



**A MULTIMODAL SEMIOTIC STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE OIL SUBSIDY  
REMOVAL PROTESTS IN NIGERIA**

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, the beginning and the end, and to my Priceless Jewel,  
my lovely daughter, Olaniyan Adedamola Esther Moyosoluwa.

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## ABSTRACT

This study identified and analysed the major linguistic patterns in the discourse of the January 2012 fuel subsidy protests in Nigeria. It also identified and described the non-verbal tokens in the fuel subsidy discourse. In addition, it related the verbal and non-verbal features of the discourse to their socio-cultural context, and this was done with the aim of carrying out a multimodal semiotic study of the language of the oil subsidy removal protests in Nigeria.

Data for the study were drawn from primary and secondary sources. The primary source comprised the recorded discourse of protesters consisting of both verbal and non-verbal resources drawn from some electronic media outfits, the secondary source of data were books, journal articles and the internet. The prominent semiotic, lexical, and syntactic structures in the discourse were analysed following the theory of Multimodal Discourse.

The result showed that the fuel subsidy protesters used structural and lexical linguistic patterns and non-verbal semiotic tokens to x-ray the country's fundamental problems, show their anger at government's actions, demand a reversal and also suggests drastic solutions to the afflictions plaguing the country. In particular through verbal weapons (structural and lexical patterns), the protesters were able to highlight the basic amenities which the people lack and the vast difference in the economic privileges enjoyed in the country. Also through non-verbal tokens the protesters were able to tell the government to deal with the people at the helm of affairs in the country and those that had been perpetrating evil acts in the oil industry rather than inflicting unnecessary pains on the masses which were made to suffer the inadequacies of the government. With effigies, dress, gestures, bonfires and entertainment, as well as structural and lexical strategies it was discovered that the anger and pains brought about by the fuel subsidy

removal seemed to have pushed the protesters to a level where they did not have any regard for the nation's leaders, seeing them as mere objects of mockery and humiliation.

The study concluded that the fuel subsidy removal protest was preoccupied with multimodal semiotic resources. Thus, multimodal semiotic resources were used to give cohesion and quality to the people's voice.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and the sixth largest producer of crude oil in the world, was virtually a theatre of protest in January 2012 following the removal of fuel subsidy which had kept the price of fuel relatively low by the Federal Government headed by Dr Goodluck Jonathan, as announced by the Petroleum Pricing Regulatory Agency (PPRA). Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) was to cost N141 per litre beginning from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012. This led to a groundswell of opposition from different sections of the Nigerian populace, including most notably the Nigeria Labour Congress, opposition political parties such as the now defunct Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) as well as non-affiliated members of Nigerian public who rose in unison to condemn what they term the bad policy of the Federal Government.

Furious Nigerians took to the streets staging 'Occupy Nigeria' protests and mass demonstrations across the country. The government said it was attempting to deregulate the oil sector in the country and believed that subsidizing the consumption of oil was a drain on public finances which would prove unsustainable in the long term. Many commentators argued that few people were benefiting from the subsidy to the detriment of the entire masses. The government, on its part, averred that the move would save the treasury more than 1 trillion Naira in 2012. The government said the money saved from removing the subsidy would help to improve public amenities and build the much-needed infrastructure in the country, such as roads, electricity and refineries.

Different organisations protested because they believed the government had introduced the plan without any regard for its implications for the cost of living in the country. Many Nigerians said that they were already experiencing undue hardship as a result of the move which they said had already affected the cost of living. Spontaneous protests started all over the country. Labour leaders, civil society groups and other protesters in the course of the protests made their grievances known to the government through provocative speeches, music, actions, images, colours, placards, and dressing. They insisted that they were against the hike in fuel price and would not relent in the protests until the government changes the oil price to what it used to be.

Since the Labour leaders and other protesters used both verbal and non-verbal means of communication in making their grievances known, it is important to study how they communicated their plight through verbal and symbolic means. This research, therefore, examines the discourse and semiotic features of the oil subsidy protest in Nigeria.

In general, discourse analysis is centrally concerned with the study of text and conversation, and shares several of the philosophical and linguistic notions that have been developed by scholars, such as the manner of information distribution in a text, deictic forms, conversation implicatures, turn-taking, turn allocation, etc. (Crystal 1997). In recent times, however, discourse analysis has undergone a paradigm shift as recent studies focus on the analysis of different modes of communication with which a text is realized including the larger semiotic context. Part of this new development in discourse analysis is a field known as multimodal discourse analysis, which considers how different semiotics systems: signs, symbols, images, colours, gestures, dress, etc, realize any piece of discourse interactions. It is a practical reflection on discourse which tries to reveal the meaning hidden below the surface in an attempt to find

sense in life. It makes use of all manners of signs for the expression of meanings. It is a symbolic means of communication (Chandler 2002).

Multimodal discourse analysis derives from a shift in focus in linguistic enquiry where language use is no longer theorized as an isolated phenomenon but contextualized in conjunction with other semiotic resources which are simultaneously used for the construct of meaning (O'Hollaran 2004). O'Hollaran, Tan, Smith & Podlasov (2010) observe that from the infancy of the science of semiotics, scholars have identified the need to develop holistic and comprehensive theories and description of semiosis, applicable to all signs and systems but also capable of taking into account the specific characteristics of different semiotic phenomena. (Kress & Leeuwen 1996) posit that users of language are making greater and deliberate use of a range of representational and communicational modes, which helps in enriching deeper understanding and paves new ways of interpretation. This suggests that multimodal discourse analysis is a blend of aspects of semiotics, discourse and pragmatics. (O'Hollaran et al 2010) note that the study of multimodal communication involves the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as (spoken and written) language, gestures, dress, architecture proximity, lighting, movement, gaze, camera angle, received a major impetus during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Nigeria today, multimodal resources are deployed effectively for different communicative purposes in different context. Our analysis of the January 2012 oil subsidy removal protest in Nigeria derives from the multimodal discourse analysis theoretical background supplemented by critical discourse analysis in an attempt to look holistically at the instrument of protest; dress, effigies, gestures, bonfires, and verbal resources such as antonyms, coinages, vulgarisms, etc.

## **1.2 Statement of the Research Problems**

Existing studies on Multimodal Discourse have focused mainly on political campaigns, advertisements, soccer discourses, pictorials on the social media, particularly *facebook*, etc. Most of these studies have, however, not analyzed the language of public protests in Nigeria. For instance, Ademilokun (2010) undertakes a multimodal

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