

A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NIGERIAN CHURCH LOGOS

Festus Moses ONIPEDE

*Department of English
University of Lagos, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

The study examined the semiotic analysis of selected Nigerian church logos. The study is concerned with the intended meaning the logos represent, the components of what the visual semiotic signs communicate and the design styles used by each designer of the church's logo.

The study examined ten Nigerian church logos using the social semiotic approach to multimodality, which was developed by Gunther Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006). We adopted this theoretical framework in the interpretation of visual communication. The churches use different signs to design their logos, which are peculiar to Christianity. The analysis of the logos shown that the logo designers used appropriate symbols and signs: that is, visual semiotic signs to communicate their intended messages, which centred on Jesus Christ. The logo designers used different styles to present their messages. Hence, the logos are designed to persuade, command, preach the gospel, and identify with people.

Keyword : *semiotics, logos, social semiotics, multimodality, church, Jesus Christ*

INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of communication is to disseminate information through language. Language therefore is a means of communication between two or more people in which one is either a sender or a receiver or vice versa. Language could be written or spoken, it is a symbol of complex signs which are peculiar to human beings and it is used in disseminating information, ideas, feelings or emotion. Communication as a means of interaction between a sender and a receiver or vice versa may be achieved through linguistic elements such as symbols, graphics style, gestures, pictures, colours and others. According to Daramola (2011: 144), he differentiates communication from language. To him, "communication involves the process of the exchange of information (or messages) that are linguistic and non-linguistic or exchange of messages in forms of language and non-language resources such as symbols, signs, gestures,

drawings, pictures, photos including technologically mediated processes." From the above difference between language and communication, it is obvious that communication comprises linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

The semiotic analysis of church logos examines the linguistic and sign aspects of the selected logos to see how visual semiotic signs have been used to preach the gospel and identify with the people.

RELEVANCE OF SYMBOLS AND THEIR MEANING IN CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Sign is one of the constituent elements of logo design. Logo is an abbreviation of logotype which is derived from Greek. It is a word and an imprint; a graphic mark or symbol used by Christians or individuals to aid or promote instant public recognition. The selected Nigerian churches have their logos specially designed to make people recognise them. The visual representation of the logo explains the nature of the church and its name. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006: 6), the visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction. This shows that the way different churches presented their experiences of Christianity is reflected in their logos and names. This therefore means that words and images interact in the construction and interpretation of social experiences. According to Van Leeuwen (2008), "words provide the facts, the explanations, the things that need to be said in so many words; images provide interpretations, ideologically coloured angles, and they do so not explicitly, but by suggestion, by connotation, by appealing to barely conscious, half-forgotten knowledge" (p.136). Church logos are semiotic resources that clearly communicate the intended messages. For a logo designer or producer to communicate effectively, he needs to make the logo through his design say the intended message clearly. For instance, the commonly used symbol in Christianity is cross, which shows an inner meaning about Christians' ideas of Jesus' crucifixion as well as symbolising His status as the Christ. The meaning encoded in Christian logos is connotative or associative and derived from the context associated with their source or place of origin, that is, the denomination of the symbols.

RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Semiotics has its root derived from Greek 'semeion', or sign, is used to describe what signs are and how they function in a given context or environment. Visual contents and designs which are in form of logos have impacts on its target audience. The language therefore helps people to identify the signs in relation to the message. Different churches or denominations use language as a sign-system to communicate their intended message to their target audience.

This paper makes use of social semiotics theory to relate with symbolic interactionism, relationship between humans, goals and outlooks. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), meaning can be located within the field of semiotics or the process of context bound and conflict laden interpersonal interaction- relation between two or more people. Simply put, interpersonal interaction means the relation between a sender and receiver, a speaker and listener or vice versa. Church logo provides a form of interpersonal interaction in which the producer communicates the intended message to have effect on the viewers, readers or audience. If the church's logo has communicated effectively, the target audience would be persuaded, commanded, instructed, informed and aware of the messages. The interpretation of signs needs the knowledge of how the signs could be interpreted and understood.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the selected church logos in Nigeria using social semiotics. It examines the intended meaning the logos represent, the components of what the visual semiotics signs communicate, and the design styles used by each church logo producer. The study also examines how each selected semiotic analysis led into domain of knowledge enquiries

Meaning requires multiple semiotic systems and this has inspired Halliday to make variety of investigation into multimodal discourse. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) build on Halliday contribution by having a major impact on the research of design and visual communication. Semiotics sees signs not only as culturally constructed but also interpreted within certain cultural purview. This study is based on Kress and Van Leeuwen theoretical approach to multimodality which adopted Halliday's (1978) three metafunction of language as a framework for semiotic theory of communication. The experiential, also known as ideational metafunction enables a semiotic mode to organise, understand, express our perceptions of the world and our own consciousness as it is experienced by humans. A semiotic mode must be able to represent objects and their relations in a world outside representational system. By this we mean that any picture, signs, symbol, graphic design, colour etc, on the church logos must be able to represent the religious message outside representational system. For instance, the picture of the Bible in the church's logo represents to the outside world the preaching of God through Jesus Christ. The way each church designs its logo represents its experience of christianity. This representation therefore enables its viewers or the target audience to encode their experiences visually. The interpersonal semiotic mode allows the participants in communicative act with other people, to take on roles and to express, and understand feelings, attitude and judgement about what they have seen or read visually. In the interpersonal metafunction, the semiotic mode projects the relations between the producer, the viewer, and the object represented. For instance, when there is visual space, distance or position between an object and its viewer, it communicates the form of interpersonal relations between them. The third metafunction, that is, the textual metafunction, relates what is said (or written) to the rest of the text and other linguistic events respectively. The

textual metafunction enables a semiotic mode to have the capacity to form texts, sign complexes, which link or cohere both internally with each other and externally with the context (both grammatical category- theme and contextual configuration- mode) in and for which they were produced. In textual metafunction, different compositional arrangements or designs allow the realisation of different textual meanings. It therefore means that the way logo producer arranges or places images, pictures, signs, symbols, colours and text will affect meaning interpretation or realisation (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this paper, the selected logos were downloaded online. The data were selected randomly. The selected church's logos are presented thus:

- 1 . Deeper Life Bible Church
2. Synagogue Church of all Nations (SCOAN)
3. Methodist Church of Nigeria
4. Redeemed Christian Church of God
5. The Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim
- 6 Mountain of Fire and Miracle Mission (MFM)
7. Four Squares Gospel Church (Nigeria)
8. Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)
9. Christ Apostolic Church (CAC)
10. Nigerian Baptist Convention

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**SEMIOTIC COMPONENT OF EACH SELECTED LOGOS**

S/N	CHURCH'S NAME	IMAGE/SYMBOL	COLOUR
1.	Deeper Life Bible Church	Image of love, cross and Bible	Red, blue and white
2.	Synagogue Church of all Nation (SCOAN)	Cross and the Church's acronyms	white and black (dark and light)
3.	Methodist Church Nigeria	Horse and name of the church	Green, white, orange and black
4.	The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)	Circle, dove, star and the church's name	White and blue
5.	The Eternal Order of Cherubim and Seraphim	Circle, trumpet, star and two angels	White, orange and blue
5.	Mountain of Fire and Miracle Mission (MFM)	Circle, fire and the church's name	Red, black, purple and gold
7.	Four Squares Gospel Church	Cross, cup, dove and crown	Red, gold, purple and white
3.	Celestial Church of Christ (CCC)	Rainbow, cross, eye and crown	Blue, yellow, green, orange, indigo, white, and violet
9.	Christ Apostolic Church (CAC)	a staff, Jesus Christ and the lamb	White, blue, black and yellow
10.	Nigeria Baptist Convention	circle, map, acronym and cross	white, blue, yellow and orange

Deeper Life Bible Church

Deeper Life Bible church was founded by pastor William Folorunsho Kumuyi in 1982 . It has picture of love, cross and Bible as components of its logo. The picture of love has red colour; the cross, red colour and the Bible , white colour with the edge painted red.



Figure 1: Deeper Life Bible Church Image

The above logo as a semiotic resources has multiple social and cultural meanings. Semiotically, the images – love, cross and the Bible, socially and culturally stand for Christianity. The church’s logo producer uses image of love, which shows Christians affection for humanity or Christ’s love for the sinners. The cross represents Jesus Christ’s suffering and salvation that grows out of it. The Holy Bible represents the word of God. Henceforth, the church identifies itself with the people through this logo. The semiotic components of the logo ; that is, the colour and visual shape, are used by the logo producer to communicate social meaning. The image colours of red and white are significant in Christian religion. The red colour represents power, strength and courage, while the white stands for purity.

Synagogue Church of all Nations (SCOAN)

Synagogue Church of all Nation (SCOAN) came into existence by T.B Joshua.



Figure 2 : Synagogue Church of all Nations (SCOAN) Image

The church has image of cross written on the acronym ; that is, ‘O’ and under the acronym there is a word, 'international' written below the acronym. The acronym ‘SCOAN’ is written in black with white background. The cross is inscribed on alphabet ‘O.’ The logo as a representation of social meaning shows that the church is for the world (international). The image of the cross as a semiotic sign represents the challenges of life Christians have to endure while in this sinful world. The logo’s colours are means of communicating social meaning visually. The image is composed of two colours- black and white. The black stands for danger, death and uncleanness, while the white stands for purity.

Methodist Church Nigeria

This church was founded by British missionaries in 1842.



Figure 3: Methodist Church Nigeria Image

The Methodist Church of Nigeria has its semiotic components- image of horse inscribed inside the world map. The horse has brown colour, a map painted green, all inscribed in a circle with white background and the church's name written in upper case. The lamb semiotically represents Christ as the paschal lamb and Christians. The brown colour stands for danger, death and uncleanness. The circle represents the whole universe and the white colour shows purity, peace and hope.

Redeemed Christian Church of God

It is one of the prominent churches in Nigeria. It was founded by Rev. Josiah Akindayomi in 1952.



Figure 4: Redeemed Christian Church of God Image

The above logo consists of the image of a dove, star and the church's name. The logo has white, blue, red and green as its background colours. The name of the church is written in green colour and the logo is in circular shape. The logo communicates to the target audience through appropriate colours. The blue colour stands for softness, freshness, truth and loyalty. The red colour represents power, strength, courage, hope, beauty and peace. The green colour shows reproductive power of God, hope and peace, while the circular shape represents eternity. The symbol or image of star represents Jesus Christ and it is through Him every worshipper receives salvation. It is therefore obvious that the church communicates its message directly to the people in order for them to know precisely what its mission is all about.

The Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim (ESOC & S)

This church was founded by Moses Orimolade Tunolase in 1925. The church's logo consists of the name of the church, circle, trumpet, image of two angels and star.



Figure 5: Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim (ESOC & S) Image

The two angels used in the logo above represent Cherubim and Seraphim. The Cherubim has four faces and four wings, while Seraphim has six wings. The function of these angels is to guide God's Holy domain, sit at the throne and worship God everyday. It is therefore clear that the designer used these images to persuade, inform and encourage the worshippers to worship God everyday. The trumpet is blown by the angels to wake up the sinners on Earth and call to repentance. The circle represents eternity awaiting the worshippers. The map represents the world and it is therefore clearly stated that the Church's messages is for everybody all over the world. The star stands for Jesus Christ through whom salvation can be given. The logo designer also used white, blue and red colours to make the logo attractive. These colours pass across information to the viewers the moment they see it. The white colour stands for purity, blue for hope and red for spiritual awakening and Holy Spirit.

Mountain of Fire and Miracle Mission (MFM)

Mountain of Fire and Miracle Mission was founded by Dr Daniel Olukoya in year 1989.



Figure 6: Mountain of Fire and Miracle Mission (MFM) Image

The logo above has the picture of fire, circular shape with purple, red and black colours. The purple colour represents prosperity as it is recorded in Proverb chapter twenty one verse twenty-two (Prov. 21: 22). The white colour stands for purity, while the red colour of the fire means power the tongues of fire as recorded in the book of Acts chapter two verse three to eight (Acts 2:3-8). The red colour also means power, strength and courage. The black colour represents the mountain top and idea of possibility and potential. The logo producer makes use of these colours to represent people's position as children of the kingdom that will reign with Jesus Christ and planning to benefit from all His promises for the whole universe and the propagation of good news to the whole world. In addition, the purple portrays every member of the church as a royal priesthood. This is evident in the book of Isaiah chapter sixty-two verse three (Isaiah 62 : 3). The black mountain represents God's mighty and the supremacy of His wonderful works to the people. The white background also represents holiness which shows that without it (holiness) one cannot see God or be in heaven.

Four Square Gospel Church

The church was founded by Aimee Semple Mcpherson in 1922.



Figure 7: Four Squares Gospel Church Image

The church's logo is in form of four-fold ministries of Jesus Christ – the saviour, the baptizer with Holy spirit, the healer and the coming king. The logo has the image of cross, cup, dove and crown. The cross represents the death of our Lord and Saviour; that is, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross of calvary. His death on this cross has carried away our sins with Him as the perfect sacrifice. The red colour signifies the blood of Jesus that was shed to wash away our sins so that we can stand before God clothed in robes of righteousness and declaration of redemption and justice. The dove painted in gold colour stands for Holy Spirit as evident in the baptism of Jesus Christ by John in River Jordan. The river therefore represents the presence of the Holy Spirit. The cup represents anointing oil which is ready to be given to a sinner when he or she repents. The purple crown represents the coming of Jesus as a king and the purple colour also represents royalty of Jesus Christ who will return very soon to take His people to remain with Him forever. It is clear that the logo producer uses appropriate images to portray what the church mission is all about and for proper identification.

Celestial Church of Christ (C C C)

Celestial Church of Christ was founded by Reverend Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oshoffa in 1947 in Agongue, Republic of Benin. The church's logo consists of rainbow colours; that is, seven colours- red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet.



Figure 8: Celestial Church of Christ (CCC) Image

The logo producer uses different colours and images relating to Christianity to communicate the intended message and also make the church to be identified world wide. The use of rainbow

colours represent the covenant God made to His people not to destroy human beings again. The red colour represents passion, security, enthusiasm and vitality. Orange (mixture of yellow and red) represents control, practicality, endurance, creativity and playfulness. Yellow colour represents clarity of thought, orderliness purity and wisdom. Green stands for fertility, growth, hope, wealth and health. Indigo represents spirituality, self awareness and intuition. Violet colour (mixture of red and blue) represents spiritual attainment. In addition to the meaning attached to these seven colours, four are semiotically used to represent four angels, who are in charge of the four corners of the Earth. Blue colour represents angel Micheal, who is the leader of all angels. The white colour represents angel Gabriel, whose duty is to reveal good news. The green colour represents angel Rapheal, who is in charge of healing, while the red colour represents angel Uriel (wisdom and energy). The name of the church is written in four different languages- English, French, Yoruba and Ogu. These names are written inside the rainbow colours and it reads thus:

English: Celestial Church of Christ

French: Eglise Du Christianisme Celeste

Yoruba: Ijo Mimo ti Kristi lati Orun wa

Ogu: Agun Wiwe Olonton

The writing of the church's name in four different languages show that the message is not meant for just one country but for everybody all over the world. The semiotic constituents (images) of the logo are the image of cross, crown and eye. The cross represents the challenges Christians have to endure while still living on this sinful world. The crown stands for christian's hope that awaits the righteous ones in heaven. The third image (eye) symbolises Holy Spirit and the omnipresent eye of Almighty God that sees everything. The eye shows the interpersonal relation between God and His people(Christians) , which means that nothing is hidden from God and nobody can hide from Him.

Christ Apostolic Church (CAC)

CAC was founded by Joseph Ayo Babalola in 1941



Figure 9: Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) Image

The church logo has the picture of Jesus Christ carrying a sheep with staff in His hand. The image of Jesus shows that He (Jesus) comes to the world to search for the lost sheep of Isreal. This is evident in the Bible that when a shepherd looses one of its sheep, he must search for the

lost one (Mathew 18: 12-13). It therefore means that the logo producer used this image to tell its target audience that the church mission is to preach to the sinners to repent of their evils. The staff represents authority with which the church is going to be used in controlling the people . The lamb represents the sinners that have repented of their evils. The lamb also represents Jesus Christ. The vegetation represents God's paradise which awaits Christians. The logo has excerpt from the book of John 10: 16 which says: "one fold, one shepherd." This shows that Jesus mission through the church is to bring the lost sheep together in one voice. The colours also tell the target audience the hope that await them. The white colour represents purity, blue stands for softness and loyalty, green represents bountifulness, victory over death and fertility, yellow stands for hospitality, happiness and love, and black represents eternity, death, fear and ignorance. It is the liturgical colour used on Good Friday.

Nigerian Baptist Convention

The church was founded in 1914 and its current General Overseer is Reverend Samson Olasupo Ayokunle.



Figure10: Nigerian Baptist Convention Image

The church's logo consists of the following images: circle, cross and map. The colours are white, blue, yellow and orange. It is obvious that the logo producer or designer uses circle as one of the images to give a specific shape in order for the target audience to identify the church. The circular shape and map represent the whole universe and the spread of the gospel. The cross represents the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross of calvary and the salvation He brought for His followers. The white colour stands for purity, holiness and innocence.

The acronym 'NBC' is written with yellow colour and it stands for wisdom, clarity of thought and orderliness, while blue colour signifies the blue skies which means hope or good health. The date of the establishment of the church is written in orange colour. The colour therefore represents endurance and strength.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this paper to examine the selected Nigerian Church logos by using Kress and Van Leeuwen's 'Social Semiotic Approach to Multimodality.' We analysed the

semiotic resources of the selected Church's logos to know whether the producer or designer of each Church's logo made use of similar and effective symbols or images and colours for their design. It is very obvious from our analysis that the Church's logo producer or designer used different style in their design but used semiotic resources relating to christianity. For instance, colours red, yellow, blue, green, black, white, gold, violet, and pink, are randomly selected by each logo producer as a means of recognition and disseminating the intended messages the Church claims to propagate. Symbols or images such as Bible, dove, cross, lamb, angels, staff, Jesus, fire and circle, are used to associate with Christianity. These semiotic resources like the display on billboards serve as weapons of gospel propagation for the global community and instrument of social interaction, which is advising, informing and promising the worshippers. (Odebode and Dabi, 2015). Some of the selected Church's logos, e.g. RCCG, CAC, CCC, SCOAN, Methodist Church Nigeria, ESOC& S, Nigerian Baptist Convention and MFM have their names written inside the logo, while others such as Deeper Life Bible Church and Four Squares Gospel Church did not have their names on their logos. It is evident in these logos that the interpretation of images is by its very nature subjective, and an image can carry multiple messages dependent upon the nature of the visually interpreting culture.(Olowu 2013: 515). According to Kress and Leeuwen, (2001), it is possible for images to carry semiotic codes that is very different from texts in their ability to capture and encode societal norms, expectation and relationship. In addition, the selected symbols, images, and colours serve as visual images which provide additional information or details to oral communication (Ademilokun and Olateju 2015).

REFERENCES

Ademilokun, M and Olateju, M. (2015). A multimodal discourse analysis of some visual images in the political rally discourse of 2011 electioneering campaign in south western Nigeria. *International Journal of society, Culture and Language*

Ayodeji, O. (2013). Christian perception of the concept of death and judgment: A multimodal discourse analytical study of selected editions of Christians women mirror magazine. *Academic journal* 4(1o) 508-575

Daramola, A. (2011). The English language as a vehicle of discourse for development in Nigeria. *British Journal of Arts and social science.* 3 (2) 143-155

Halliday, M.A.K..(1978). *Language as social semiotics*. London: Edward Arnord

Hodge, R and Kress, G.(1988). *Social semiotics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

[http://art of mourning.com/2006/01/17/symbolism-meanings-objects/](http://artofmourning.com/2006/01/17/symbolism-meanings-objects/). accessed 24/9/2016.

http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_churches_in_Nigeria. Accessed September 24, 2016.

Kamalu, I. (2016). Politics and promises: A multimodal social semiotic interpretation of political party emblems and slogans as discourse of hope in democratic Nigeria. The internet journal Language, Culture and society. URL: <http://aaref.com.au/en/publication/journal/>.

Kress, G and Van Leeuwen, T.(1996). Reading images: the grammar of visual design. London/NY: Routledge.

Kress, G and Van Leeuwen, T .(2001). Multimoda discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communications. London: Arnold.

Kress, R.G and Leeuwen, T.V. (2006). Reading images: The grammar of visual design. London: Arnold.

Odebode, I and Dabi, O. (2015). Speech acts in billboard messages of the Redeemed Christian church of God, redemption camp, Nigeria: A pragmatic study of. *English Linguistics Research*. 4(20).

Ogunike, F.V.(2015). Semantic critique of language of some religious car stickers in Oyo State, Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and social science (IOSR-JIISS)* 11(5) 35-42.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford: University Press.