. Campaign posters are prominently used in elections because the way a candidate is depicted stays in the mind of the voters. The current study examines how campaign posters impact voters and shape the formation of political authority.

## **Peter Obi's Biography and his Emergence in the Nigerian Political Scene**

Peter Gregory Obi is a businessman cum politician. Born in a family of 5, he was raised by a trading Father and a mother who was a teacher. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Philosophy from the prestigious University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is a former governor of Anambra state. He served as a governor from March to November 2006 and May, 2007 to March 2014. He contested for the presidential election under the labour party. He became the Labour party candidate for 2023 presidential election after defecting from People's Democratic Party. Peter Obi had an excellent record at the end of his tenure as a state governor. As a result of the good work he did in Anambra state, so many Nigerian believed in him as the candidate to save the nation from the shambles it is in currently.

## **Review of Relevant Concepts**

Multimodality is a term that has been employed more and more in the last few decades to describe the way various resources are employed in communication to create meaning (9). It is both recognized as a communicative phenomenon and an area of academic study. When we refer to multimodality as a communicative phenomenon, it is the convergence of different resources, whether images, speech, writing, gestures, or even bodily language, into texts and communicative events (10).

At the scholarly level, multimodality as a discipline has expanded to examine how these resources intersect and impact communication. Scholars are interested in developing theories,

methods, and tools for examining how meaning is made in various modes (11). The term has also found its way into other disciplines, including linguistics and communication studies, though the majority of scholars are interested in language (12).

Multimodal scholars research the phenomenon using a variety of theoretical perspectives (11). These methods (13) have a tendency to rely on four central ideas, as noted by Jewitt (2014): firstly, that communication is multimodal; secondly, that meaning cannot be comprehensively explained through language analysis; thirdly, that each mode has unique values depending on material form and culture; and fourthly, that how the various modes interact is essential for interpreting communication (14).

Here, representation and communication are understood through a range of modes, like gestures, sound, pictures, color, and arrangement, which are socially constructed by societies in order to create meaning and express values, ideologies, and power relations (Kress, 2010). These modes are not ancillary to writing and speaking but work alongside them to sum up to the final meaning of the text (15).

Communication, whether technologically mediated or face-to-face, has always been multimodal (16). Speech and writing have long been viewed as the key modes of communication, but contemporary technologies have suggested that communication is multimodal in form. Lee and Walsh (2021) describe how language itself cannot explain the multimodal nature of meaning in modern digital texts that commonly combine writing, pictures, color, and sound (17). For example, when interacting with digital displays, such as ATM screens, we're not just reading text, but engaging with a combination of elements that all contribute to the message (17).

Halliday's work has contributed immensely to the field of multimodality by extending his model of language to modes of communication other than writing and speaking. Halliday's model was used by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in their seminal book *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* to illustrate how visual texts can convey meaning, depict the world, and create the relationship between the text, author, and audience (16).

## **Discourse and Context**

The word discourse, (since its origin) has had various, and sometimes very broad, meanings. The word discourse is derived from the Latin word *discursus* referring to conversation and talk (19). Fairclough (1989) employed the word discourse referring to the whole process of communication of which a text is merely a part (20). Discourse as a linguistic word literally refers to a formal speech, a writing or discussion. That is, discourses are written or spoken. It is also sometimes called language in use, which is also a term for text (21).

As a set of personalized statements, discourse is employed to denote statements of particular features occurring among groups, contexts or stereotypes (22) such as medical discourse, political discourse and classroom discourse that differentiate each practice from the rest. Discourse may be marked by other semiotic alternatives (23). Blommaert (2005) defined discourse as any form of meaningful human activity, which is deeply connected to social, cultural, and historical contexts (24,25). One of the key aspects of discourse is the context in which it occurs. There are different views on how discourse relates to context, but it is generally understood as the interaction of language within diverse cultural

and historical settings, particularly in the study of critical discourse analysis (26). Widdowson (2004) defined context as the conditions under which language is used, emphasizing that these circumstances are crucial for understanding meaning (27). In other words, context helps shape the meaningful elements of discourse, particularly those linked to real-life experiences (28).

Wodak (2011) identified several features of discourse, including the content of communicative events, intertextual and interdiscursive connections, and the role of the broader social environment (29). These features, along with the institutional and societal contexts in which discourse practices are embedded, are essential for understanding the meaning of discourse. Without these contexts, discourse would lose its relevance (30). It is clear that speakers rely on specific contexts, cognitive, social, cultural, and historical, to give their discourse significance (31).

## Political Discourse

Van Dijk (1998) considered that discourse is a communicative event that takes place in a social context, reports a situation, has participants who perform different roles, and anchors some action (32). This means that discourse is not done in a vacuum but it is part of our everyday life (33). In the thinking of discourse being a social semiotics, Van Dijk also noticed that text and talk are not limited to using natural languages. Discourse consists of a system of signs, sound, gestures, and other modes known as multimodal discourse (34). With the focus of this research on campaign posters, discourse here encompasses all multimodal signals used in a particular presidential candidate's campaign posters to disseminate political ideology.

Political discourse is a general term that covers various areas. Political discourse deals with questions of power, control, hegemony, representation, and ideology (23). At the core of political speech is the role of language, language structure, and manipulation in political communication and political effect (35). Political discourse assumes the form of social practice through which language is reproduced, as political discourse states according to Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (36). To a large extent, though, such forms of social practice may have the ideological foundation (36). Contrary to this belief, Wilson (2005) has argued that political rhetoric is indeed manipulative (37). Language is not a social act but an insidious kind of manipulation framed in hidden manners within discourses (39). Wilson further argued that politicians often conceal undesirable issues within certain frames, ensuring that the public remains unaware of the wrongdoing right before them. Bourdieu, as referenced in Fairclough (1995), described political discourse as a battleground where efforts are made to create and maintain a structured political narrative (37). This struggle extends beyond traditional political discourse, aiming to establish a public political arena (40).

## Political Revolution

Private interest theory of Revolution specifies that 'A revolutionary act is an extra-legal act (violent or non-violent) intended by the actor to secure a change in governmental personnel, structure of policy' (4). The private interest theory categorically classified revolutions into the subsequent:

- Revolution owing to political reform.
- Revolution owing to war defeat.
- Revolution owing to attacks on powerful people.

- Revolution caused by general increases in antagonism towards the regime.

## Tocqueville's research findings on the French revolution are that

This may sound paradoxical, but there are such paradoxes in history. It is not always in times of worsening that revolutions occur. Actually, revolutions often occur when a people, long oppressed under dictatorial leadership without protest, suddenly find that the administration has begun to relax its hold. It is in those critical moments that the people rebel against the government. Therefore, the toppled social order of a revolution is always superior to what existed before it (41).

Political revolution is the overthrow of an existing power structure by some group of individuals for the erection of a new government system. Oftentimes, when individuals speak of a "power structure," they are referring to the government. A revolution is literally a group of individuals toppling the government, with the goal of creating a better system. That's the broad definition. But there are instances when the government is not so much overthrown but rather severely altered or redirected. Though exceptional, such occurrences can still be considered revolutions (42). Revolutions happen within a limited time frame, oftentimes a few months or a couple of years, although others take decades. Along with the change in the ruling, revolutions usually happen along with significant economic and social transformation. Nigeria is gradually experiencing this following the 2023 elections (43).

In Nigeria, as in the majority of other developing countries, politics is usually seen as a dirty game, only for the mighty and powerful (44). Power is normally centralized in the hands of the mighty few, who constantly change power amongst themselves. Nigeria has had two major parties over the past sixteen years: The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). The political weather in the country was tense when Peter, a candidate of the Labour Party, opposition party, alleged to be disorganized, entered the presidential race (45).

## Theoretical Framework

Multimodal discourse analysis, or multimodality (11), takes its cue from Halliday's (1978, 1985, 1989a) social semiotic theory of language (30). The framework focuses on how different modes of communication are used to express ideas (14). It is an allusion to the arrangement of various communicative modes (i.e., language and music) within a communicative artifact or event (34). Pioneering scholars like Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen have been prime exponents of this theory, most notably through *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (14). They proposed that multimodal discourse analysis includes the study of different modes' different facets, e.g., lighting, color, and composition. The field of multimodal discourse analysis focuses on how the meaning-making process is understood through semiotic resources (15). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) argued that each element of a mode possesses meaning potential, which is realized upon decoding against other elements (46).

Multimodality believes that language is but one among many available resources to make meaning (Jewitt, 2009). In this, all the various modal resources available in a culture must be treated as one unified system for meaning production (12). The aim of a multimodal strategy is to transcend traditional models where



modes tend to appear as separate or mutually defining. Under a multimodal paradigm, all the modes share the same domain, a social group's shared cultural reservoir used to constitute meaning at some point. All modes are distinct in their material affordances and social usage, but they work functionally together to inform meaning-making of a text (15).

## Method of Data Collection and Data Analysis

Photographs of the campaign posters were obtained from various online sources, including social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups.

The data derived for this study were analysed using qualitative approaches. The writings and colours on the posters were all descriptively explained.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

Data 1



The image above contains the picture of an able bodied young man, holding a campaign poster in a rally. The campaign poster in this image contains the colours of the Nigerian flag which signifies patriotism and belief in the betterment of the country. The upper left hand side of the poster, contains the logo of the labour party. The logo which is a picture of a mother, a father and a child signifies the inclusive ideology of the party and the desire to carry everyone along irrespective of the social class. The logo contains colour red, white and green. The red symbolizes strength and power, while green and white indicates the Nigerianess of the party. The inscription on the poster reads, '62 years of Drama, Change the actors. Vote Peter Obi for President'. Nigeria, gained independence 62 years ago, and for the past 62 years of the country's post-colonial era, the level of development expected has not been achieved. Hence, this campaign poster suggests that all these years our political leaders have been acting drama year in year out without devising a means for the general wellbeing of the country. Every one, particularly the youths has gotten tired of the political garbage that goes on in the country. The dramas are

unending and they tell us tales that sound like folklore and expect us to believe it. One time, the media reported that snake swallowed money. Another time, it was reported that rats chased the president away from the presidential villa, these vague stories and drama is what the people are tired of and they are protesting/campaigning for a candidate who has their interest at heart and will save them from all the dramas of 62 years.

Data 2



The image on data 2 contains images of four young ladies on the rally ground. Two of them have campaign posters raised above their heads. The colours on the posters are red, green and white which are the colours of the labour party logo. The inscription on the first poster says 'TO SECURE YOUR DAILY VOTE FOR 2K PETER OBI' In the Nigerian social media parlance, 2k also known as 'urgent 2k' stands for two thousand Nigerian naira. In the Nigerian context, it is believed that 2k is the barest minimum wage an average person could make a day. Hence, there is this slogan which most young people use, one can say 'make I go hustle for urgent 2k' when out on their daily business or 'abeg help me with urgent 2k' when asking for favours, especially ladies. A lot of social media memes has been created making mockery of girls who always ask men for urgent 2k on social media. So, this poster indicates that if Peter Obi is voted in, jobs and resources will be provided hence there will be no need for girls to be asking men for money online, because with a better means of livelihood, there daily 'urgent 2k' is secured..

The inscription on the second poster reads 'Hook up No dey pay again, Peter Obi go run us Jobs' this is loosely interpreted to mean, Hook up does not pay anymore, Peter Obi will provide jobs for us. In the Nigerian context, Hook up stands for advanced prostitution. Due to lack of jobs in the country, most female graduates who are supposed to be employed to different parastatals resort to prostitution as way to make ends meet. The message, this poster is indicating is that the act of Prostitution does not pay enough so

they should all vote Peter who will in turn provide jobs and the rate of prostitution will drastically reduce

Another point to note is that all the inscription on the posters in data 2 are written all in capital letters for emphasis.

**Data 3**



The image in data 3 contains the picture of a female youth holding up a campaign poster,

In Nigeria, there is this open secret or general knowledge that during campaigns leading to an election, money and relief materials are shared to canvass for vote, a lot of electorates sell their votes in exchange for money. Many protesters and supporters of peter obi frowned against it and reminded the electorates that whatever they collect to sell their votes cannot last beyond the present year and they will have 4-8 years of bad governance to bear the consequences of their action. This explains the inscription on the poster that reads ‘say No to 5 cups of rice, Give us Peter Obi’.

On the right-hand side of the poster is a vivid image of the presidential candidate, with a face full of heart-warming smile which exudes readiness and eagerness to work the electorates through a part of good governance.

**Data 4**



The above data contains the picture of a male youth holding up a campaign poster amidst others on a rally ground. The focal point in the data above is the campaign poster which reads ‘PETER OBI IS THE REASON WHY I’M INTERESTED IN POLITICS’. The 2023 elections in Nigeria got a lot of young people interested in politics, in the past, most young people do not bother themselves to vote because of the narrative that votes do not count. Supporters of Peter Obi fought this narrative and convinced people to come out en masse and cast their votes. The opposition party ridiculed Obi’s supporters and termed them two persons hiding behind the keyboard to make tweets. To prove a point, they came out in mass for the rallies and made efforts to get more registered voters. The past election witnessed a lot of newly registered voters, people who lacked concern in choice of governance but have become fed up with the suffering of the poor masses got their Permanent Voters card in a quest to get it right. In the inscription above it says ‘Politics’ instead of politics or POLITICS, this choice is ideologically motivated to lay emphasis on PO which stands for Peter Obi’s initials. The poster contains a logo of the labour party on the top left side and a thumbprint beside it to sensitize the electorates to cast their votes for Obi by putting their thumb print across the party logo.

**Data 5**



The inscription first on the campaign poster reads “IF YE BE OBIDIENT AND YUSFUL...YE SHALL EAT THE GOOD OF THE LAND” the author employed the use of pun on the words obedient and useful to inculcate the name of the presidential candidate and his running mate, Yusuf. This inscription is an excerpt from the holy book admonishing the Israelites, here the actor is using it to persuade the electorates to vote for Peter Obi.

The second inscription reads #PETERISBETTER which makes a rhyme.

The last inscription reads #ObiDatti2023 a hashtag which contains the name of the candidate, his running mate and the year of the election all for emphasis.



## Conclusion

From the analysis of the selected campaign posters of Peter Obi's presidential campaign rallies, it can be seen that multimodal communication significantly contributes to political discourse and revolution in Nigerian politics today. The campaign posters under discussion in the above are examples of the transference of various semiotic modes, such as imagery, color, typography, and language, used collectively in a strategic manner to evoke emotions, make meaning, and mobilize the electorate. The use of patriotic color and symbolic imagery creates a deep sense of nationalism and acknowledges the aspiration of a revolutionary political movement.

The use of language in these posters is more than mere general persuasion and is used politically as a catalyst for change, particularly in a country where political apathy has taken root. These posters appeal to the frustrations of the masses, and they demand improved leadership, openness, and job creation. They use powerful slogans that appeal to the everyday struggles of the Nigerian populace, such as the "urgent 2k" meme and calling for the vote-buying to be avoided in return for good governance. The prioritization of youth empowerment and engagement also indicates the effective use of multimodal tools in building a new political identity for young Nigerians who are, for the first time, participating in the political landscape.

The evaluation not only gives prominence to the possibility of multimodal communication in modern political campaigns but also gives prominence to its pivotal role in creating a political revolution. The success of the campaign, marked by increasing voter turnout and shift in political discourse, is a confirmation of the power of visual and linguistic methods in forming public opinion as well as political change in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

Based on political revolution multimodal representation analysis in Peter Obi presidential campaign posters, the following are prescribed to enhance the effectiveness of subsequent political communication attempts in Nigeria:

- **Enhance Multimodal Communication Usage:** Political campaigns of the future must continue innovating and leveraging a greater number of semiotic resources, such as combining images, colors, typographies, and social media exchanges, to construct more appealing and persuasive messages. Doing so can resonate further with voters' multilayered literacy practices, making messages more contextual and impactful across various demographic segments.
- **Focus on Youth Engagement:** With the younger generation becoming more actively engaged in the 2023 elections, political campaigns must shift the focus towards creating content that engages the youth. This includes talking about the establishment of jobs, economic security, and justice through terms and visuals that resonate with the culture of digital natives. Political messaging must be presented as a discussion of their problems and presenting solutions for a better tomorrow.
- **Encourage involvement in Anti-Vote Buying Campaigns:** Building on the effective message of denying material bribes for votes, future campaigns should appeal to integrity and the consequences of selling out one's vote. Public campaigns that further

expound on the long-term harm of vote-buying, along with a pledge for real political reform, will most likely encourage more upright voting habits.

- **Implement More Focused Localized Campaign Strategies:** Campaign posters need to be developed with increased sensitivity to local situations and socio-cultural contexts. By adopting regional languages, symbols, and relevant local issues, campaigns can forge a closer connection with the electorate and make messages address explicitly the specific concerns of specific communities.
- **Leverage Digital Platforms for Increased Voter Participation:** While traditional media like posters continue to play a significant role, campaigns need to include digital platforms to react to voters instantaneously and receive feedback. Communicating with voters through social media, mobile apps, and interactive websites will allow for a more inclusive campaign environment, allowing voters not only to receive information but to participate in the political process.

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