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Codeswitching and Semiotic Modes in Nigerian Political Campaign Advertisements: Evaluating Effects & Perception

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ABSTRACT

This study explores codeswitching and semiotic modes in 2023 Nigerian Presidential Campaign Advertisements. Three (3) political campaign advertisements and party logos from the three major Nigerian political parties, APC, PDP, and LP, alongside 200 survey responses, were analyzed using a mixed descriptive quantitative and qualitative data analysis method. The markedness theory and social semiotic theory were adopted in this study. Findings indicate that linguistic codeswitching and visual strategies such as salience, gaze, and foregrounding were used to perform certain rhetorical functions, such as wooing the electorate's support and solidarity, ethnic and religious affiliations, party identity projection, and portraying the candidate's positive identity by emphasizing the leadership skills that make them fit for the role. Despite the persuasive effects of the strategies, the survey responses indicated that voters also considered the previous performance of past leaders. Thus, while culturally informed language and visual strategies can enhance the appeal of a message, political campaign designers should also prioritize communicating performance-based credibility in their campaign resources.

INTRODUCTION

Language and semiotic modes are crucial elements in political campaign advertisements. In a multilingual and multicultural society such as Nigeria, political advertising is not a mere dissemination of political information to gain voters' support, it involves the strategic use of language and semiotic elements such as colors, logos, images, and cultural symbolism to create campaign messages that rhetorically resonate with the voters and establish a form of connection between them (Osisanwo, 2022). Political advertising is a common media resource that has become an inextricable part of politics; it is used persuasively to appeal to voters during elections for political offices (Olumuyiwa, 2013). Language and visual elements are carefully crafted "to gain access to the heart of the electorate to woo and win them over to the side of an intending public office holder" (Osisanwo, 2022). Any instances of erroneous use of language in political speeches or campaign advertisements could negatively impact the overall outcome of the election. Thus, deliberate efforts are made in the linguistic and semiotic choices used in speeches and campaign materials. Political advertisements in Nigeria employ various media; traditional and new media forms of communication, such as newspaper advertisements, billboards, posters, social media posts, and radio and television advertisements, are often used to convey political messages and influence voters. As large and strategically placed advertisements, billboards dominate public spaces and rely on bold visuals, slogans, symbols, and language to capture attention (Essien, 2025). Placards are portable and often used during campaign rallies, making them instrumental for immediate and localized communication. Both media utilize language and semiotic tools to construct meanings,

playing a crucial role in influencing public opinion.

Nigeria, a country in West Africa, operates a multi-party system that allows multiple political parties to compete for electoral positions. In the 2023 general election in Nigeria, eighteen (18) political parties contested for the presidency but out of these parties, three major political parties had intense rivalry during the 2023 election which are the All Progressive Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and Labor Party (LP). These political parties strategically used political advertisements to create awareness about their parties, create group membership and affinity, and seek solidarity and alignment with those who share their political ideologies. As a multilingual and multi-ethnic society, these political parties portray linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, and affinity in their campaign advertisements, which have significant implications for their electoral activities. Linguistic diversity is mostly seen in the aspect of codeswitching, where two or more languages are used on the billboard to achieve specific communicative goals, while cultural diversity and political affinity are portrayed through some semiotic tools such as the attire, colors, and symbols of the political candidates on the billboards. The political parties creatively used the English language (lingua franca) alongside Nigerian Pidgin and other Nigerian indigenous languages to garner support and appeal to the public to vote for their political parties during the election. The three major political parties had their candidates representing the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, which are Yoruba (west), Igbo (east), and Hausa (North); as a result, the election went beyond just a political competition to include ethnic based rivalry. Language is used alongside pictures, graphic design, symbols, and color as multimodal resources through

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which the political parties convey their intended messages and form solidarity with their supporters.

Statement of Problem

As a multilingual and visually rich political landscape, political actors in Nigeria employ linguistic strategies such as codeswitching and visual elements to construct persuasive messages to achieve political goals and influence voters' perceptions. The Nigerian political landscape has received various scholarly attention from linguists and communication experts. Previous works, among others, have explored codeswitching in political speeches (Opeibi, 2017; Ayulo, 2022) and semiotics in Nigerian political discourses (Felicia, 2019; Adeagbo, 2020; Adegoju, 2022). Despite these foci of research on rhetorical strategies in political discourse, limited research has studied codeswitching and semiotic modes together in a political campaign advertisement, with a focus on their effects on the voters' political perception, particularly in the present political atmosphere in Nigeria. Therefore, the current study aims to fill this gap by evaluating codeswitching and semiotic modes in the 2023 Nigerian political campaign advertisements and their effects on voters' perceptions. The understanding of the interplay between language and visuals as a meaning-making resource in political advertisement and how these meanings are received and evaluated by audiences is significant to evaluate the effect of linguistic and visual strategies on voters' reception of political advertisement.

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the linguistic and verbal strategies employed for a persuasive effect in the political campaign advertisements.
2. To investigate how language and visuals in political advertisements reflect or reinforce political ideologies and cultural contexts.
3. To evaluate how the audience's political perception influences their reception and evaluation of the political advertisements.

Research Questions

1. How do Nigerian political campaign advertisements employ code-switching and semiotic elements for a persuasive effect?
2. How do verbal and visual elements interact to reflect or reinforce political ideologies?
3. How does the interplay of verbal and visual modes influence audiences' reception and evaluation of the political advertisements?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Visuals in Multimodal Discourse: An Overview

In discussing the semiotic landscape, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) view language as one of the key modes within a semiotic system in which meaning is derived from various signs and symbols. They state that "writing

is itself a form of visual communication". This implies that language functions with other modes, such as images and colors, to produce comprehensive meanings in communication. Language is not a dominant form of communication; it works in conjunction with other semiotic modes to create meaning within a specific context. In political advertisements, language and visuals are often used to convey political messages to the public. They are strategically combined to create a compelling and persuasive message that appeals to both rational and emotional responses. Language and visuals in political communication form a multimodal approach in which language is used to state the policies and goals of the candidate, while visuals project the candidate's identity, affiliation, and credibility. The use of language and semiotic modes allows political ads to create a comprehensive message that actively engages the audience.

Multilingualism is a common phenomenon in Nigeria, with about 500 languages used for interaction (Adegbite, 2010). Thus, codeswitching is an inevitable effect of the language contact situation in the present Nigerian linguistic landscape (Blench, 2020), where various languages are in contact (Adegbite & May, 2023). There are three major Indigenous languages in Nigeria: Yoruba (Southwest), Igbo (Southeast), and Hausa (North), which are used alongside English as the official language and Nigerian Pidgin (NPE), an English-lexifier pidgin used as a lingua franca in Nigeria (Akerstrom, 2010). Codeswitching involves the alternation between two or more languages in interaction. In earlier research, there was a notion that bilingual speakers code-switch due to a lack of proficiency in a language, which makes them switch to the other language to cover up their low language proficiency. Contrarily, Gracia (2009) demonstrates that "Codeswitching often occurs spontaneously among bilingual speakers in communication with others who share their languages. Far from being a sign of inadequacy or sloppy language usage or lack of knowledge, it has been shown that codeswitching is a sophisticated linguistic skill and a characteristic of speech of fluent bilinguals". In other words, rather than a lack of proficiency, in most cases, bilingual speakers code-switch to achieve certain communicative goals and establish social relationships. By integrating these two aspects into political advertising, this study examines how political campaign advertisements utilize linguistic and semiotic elements to effectively communicate their intentions to the public.

Codeswitching & Semiotic Modes in Political Campaigns: An Empirical Review

This section explores the previous studies on language and semiotics in political advertisements. Scholars have examined the use of language and semiotic tools in political advertisements (Ayulo, 2022; Batrynychuk, 2022; Gochenco, 2013; Moody, 2020; Olumuyiwa, 2012; Opeibi, 2017). Ayulo (2022) unravels the semiotic tools used in the Nigerian 2019 political advertisements by the

All Progressive Congress Party (APC). The study unravels how personality profiling, color, images, and attire served as semiotic resources in the campaign advertisements of the APC candidates of Lagos State and Abia State, using social semiotic theory and the discourse analysis approach for data analysis. Findings revealed that the posters show personality profiling of the APC gubernatorial candidate of Lagos State based on his educational qualifications, experience, and popularity. Also, color, image placement, attire, and handshakes were semiotic resources found in the newspaper political campaign advertisements of the select candidates in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Batrynychuk *et al.* (2022) analyze the symbolic representation of the verbal and non-verbal levels of political advertisements in the local election campaign in Chernivti, Ukraine. They applied the principles of the generic structural potential of advertisements and a systemic functional approach to analyze twenty-five (25) leaflets and newspaper advertisements. The data analysis occurs on both literal and interpretative levels of meaning. The visual components of the advertisements include the lead and display, and linguistic aspects include Announcement (Opening), Enhancer, and Call-and-visit Information. The study concludes that political candidates attempt to influence voters' perceptions by providing information about their affiliation, position on the ballot, and credible identity, thereby shaping social, political, patriotic, and economic viewpoints.

Following the functional approach to studying codeswitching in political discourse, Gochenco (2013) examines codeswitching in political television campaign advertisements in the Philippines. The study explores the political genre as it portrays socio-cultural context through an examination of codeswitching and the functions it serves in discourse, such as reducing social distance and providing objective information about the political party and the candidate. Moody (2020) studies the use of codeswitching as a political discourse device by Senator Kaine during the 2016 presidential election, examining how the usage of codeswitching varies based on each speech context and situation. Findings from the article show that Senator Kaine intensely code-switched during his speech, a political campaign speech in Miami and Florida, where he used it as a strategy to advocate support and establish solidarity with the people, and he engaged in repetition of code-switched expressions to emphasize his points. Within the political discourse in Nigeria, Olumuyiwa (2012) studies the use of codeswitching in Olusegun Mimiko's political billboards in Nigeria. The study states that codeswitching/code-mixing is used to meet the communicative needs of people who have low proficiency in the English language. The article concludes that most of the political billboards of Olusegun Mimiko are used to eulogize him. Opeibi (2017) studies the use of codeswitching and code-mixing in political advertisements as a campaign strategy by Nigerian politicians. The study is hinged on the speech accommodation theory and the rational choice model.

Using the qualitative method, the article analyzes campaign ads found in Nigerian newspapers. Findings show that codeswitching is employed in campaign ads to establish solidarity, project emotional appeals, create meaning, and promote ethnic affinity.

The above studies have either explored language or semiotics in political advertisements as communicative strategies to engage the electorates, much has not been done on the study of codeswitching and semiotics as communicative instruments in political advertisements in Nigeria. This present study aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring how codeswitching and visual elements are strategically used together in the Nigerian 2023 presidential election as rhetorical devices to engage the electorate and persuade the public.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Markedness Theory from Sociolinguistics to analyze code-switching practices, and on Socio Semiotics, particularly through Multimodal Discourse Analysis, to investigate how the textual and visual resources in political posters function as meaning-making tools. Together, these frameworks reveal how linguistics and semiotics contribute to meaning-making, identity construction, and self positioning in political advertising.

Social Semiotic

The Social Semiotic framework developed by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* views communication as inherently multimodal, in which meaning is constructed not only through language but through a range of semiotic resources including image, layout, color, gesture, salience, gaze, and typography. Social semiotics emphasizes that these resources are not neutral; they are shaped by cultural context, ideology, and power relations. Multimodal discourse analysis enables an examination of how political posters integrate various modes (text, imagery, color schemes, and spatial arrangements) to persuade, inspire, or manipulate. "Social semiotics has been a social theory of meaning and communication in which semiotic resources with varying affordances are used as tools by sign makers for serving particular social needs required in a given social context" (May, 2019). In other words, it focuses on the social dimension of the meaning-making process, using multimodal resources that communicate social and cultural practices. The theory of social semiotics relies on semiotic modes that include the more obvious modes, such as signs, verbal, gestures, images, videos, layout, etc., and the less obvious modes, such as food and dress, all of which portray some cultural values and are used for meaning making. Multimodality entails "the different potentials for providing means of expressing views, positions, attitudes, facts, and to enable the production of what is best suited to a specific task or need" (Kress, 2015). In other words, within the framework of social semiotics, meaning-making is usually

multimodal, relying on the interaction of different modes to convey meaningful messages in a specific context.

In the framework of Social Semiotic, meaning is seen as a response to the prompt of a social agent (the designer), whose intentions are expressed through semiotic elements and interpreted by the audience. The designer strategically combines semiotic elements to achieve specific goals in a particular context and environment, considering the environment, the purpose, and the audience as the recipients of the message (Kress & Gualberto, 2019). An important aspect of social semiotic theory is sign-making, where the connection between meaning (the signified) and form (the signifier) is not arbitrary but influenced by the sign-maker's intent. The maker selects material signifiers that best express their intended meanings while accounting for the relevant contextual factors. In communication, meaning-making happens in two stages: first, the initial sign is created by the rhetor/designer, and second, it is reinterpreted and transformed by the audience based on their interests and semiotic resources. This dual process results in modes that are continually reshaped through the collaborative efforts of the initial rhetor/designer and the audience as re-designers. From a social semiotic perspective, a text is a composite of cohesive and interconnected signs created through various modes. A text's meaning is ultimately realized through its social use.

The Markedness Theory

The Markedness theory proposed by Myer Scotton (1993) emphasizes that codeswitching is an indexicality of social negotiation. This suggests that language derives its social meaning from the social identity it projects. The model accounts for the socio-psychological motivations of speakers when they engage in codeswitching. Code choices in interaction are marked or unmarked; an unmarked choice occurs when the language choice is expected, frequently used, or generally used code which makes the right and obligations set accepted and normal, while the marked choice occurs when the language choice is unexpected, unusual, or not frequently used, making the rights and obligations set become negotiated. When speakers use a particular code in interaction, they tend to reflect both their views and their relationship with others in the interaction. Scholars such as Auer (1998) and Adegbija (2004) have noted that such linguistic shifts are often used to manage interpersonal relationships and political alignment. The markedness theory emphasizes that there are motivations that influence code choices in interactions

There are various ways of speaking in a speech community, which result in speakers' choice of codes in interaction, depending on the social groups or situational contexts of the conversation. According to Myers-Scotton (1993), "the Markedness Model proposes that speakers have a sense of markedness regarding available linguistic codes for any interaction, but choose their codes based on the personal and or relation with others they wish to

have in place". This implies that as speakers engage in code choice, they are aware of the Markedness of their linguistic choice and the effects of the choice of one code over the other in an interaction. Speakers choose either the marked choice or the unmarked choice to achieve specific communicative goals in interaction. "Because the unmarked choice is 'safer' (i.e., it conveys no surprises because it indexes an expected interpersonal relationship), speakers generally make this choice. But not always. Speakers assess the potential costs and rewards of all choices, and make their decisions, typically unconsciously" (ibid 75). The unmarked code is usual and expected among the interactants in discourse as it indicates some form of interpersonal relationship between them. "Switching away from the marked unmarked choice in a conventionalized exchange signals that the speaker is trying to negotiate a different rights and obligations balance as salient in place of the unmarked one, given the situational features" (Myer-Scotton, 2007). That is, in a situation where speakers do not use unmarked code, they use the marked code, which appears unusual and indicates an attempt to switch the form of communication in the conversation. Thus, such switching indicates a marked choice that flouts the unmarked choice maxim. As a violation, it is often disruptive, which could be in a negative or positive sense. What is more, a marked choice could be positive by mitigating social distance as a signal of solidarity, and it could be negative if it increases social distance by making differences between the speakers salient.

Relevance to Study

The dual theoretical lens, Markedness theory and Social Semiotics, provides a robust framework for understanding how Nigerian political campaign advertisements operate as strategic acts of communication. Their application explains the effectiveness of strategic use of language and visuals in campaign messaging, providing valuable and practical insights for political practitioners and campaign strategists seeking to engage electorates and persuade the public through political campaigns. By exploring how language and visual elements are strategically used in political advertisements, the study offers valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of political discourse in Nigeria, portraying the significance of language in identity construction and cultural representation in politics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis (utilizing language and semiotic tools) with descriptive quantitative analysis from a structured questionnaire to determine voters' perceptions of codeswitching and semiotic modes in the 2023 Nigerian election campaign advertisements. This section comprises four major aspects, including the process of data collection, data analysis, presentation of results, and ethical considerations.

Data Collection Procedure

This study collected data from two sources: political

campaign advertisements and responses from voters' surveys. The three major political parties, All Progressive Congress (APC), Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), and Labor Party (LP), are the focus of this study, with one political ad analyzed for each as a case study. Although there are several political ads used during the 2023 election campaign in Nigeria, the three selected campaign advertisements are used as samples to analyze political campaign ads in Nigeria. These parties were the most popular and vibrant during the 2023 presidential election, and they received strong support from the electorate, making the electoral competition very intense. The selection criteria are based on ads that feature codeswitching and semiotic elements, including colors, images, and cultural elements. These campaign ads are collected from the Facebook media page of each party and carefully examined to analyze codeswitching and semiotic modes. To complement the visual analysis, a structured questionnaire is shared to measure voters' perceptions of the campaign ads. The questions assess voters' responses to the ads in terms of mobilization for the party's support and voting decisions. Using a random sampling technique, the survey is distributed to diverse demographic groups, including age, ethnicity, and level of education.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis is structured into two categories: visual analysis and survey data analysis. For the visual analysis, three (3) 2023 Nigerian presidential campaign advertisements alongside their logos were analyzed, focusing on codeswitching between the languages and their effects on the electorate's political perceptions, mobilization, and support. The semiotic analysis focuses on the use of colors, images, cultural signals, party logos, and slogans in the ads, interpreting them to reveal their intended communicative functions. For the descriptive quantitative analysis, an online questionnaire is used to assess voters' exposure to political advertisements and their opinions on codeswitching and semiotic tools as campaign strategies in Nigerian politics. Two hundred (200) responses were collected and analyzed using a descriptive statistical method to interpret the pattern of frequency and percentages in the results, revealing voters' perceptions of the campaign advertisement and its impact on voting decisions.

Presentation of Results

The results of this research are presented in quantitative summaries, using tables to display the patterns in voters' responses. Voters' responses are provided next to the questions, ensuring data clarity. In addition, an analysis of the visual campaign ads is provided, revealing the switching format (English – indigenous languages, English – Pidgin) in each campaign ad and the strategic positioning of the semiotic elements to achieve the intended goals. Finally, the three ads are compared to reveal the specific pattern in each and the intended function.

Ethical Consideration

This study follows ethical standards, ensuring the integrity of research. Responders' personal information was not collected to ensure their confidentiality. Informed consent is obtained before proceeding with the data collection; responders are informed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time. The collected data is used only during the duration of the research and stored in a protected database. The analyzed political ads are publicly available resources posted on the media platform. To ensure neutrality and objectivity, this study solely focuses on language and semiotic elements in the campaign ads, without any biased political view or party support.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discourse is regarded as a language in use. In other words, it is a language used to perform functions in a specific context. In this light, the political billboards are seen as a text that is constructed to perform specific communicative functions. Within the socio-political context in Nigeria, political ads are strategically crafted to achieve specific goals through the alternation of codes combined with other semiotic resources. The focus is to examine how these communicative strategies are used to perform rhetorical functions that have significant effects on the voters.

In the above billboard, codeswitching (Yoruba-English) is used alongside color, symbols, and cultural attire as



Figure 1: Data 1

semiotic tools to strategically convey the political message and reflect the identity of the political party. The billboard opens with the logo of the All Progressive Congress (APC), showing a hand holding a traditional broom on the background of colors green, white, blue, and red, at the top left corner of the billboard, and the slogan "Renewed hope" on a green background at the top right

corner of the billboard, which Jewitt (2009) refer to as a multimodal ensemble that combine multiple modes in meaning making. In Nigeria, the traditional broom is a common household cleaning tool made from stiff, dried palm fronds, typically bound tightly at one end with twine, which culturally signifies unity. It operates as a semiotic resource (Van Leeuwen, 2006) that draws on indigenous cultural codes, specifically the Yoruba and Nigerian political tradition, where the broom signifies solidarity and a shared purpose of “sweeping away corruption.” In this context, the broom is not just a logo but a semiotic tool that carries ideological weight and communicates political cleansing and renewal. The All Progressive Congress used the concept of broom as a campaign strategy, with the pledge to clean the country of bad governance and ensure unity. The colors in the logo, green, white, blue, and red, each have symbolic meanings linked to the party’s values and mission for Nigeria; green reflects Nigeria’s natural resources and agricultural heritage, which signals the party’s commitment to growth, while white stands for peace and transparency. Blue represents stability and trust, and red conveys strength and determination to combat the nation’s challenges. These elements reinforced the identity of the political party and the commitment to ensure unity, growth, and prosperity. Pictures of the president and the vice president in their cultural attire are placed at the center of the billboard, with a direct gaze, which in visual grammar terms is referred to as a demand gaze (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), inviting interaction, trust, and alignment with the political subjects.

The expression “O gbiyanju, O peregede, O see gbekede” which means “he tried, he excelled, he is reliable” in English, is written in a big bold font which is a typographical technique that establish salience, which Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) describes as a visual strategy to make elements stand out from the others to attract the viewers’ attention. The typography attracts the electorate’s attention and signals an in-group membership and social inclusion with the Yoruba ethnic group. In this situation, English is the unmarked choice, while Yoruba is marked as a deviation from the expected norm to achieve certain political goals (Myer-Scotton, 1993). The expression is written in Yoruba to signal a close alliance with the Yoruba voters. The billboard is on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway way which is an area located in southwest Nigeria where there are also speakers of other languages. Although the use of Yoruba is an index of solidarity with the Yoruba ethnic, it is also viewed as a way of excluding speakers of other languages from that specific message. The use of Yoruba narrows the social distance between the presidential candidate and the speakers of the Yoruba language. The choice to only alternate Yoruba and English in the presidential billboard is a strategic move to reflect ethnic identity and clamor for ethnic support. The expression “renewed hope,” which is the APC party campaign slogan for the 2023 election, is written in English to address a wider audience about the party’s aim to restore positive hope in the nation.

The billboard’s opening shows the expression “We Are #OBIdient!!!” The word “OBIdient” is enclosed in a



Figure 2: Data 2 (Labor Party Logo)

hashtag as salience (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020), which is deliberately done to attract readers’ attention as a form of political activism. The compositional structure depicts the given-new information value according to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2020), where the phrase “We Are #OBIdient!!!” appear at the top as the ideal, “for something to be ideal means that it is presented as the idealized or generalized essence of the information, hence also as its, ostensibly, most salient part” (187), while real information presents more specific ‘down-to-earth’ information (188). The top-bottom information value also features the party logo, placed beside the party ballot paper, indicating that people should vote for the party’s candidate during the election, and the candidate’s image is placed at the lower side of the visual space which re-introduces the candidate as real information alongside a quote that marks his credibility for the position. The prominent colors used in the billboard are green, white, and red, which signify agricultural heritage, peace, and strength. The Labor Party logo, featuring the images of a father, mother, and child, symbolizes the party’s recognition of family values, projecting their commitment to serving everyone in Nigerian society. Peter Obi’s picture is placed on the left side of the billboard, with a hand gesture that signals his assertiveness to ensure growth and development. According to Van Leeuwen (2005), multimodal texts rely on semiotic resources that are deployed in certain ways in specific social environments, such as political advertisements. The Labor Party presidential candidate’s name is Peter Obi, from which the slogan ‘OBI-dient’

is coined as a neologism with a deliberate capitalization of 'OBP' for emphasis. It serves as a discursive identity marker. Obi is an Igbo word that means 'heart' and is used to refer to the head of a household within the Igbo culture in Nigeria; thus, the supporters of the political party referred to themselves as "Obident," which is used as a rallying slogan for the 2023 general election. In this situation, English is the unmarked code, while Igbo is the marked code (Myer-Scotton, 1993), as it is a deliberate move from the common term to signal support for the candidate. Further, Nigerian Pidgin, which is widely used and functions as a lingua franca in Nigeria, is used in the billboard as a marked code. The words 'papa', 'mama', and 'pikin' which are Pidgin words that translate to 'father', 'mother', and 'children' in English, are used to address the public, therefore creating a sense of collective responsibility and grassroots involvement. The switch between Igbo, English, and Pidgin shows the party's effort to reach a wider audience.

The campaign poster strategically combines visual and verbal elements to project the party's political identity



Figure 3: Data 3 (PDP Logo)

and ideology. It consists of an acronym with each letter of the candidate's name used to represent unique leadership qualities (Agile, truly visionary, inspiring, keen, and unifying leadership), placed on the right side of the placard, depicting the given-new information value structure (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). In this case, the candidate's image is given, while the acronym is new. "For something to be 'given' means that it is

presented as something the viewer already knows, as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message", while "new" means that it is presented as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something to which the viewer must pay special attention" (181). There is a switch after the name of the candidate to Hausa, with the term "Wazirin Adamawa," which means "the chief advisor of Adamawa." In this instance, English is the unmarked code, while Hausa is the marked code. Since the title has an equivalent in English, it could have been written in English. Still, it is deliberately written in Hausa and left untranslated to project the ethnic identity and the leadership identity of the candidate, popularly known in Adamawa state. This is to create a close relationship with the Hausas and emphasize that he has been bestowed a prestigious and high leadership title in Adamawa state; therefore, he is equally fit to lead the whole nation.

Visually, the logo of the party consists of an umbrella, which offers a symbolic affordance that projects the identity of the party (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Denotatively, an umbrella shields one from the sunshine and rainfall. For the party's representation, the umbrella positions the People's Democratic Party as the protector of the masses, shielding the masses from suffering and pain. The vivid representation of the logo stands to reinforce the aim of the party to the electorate. The party logo also includes green, white, and red, which have cultural meanings of growth, peace, and strength. According to Van Leeuwen (2005), colors are not merely neutral; they are semiotic cues that carry cultural meanings. The placard features the image of the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar, dressed in a native Hausa attire, placed at the center of the poster, referred to as the nucleus of the composition, thus signaling his centrality to the proposed national vision. It creates salience that demands viewers' attention (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2020). His neutral facial expression and traditional attire visually index ethnic legitimacy and cultural continuity, appealing to regional voters through symbolic realism.

Quantitative Analysis

This section entails the analysis of responses from the survey, providing details on voters' reception of the use of semiotic modes and codeswitching in the campaign advertisements. The table includes the questions, the number of responses, and their percentages, revealing the patterns of responses in the survey. The analysis offers valuable insight into the effectiveness of campaign advertisements in mobilizing support and influencing voters' perceptions based on the language used and semiotic elements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data show that most respondents (60%) indicated

Table 1: Analysis of responses from the survey

How often did you encounter political advertisements (billboards, posters, and placards) during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election campaigns?	Number of Responses	Percentage
Daily	120	60
Occasionally	70	35
Rarely	10	5
Did you notice the use of multiple languages in political advertisements?	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	172	86
No	28	14
How often did you notice the use of symbols, colors, or imagery in the 2023 Nigerian presidential political advertisements?	Number of Responses	Percentage
Frequently	120	60
Occasionally	60	30
Rarely	20	10
How did you feel about political advertisements that use a mix of languages (e.g., English and your local language)?	Number of Responses	Percentage
Relatable	160	80
Indifferent	32	16
Confusing or less appealing	8	4
Did you support a candidate because they used your local language or symbols that reflect your culture in their advertisements?	Number of Responses	Percentage
No	120	60
Yes	80	40
Did the use of multiple languages and semiotic modes (symbols, colors, or cultural references) in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential campaign advertisements influence your perception of a candidate, message, and your support for them?	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
No, they did not influence my decision	118	59
Yes, they influenced my decision	67	33.5
I found them irrelevant	15	7.5

they encountered political advertisements daily, which portrays the wide usage of political advertisements during the 2023 Nigerian political campaigns. This frequency of exposure suggests that the political advertisements were a significant component of the campaign aimed at exposing the electorate to the political messages. The significant majority (86%) indicated they noticed the use of multiple languages in the campaign ads, portraying the common deliberate strategy of the political parties to reach diverse linguistic and ethnic groups in the country, enhancing relatability and engagement with the ads' messages, which ascertain that multilingualism is common linguistic phenomenon in Nigeria (Adegbite, 2010). 14% of the respondents indicated that they did not notice the use of multiple languages in the campaign ads, which suggests that they paid attention to the message rather than the composition of the ad.

The data show that 60% of respondents frequently observed symbols, colors, and imagery in advertisements, which reinforces Jewitt's (2009) multimodal ensemble that combines multiple modes in meaning-making to

establish visual connections with candidates or political parties. 30% and 10% of occasional and rare exposure indicate that some ads were more visually elaborate than others, and some of the respondents did not focus on the symbolic aspect of the campaign ads. 80% of the respondents found the codeswitching relatable, indicating that codeswitching is a common linguistic phenomenon in Nigerian society, creating a sense of cultural relevance. Only a small percentage (4%) found it confusing or less appealing, while 16% were indifferent, which suggests that codeswitching was generally well-received and enhanced engagement with the ads, but few of the respondents found it insignificant.

Further, 60% of respondents indicated that they did not support the candidates because they used language or cultural symbols that resonated with them in their ads, while 40% indicated that they supported the candidates based on the language and cultural symbols used in their ads. This shows that the use of codeswitching and semiotic modes received a mixed reaction from the electorate. Similarly, most of the respondents (60%)

indicated that codeswitching and semiotic modes in the campaign adverts did not influence their perceptions of the candidate, which indicates that most of the electorate prioritized other factors, such as the goals and integrity of the candidates. In contrast, 33.5% felt influenced by these communicative strategies, as they perceived them as signals of cultural relevance that resonate with their values and identities, which made the candidate more relatable or trustworthy. Meanwhile, a small group (7.5%) found these techniques irrelevant, indicating they view such elements as inconsequential in their voting choices, instead focusing on more crucial aspects of a candidate's campaign. These perceptions are further reflected in the respondents' responses to a closed-ended question: "Would you support a candidate who uses your local language or symbols that reflect your culture in their advertisements? why?" The following are randomly selected responses from the respondents.

"It depends on who would work diligently and ensure good governance."

"No, I am more focused on candidates that would work well."

"I voted for my choice."

"No. Because politics have now changed. Voters don't have to vote based on party anymore".

"I would rather support any candidate with the best Ideas."

"No. I will only support a candidate who has the capacity and the masses at heart."

"No, leadership should not be based on any affinity, but rather on the ability to function in office."

Overall, the data illustrate that despite the high prevalence and strategic use of both language and semiotic modes such as colors, symbolic images, and cultural attires, in the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election advertisements, electorates did not only base their voting decisions on the linguistic and symbolic contents, rather they considered other crucial aspects such as the capability of the candidates to ensure good governance. These tools generally succeeded in resonating with the audience, particularly in creating relatability through multilingual content and visual symbols. However, their impact on actual voting decisions was limited, as the tools did not significantly influence the respondents' choices, suggesting that while codeswitching and semiotics are effective for engagement, they may not be as powerful in changing voter behavior.

The mixed reactions to codeswitching and semiotic tools in the political ads are linked to the performance of previous governance in the country, in which politicians make promises using these communicative strategies to influence the electorate's decisions, but afterward, they fail to fulfill their electoral promises. For many, linguistic diversity and semiotic modes in the ads are mere strategies to win the trust and alliance of the voters. This skepticism made some of the voters focus more on policy specifics and tangible commitments rather than stylistic techniques in ads. For others, however, these semiotic tools aligned

them linguistically and symbolically with the identity of the candidates and their political parties, which suggests that some of the voters were not swayed by the performances of the previous governments. In this way, the track record of past governance contributes to the diverse voter behavior.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we argued that codeswitching is an inherent part of a bilingual or multilingual society. In a society where people speak different languages, there is a high tendency to code-switch for various reasons. In the analyzed political advertisements, it is observed that codeswitching is used to perform certain functions, which include wooing electorates' support and solidarity, ethnic and religious affiliations, party identity projection, and portraying the candidate's positive identity by emphasizing the leadership skills that make them fit for the role. The discussion indicates that the campaign advertisements across the three political parties portray similar features and patterns of alternation between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages. As the general unmarked code, English is unmarked in the advertisements, while the indigenous languages operate as the marked code, which is deliberately used to enhance the effect of the conveyed messages in the advertisements. While English is used to reach the public, the alternation with the indigenous languages creates an in-group membership categorization that closely includes those who understand the indigenous language and excludes those who do not, as a strategic instrument of a political campaign. This is also seen as a display of power dynamics whereby the indigenous languages of the presidential candidates are used as the alternate languages in the advertisement, although those advertisements are in communities where other languages are spoken. Also, the analysis shows that the political advertisements did not portray instances of verbal attack through language use; rather, each party tries to enhance the candidacy of their presidential candidate through strategic use of language and other semiotic resources to promote the reception of their campaign. The visual elements in the advertisements are strategically constructed, which contribute to the messages conveyed. It is necessary to note that the Nigerian election is not just a politically based rivalry but runs deep in ethnic affiliation, whereby most people used the basis of ethnicity as the basis of their candidate. Thus, the advertisements heavily involve the display of ethnicity and culture, portrayed through the native dress of the candidates to signal cultural identity. The use of Indigenous languages indicates a commitment to inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, acknowledging the importance of linguistic diversity in Nigerian society. The strategic combination of linguistic and visual elements in the advertisement indicates the significance of effective communication strategies in political campaigns, as they shape public opinion, mobilize voters, and influence electoral outcomes.

Despite the relevance of the strategies in shaping political narratives, voters did not entirely rely on them to make their voting decisions, but in consideration of the performance of the past political leaders who had also used the strategy but failed to fulfill their campaign promises. The study recommends that while culturally informed language and visual strategies can enhance message appeal, political campaign designers should also prioritize communicating performance-based credibility, as voter decisions are often shaped by past leadership outcomes.

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