

# Discourse Analysis of Semiotic Resources in Newspaper Political Campaign Advertisements of Select Candidates for the 2019 Elections in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study focused on newspaper political campaign advertisements of select candidates for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria with the aim of analysing the semiotic resources in the newspaper political campaign advertisements of the select candidates. The specific objectives were to: determine how personality profiling served as semiotic resource in the 2019 elections campaign advertisements of the APC candidate of Lagos State, Nigeria as well as examine the use of color as a semiotic resource in the 2019 elections campaign advertisements of the APC gubernatorial candidates of Lagos and Abia States, Nigeria among others. The Social Semiotic Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. Data for this study were drawn from newspaper advertisements in three national dailies: *The Punch*, *Daily Sun* and *The Vanguard* newspapers. The newspapers were published between December 2018 and February 2019. Three (3) advertisements were purposively selected for this study owing to the several semiotic resources in them. The data were analyzed using the Discourse Analysis approach. The analysis revealed personality profiling of the APC gubernatorial candidate of Lagos State based on his educational qualification, experience and popularity. It also showed that color, image placement, attire and handshakes were also semiotic resources found in the newspaper political campaign advertisements of the select candidates in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Green and red were identified to be instrumental in communicating growth, light and love. Based on the findings, it was recommended that further study be carried out to uncover the communicative elements in political campaign advertisements in Nigeria newspapers.

**Key words:** Personality profiling, color, image placement and discourse analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since political campaigns are tied to elections, which determine the individuals who lead people, they attract a lot of attention as politicians seeking elective positions invest enormous financial resources, energy and time into them in order to appeal positively to the electorate. It is common to see posters, billboards, and banners being used to project certain politicians or political parties for public acceptance. This aspect of political communication has received considerable attention (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013; Opeibi, 2006). Political campaigns which constitute an important part of political campaigns are also characterized by a compelling use of multimodal resources for persuasive political

communication. These resources are captured on the pages of newspapers regularly.

In Nigeria, just as it is in many other countries, politicians use visual resources such as vests, head wears, dance, and surrogate language among others to communicate meanings in the discourse for the main purpose of seeking political support for certain politicians or political parties (Ademilokun & Olateju, 2015). However, not much has been done on the semiotic implications of the multimodal resources highlighted above in the Nigerian context. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze some of such multimodal resources used in some newspaper advertisements on political campaign discourse in Nigeria with focus on the political campaigns of the 2019 elections.

It is widely known especially within the political arena that one of the political events during which politicians try to use discourse to establish, maintain or sustain power is during political campaigns. The deployment of multimodal resources in political campaigns is the first determiner of the acceptability of most candidates who impose their ideology on others in their quest to win the people's mandate. Since the commencement of the current fourth republic, political campaigns have grown markedly. Even though features of political campaigns in previous republics such as violence and money politics still manifest in the campaigns, there is innovation and more creativity in the campaigns. Apart from the traditional means of campaigns such as print media advertisements, there is now the use of various platforms on the electronic media such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, among others, for political campaigns.

Studies around the area had focused more on 2015 elections. For instance, Ademilokun and Olateju in 2015 had worked on the area although their focus was on 2015 elections. It is upon this background that this study attempts to improve on the literature on the use of semiotic resources for the establishment of political goals and objectives by Nigerian politicians during the campaigns for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Here, personality profiling is examined in conjunction with other semiotic resources that politicians deploy for meaning-making. Hence, this study therefore seeks to analyze how the APC Lagos gubernatorial candidate is profiled and the associated communicative elements as

semiotic resources by three candidates in the 2019 elections campaign advertisements in Nigeria.

## II. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study therefore is to discursively analyse some semiotic resources in newspaper political campaign advertisements of three candidates for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study shall be to:

1. determine how personality profiling served as semiotic resource in the 2019 elections campaign advertisements by the APC candidate of Lagos State, Nigeria;
2. examine the use of color as a semiotic resource in the 2019 elections campaign advertisements by the APC gubernatorial candidates of Lagos and Abia States, Nigeria;
3. find out other semiotic resources used in the 2019 elections campaign advertisements in Nigeria.

## III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A related study was that conducted by Ike-Nwafor (2015) on “Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Political Campaign Speeches of gubernatorial Candidates in South-Western Nigeria 2007-2014.” In the study, it was observed that previous studies on campaign speeches in Nigeria have tended to be a description and analysis of style, innovative and persuasive strategies of politicians, and manipulation of linguistic structures to champion individual interest in presidential election campaign speeches. Therefore, the researcher saw the need to investigate how texts reproduce and sustain power and unequal power relations in campaign texts and how ideological or political undertone was projected in gubernatorial campaign speeches. The study uses Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the role of language in creating and sustaining power relations as well as ideological structures in South-Western Nigeria. These power relations are created, enacted and legitimated by the application of certain linguistic devices. The researcher attempted to unravel hidden meanings and connotations of power in selected gubernatorial campaign speeches in South-Western zone namely: Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo and Osun states. The data for the study were purposively sampled from gubernatorial campaign speeches made in the four states during the 4th republic precisely 2007 - 2014. A total of eight speeches (two from each gubernatorial candidate of Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo and Osun state) were sampled and analyzed. The study drew from Fairclough’s (2001) Members’ Resources (MR), Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach (2004), and principles from Halliday’s system of mood and modality as theoretical bases. The findings showed that the South-Western gubernatorial aspirants deployed language as a strategy of domination and supremacy by exploiting lexical items and strong imperatives which allow them to impose their views on others. They created, by means of their campaign texts, asymmetrical power relations of privileged “we” and less privileged

“others”. Another form of dominance or power abuse is mind control which is also a form of manipulation through interference with processes of understanding the formation of biased mental models and social representations. This is mainly achieved through persuasion, coercion, and information- giving strategies. Thus, the candidates employ certain declaratives to neutralize the asymmetrical power relations that exist between them and the electorate when they want to liberalize power. This, usually, had the effect of reducing the authority of the candidate. The aspirants also used discourse structures that have implications for ideology as weapons of persuasion and pleading, positive self-representation of “us” and negative other representation of “them”, negotiation and personality projection. Additionally, the findings also reflected figurative expressions that are implicitly used to project different ideological positions of the aspirants. The figurative expressions predominantly used were metaphor, mainly metaphor of religion, time, journey, sports, violence and animal innovations which were used to project positive ideology of self and negative ideology of the other. There were also instances of linguistic items like idiomatic expressions, parallel structures, hyperbolic expressions and rhetorical devices used to unfold hidden ideological meanings. In the sampled data, there were some linguistic items which need to be drawn from the speakers’ cognition, and this can be accounted for by Fairclough’s Members’ Resources. Based on these findings, the researcher recommended that text producers and consumers should be aware of the hidden ideologies and coercive elements in texts, and this will inspire them on how to use and accept certain discursive practices. Such empowerment is important to enable the people to determine the true interests of the speeches and for them to be more active and less gullible citizens. The study, therefore, concluded that in actual sense, the plethora of texts produced, distributed and consumed in the 2007-2014 gubernatorial electioneering campaigns in the South-Western Nigeria not only promoted asymmetrical power relations, they also produced, reproduced, legitimized and maintained social structures that sustain domination.

Another related study was by Abdullahi - Idiagbon (2013) on “Meaning Conception and Perception in Political Campaign Ads – A Multimodal Discourse Approach”. The study was on the basis that the complexity of human thoughts is manifested in his words, actions, and other meaning-signaling devices. The use of language or graphical material like motion or motionless pictures/images as well as natural or electronic sound is imbued with information, ideology and properties capable of effectively conveying implicit and explicit meaning to the target audience. A multimodal discourse, hence, became a viable means of demonstrating all these qualities. Language-use, especially in politics, turns an individual or a state’s instrument used to arouse sentiments, win sympathy and trigger the sense of submission and followership. Thus, an appreciable quantum of meaning of the speaker’s utterances can be strongly enhanced by a multimodal discourse which makes use of multiple semiotic

resources like language, visual images, sound, space, etc. However, language or other media through which we communicate do not convey the 'objective truth' as it is made to believe; there is always subjectivity in the so-called objectivity.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) warns against the assumption of objectivity notwithstanding the multimodal means of such discourse, and it further sensitizes people on ways of politicking with language. CDA goes beyond the borders of text and other semiotic means employed in the process of encoding a campaign ad. to perceiving meaning as bi-directional and that the actual meaning is hidden but retrievable from many contending factors like social class, ideologies, ethnicity, religion and interests, etc. which are not even necessarily found in words, images, sound, music and other semiotic resources woven to construct such discourse. This study investigated a political campaign television ad of Nigerian's President Goodluck Jonathan in his desperate move to return as the President of Nigeria using, essentially, CDA approach to explore the multimodality of this discourse construction. The study further explored the perception of this campaign ad not only on the basis of audience's sophistication and individuality but also on what the speech seeks to achieve taking into account both linguistic and non-linguistic communicative facilities.

#### IV. THE SOCIAL SEMIOTIC THEORY

The origin of Social Semiotics can be traced to Functional Linguistics, more specifically in the work of Michael K. Halliday (1978). This theory was introduced in the above mentioned work and later developed as a full-fledge theory of multimodal sign-making in the works of Hodge, Kress and van Leeuwen (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2019). In Hallidayan theory, language is a product of social processes; the resources of a language are shaped by the functions it has developed to satisfy the communicative needs of people's lives. This approach to the analysis of multimodal communication is rooted in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics from which it takes its analytical principles. Hodge and Kress (1988) cited in Jewitt and Henriksen (2019) in their book *Social Semiotics* extended Halliday's approach from language to sign-making more elaborately, and posited that societies develop and shape all semiotic resources to fulfill given social functions, express a social group's values, systems of knowledge (i.e. discourses), structures and power roles. They explained instances from a range of social contexts involving a range of modes, but focused primarily on writing and image in 'print' media (e.g. newspapers, billboards).

Social semiotics is related to discourse analysis in that it concerns how people make meaning from cultural artifacts, but social semiotics includes signs and images in addition to verbal and linguistic material (Hodge & Kress, 1988 as cited in Chandler, 2013). The authors developed social semiotics in response to what they considered the

limitation to verbal language in their earlier work, and to reflect their view that "social structures and processes, messages and meanings as the proper standpoint from which to attempt the analysis of meaning systems" (p. xii). Social semiotics also involves the analysis of ideological complexes, defined by the researchers as "functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively imposed by one social group on another" (p. 3). Ideological complexes sustain relationships of both power and solidarity, and constrain behavior by "structuring the versions of reality on which social action is based" (p. 3).

Semiotics functions with some sort of resource, called "semiotic resource" (Jewitt & Henriksen, 2019, p. 147). They defined semiotic resource as the actions, materials and artifacts we use for communicative purposes" with. Similarly, van Leeuwen (2005) defined semiotic resource thus:

A meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime (p. 285).

Jewitt and Henriksen (2019), in buttressing the concept of semiotic resource stated that a person 'chooses' a semiotic resource from the available system of resources. They combine a semiotic resource (*a signifier*) with the meaning (*the signified*) that they want to express. Put differently, people express meanings through their selection from the semiotic resources that are available to them in a particular social situation and moment in time: in short, meaning is choice from a system. This choice is always socially located and regulated, both with respect to what resources are made available to whom, and the discourses that regulate and shape how modes are used by people.

In the context of this study, the social semiotic theory will be appreciated in the form of its metafunctionality in the political arena; with specific attention to political campaign advertisements on newspapers in the 2019 presidential and gubernatorial elections in Nigeria. The relevance of the theory is premised on the fact that the present study centers on semiotic resources, which cover the images, color, texture, inscriptions on placards, hats, vests, etc.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were drawn from newspaper advertisements in three national newspapers in Nigeria: *The Punch*, *Daily Sun* and *Vanguard* newspapers. The newspapers were published between December 2018 and February 2019 which was the most eventful period of political campaigning for the February 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Three (3) advertisements were purposively selected for this study owing to the semiotic resources found in them. The ads were basically those of the two major political parties in Nigeria: *Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)* and *the All Progressives Congress (APC)*. The ads were campaigns for Lagos and Abia States APC gubernatorial candidates and the PDP Presidential

candidates in the 2019 general elections. The decision to focus on the strongest parties was motivated by the fact that their political ads cut across most Nigerian newspapers towards the elections due to their financial capacity and media influence. The ads are subsequently scanned and opened using MS Image viewer for data presentation. The method of analysis was the discourse analysis approach.

## VI. SEMIOTIC RESOURCES IN NEWSPAPER POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE 2019 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

### 6.1 Personality Profiling as a Semiotic Resource in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

Personality profiling abounds in the concise but catchy autobiographic rundown of the APC candidate, Lagos State for the gubernatorial election which centers on his career and professionalism level. The ad producer gives a bolder and high class description of the professionalism of Sanwo-Olu in resource management both at the private and public sectors using the verbal material as shown in *figure 6.1* below.

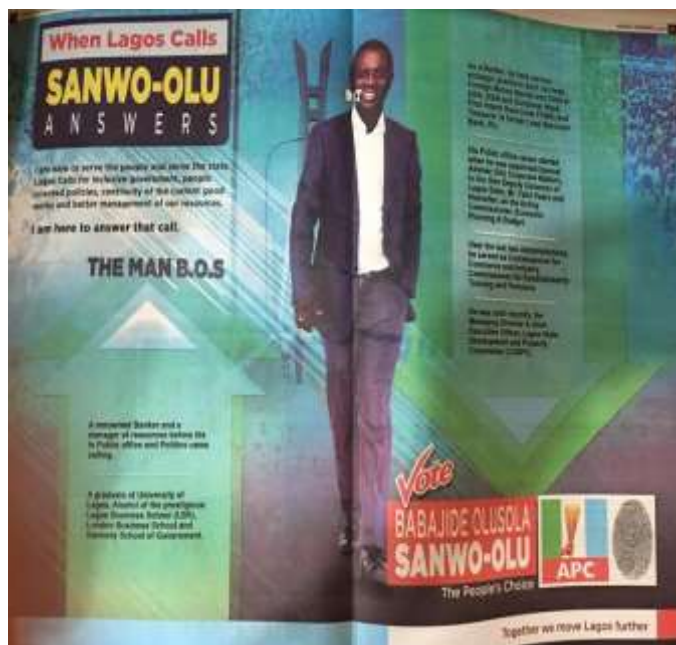


Figure 6.1: (Punch, Monday, December 3, 2018)

*“A renowned banker and a manager of resources before life in public office and politics came calling.”*

*“A graduate of University of Lagos. Alumni of the prestigious Lagos Business School (LBS), London Business School and Kennedy School of Government”.*

*“As a banker, he held various strategic positions such as Head, Foreign Money Market and DGM at UBA, DGM and Divisional Head, First Inland bank (now FCMB) and treasurer at former Lead Merchant Bank, Plc”.*

*“His public office career started when he was appointed Special Adviser (SA) Corporate Matters to the then Deputy*

*Governor of Lagos State, Mr Femi Pedro and thereafter, as the acting Commissioner Economic Planning and Budget”.*

*“Over the last two administrations, he served as Commissioner for Commerce and Industry, Commissioner for Establishment training and Pensions”.*

*“He was until recently, the Managing Director and chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Development and Property Corporation (LSOPC)”.*

### 6.2 Personality Profiling Based on Educational Qualification

The above concise juicy autobiography presented the APC gubernatorial candidate as one who is well schooled in all the areas that are relevant to resource management and politics, which is what the people need at the moment. The verbal and linguistic material above reveals so much about the discourse participant’s personality using very few words. Also, the ad producer is consistent with his move to sell beyond query the candidate’s competence to be voted for as the Governor of Lagos State. The semiotics here is evident in the use of verbal material as in: *“A graduate of University of Lagos. Alumni of the prestigious Lagos Business School (LBS), London Business School and Kennedy School of Government”*, to reveal to the electorates level of professionalism and expertise in resource management and by implicate reassuring them of his capability and all round competence in properly utilizing the finance of the state for the development of the state and its people. The above semiotic resource also goes further to bring to the knowledge of the electorates that the educational history of the candidate is not that which they cannot easily relate with. For instance, *“A graduate of University of Lagos...”* communicates not just any candidate or maybe a candidate with questionable educational history but a candidate to whose educational history they can attest. Beyond educational history easy to relate with, the verbal material *“...Alumni of the prestigious Lagos Business School (LBS), London Business School...”* communicates the candidate’s ability to manage the fast growing economy of Lagos State. The communicative intent in the above discourse is to present the personality of the candidate as one who is knowledgeable in business having passed through Lagos Business School and London Business School in order to give him an advantage.

### 6.3 Personality Profiling based on Experience

The personality of the candidate is also profiled as one with wealth of experience having worked in highly placed positions in both public and private sectors. For instance, the text *“As a banker, he held various strategic positions such as Head, Foreign Money Market and DGM at UBA, DGM and Divisional Head, First Inland bank (now FCMB) and treasurer at former Lead Merchant Bank, Plc”* portrays him as one efficient in managing public funds and so cannot disappoint the people of Lagos State if he is giving the opportunity to manage their fund and by extension their

economy. The above extract is not just presented to showcase the discourse participant's qualification but also to make so vivid his uncommon high level competence springing from academic qualifications to working experience. The fact that he is a banker says so much about his financial management skill and prowess. Knowing that just being a banker would not have been enough to convince the electorates to vote for him, the ad producer goes ahead to specify his designations in the various banks where he worked. Perhaps, not satisfied that the candidate's experience with private institutions would earn him the electorates' trust the ad producer goes ahead to reveal his activeness and experiences in public service. Here, the portfolios are of the essence.

And in the textual material which reads thus: *"His public office career started when he was appointed Special Adviser (SA) Corporate Matters to the then Deputy Governor of Lagos State, Mr Femi Pedro and thereafter, as the acting Commissioner Economic Planning and Budget"* further portrays Sanwo-Olu as one who is not new in governance so long as Lagos State is concerned. His being an acting Commissioner, Economic Planning and Budget also gives him some credit as one of the persons who have contributed greatly to what Lagos is today.

#### 6.4 Personality profiling Based on Popularity

The personality is deeply implied by the advert producer in the way he refers to him as **"the People's Choice"** at the bottom right hand side of the page. By the above description, the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress is presented as the most popular candidate for the gubernatorial position. Hence, whosoever does not want to waste his vote cannot afford to cast it for any other candidate for that election. Even when the elections have not been conducted yet, the advert producer already presents him as the winner thereby leaving the electorates who aforesaid had a different preferred candidate with no other choice than reconsider their decision on who to vote for during polls. This justifies the Hallidayan's Social Semiotic theory which explains that language is a product of social processes; the resources of a language are shaped by the functions it has developed to satisfy the communicative needs of people's lives. Hidden in language are the characteristics of praise, condemnation, rejection, acceptance, approval, appeal, foregrounding, etc. and sometimes, these characteristics are not necessarily explicit in verbal materials but implied using semiotic resources.

To further justify his claim the ad producer showcases the picture of a multitude of Lagos people calling to him. This multitude is presented as the background of the newspaper campaign advertisement design. The interesting thing about the visual text is that, the verbal language accompaniment of the semiotic artifact is creatively presented. The verbal expression which serves as the anchorage in the text is used to present Sanwo-Olu to the electorates as the best choice. The tone of the text is assertive as the political

aspirant can be misunderstood to be imposed on the electorate. The producers of the text are not begging the audience to vote for the candidate, but they seem to be saying that, if you want the best for yourself, you would rather vote for Sanwo-Olu. Also worthy of note is the attitude of the electorates as presented in the campaign advertisement. The attitude of the electorates on the other hand is manifest in the confidence and hope they exude lifting up their two hands to call Sanwo-Olu to claim the mandate freely and willingly given him by the people of Lagos State.

#### 6.5 Color as a Semiotic resource in the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

Extensively, some semiotic resources were employed by the ad producers and the discourse participants to score some political advantage. In this study, color is one of the focal points of analysis. The use of color goes beyond esthetic beauty and compliance to semiotic relevance. It reveals the discourse participants' motives in the context of politics beyond how the level lexical items could have revealed them. The use of colors such as green, yellow, red, etc. in the political campaign advertisements on newspapers to convey a meaning that literally may not be present is richly semiotic.

The dominating use of **green** and **red** in *fig. 6.1* constitutes the relay of the visual text as they interact with the verbal language for meaning making. The color **green** which forms the background for the personality profile of Sanwo-Olu re-emphasizes hope, progress, growth and light found in the personality of the discourse participant. Also observable in *fig. 1* above is the use of color **red**. The color is used to reinforce the love and preference of the above APC candidate by the electorate. In other words, there is an obvious appeal to blood relationship with the electorate; subsequently making him the 'people's choice'. Apart from giving an aesthetic appeal worthy of beholding, the colors portray the party and the candidate in a way that is undoubtedly acceptable by the electorates.



Figure 6.2: (DailySun, Friday, February 15, 2019)

In *fig. 6.2*, green as used in “Rejoice” by the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in Abia State, Uche Ogah conveys a meaning that is more pronounced in pragmatically interpreting the color. It expresses light and hope for the people of the state, which implies that the people have been in darkness. It is used by the ad producer to communicate good things on the way. This is reinforced by the ad producer as the lexical item, “Rejoice” is made bolder than “Abia” which is the state.

#### 6.6 Other Semiotic Resources on Newspaper Political Campaign Advertisements of the APC Abia State Gubernatorial and PDP Presidential Candidates for the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

Also, in *fig. 6.2*, the technique of making one of the photos larger than the other completely explains who the APC Abia State gubernatorial candidate is as well as his running mate. It is true that two persons are in above photo but their hierarchical inequality is quickly understood following the photo representation.

Another semiotic resource in *fig. 6.2* above is the undetachability of the two images on the photo. It communicates the inseparability of the two unidentical individuals as running mate. In other words, its implicature is that of togetherness and oneness of purpose. They may be two different individuals; their purpose is indivisible and so cannot be separated.



Figure 3: (Vanguard, Monday, February 11, 2019)

In *fig. 6.3* of this study, the semiotic resource showing the PDP Presidential aspirant, Atiku Abubakar with other top ranked members of the party dressed in *Agbada*, a northern attire that is associated with class, and then the discourse participant shaking hands with the Emir of Gwandu, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ilysu Bashar is not devoid of some semiosis. The handshake by the discourse participant with the Emir is iconicity for reception and possible acceptance. Considering the traditional status of the Emir, his shaking

hands with the discourse participant goes a long way to tell his people that “Atiku Abubakar is the candidate I want you to vote for in the Presidential elections”. This is what the ad producer wants the electorates to see in the campaign advertisement.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

This study has discursively analyzed some semiotic resources in newspaper political campaign advertisements of select candidates in the 2019 elections in Nigeria. The study reveals personality profiling based on educational qualification, based on experience and based on popularity. The profiling based on educational qualification presents The APC gubernatorial candidate of Lagos State as one who is well schooled in all the areas that are relevant to resource management and politics, which is what the people need at the moment using some verbal materials. Based on experience, the profiling portrays the participant as one efficient in managing public funds and so cannot disappoint the people of Lagos State if he is given the opportunity to manage their fund and by extension their economy. Based on popularity, the participant is profiled as the most popular candidate; the only one popular enough to win gubernatorial seat of Lagos State in the 2019 general elections.

The study further concludes that color, image placement, attire and handshakes are also semiotic resources found in the newspaper political campaign advertisements of select candidates in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Green and red are identified to be instrumental in communicating growth, light and love. Image placement in the study reveals hierarchical inequality in the official positions of the two participants as well as the inseparability of the two unidentical running mates of the APC, Abia State. Northern attire *Agbada*, which is associated with class, and the shaking of hands by the PDP Presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar and the Emir of Gwandu, Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ilysu Bashar communicate oneness and acceptance.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings of the study, the author recommends thus:

1. Further study should be carried out to uncover the communicative elements in political campaign advertisements in Nigeria newspapers.
2. Further studies on semiotic resource should be conducted to include other States and candidates in order to show similarities and differences among them.

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