

A Multimodal Analysis of Selected Placards From the #Bring Back our Girls Campaign Discourse on Twitter

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Abstract: BBOG has remained the most articulate group clamouring for the release of the 276 girls abducted by Boko Haram in Chibok on April 14, 2014. Existing studies on the BBOG protest have focused on Critical Discourse Analysis, pragmatics and sociological theories, but with little attention to the multimodal interpretations inherent in placards used during BBOG's campaigns on the social media. As a result of this, multimodal analyses of selected placards from BBOG's Twitter page were examined with a view to discovering different semiotic interpretations inherent in placards used to campaign for the release of the abducted Chibok girls. Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis was used to analyse ten pictures containing twenty one placards which were purposively selected from BBOG's Twitter page. At the ideational level, the placards were used by parents of the abducted girls, members of the BBOG and international advocacy groups to campaign for the release of all the girls abducted by Boko Haram. At the interpersonal and textual levels, the placards were used as tools to condemn the continued captivity of the abducted Chibok girls and other heinous attacks by Boko Haram sect. They were also used to urge the government to facilitate the release of all the abducted Chibok girls and end the security challenges evident in the country.

Keywords: BBOG, placards, Multimodal Discourse Analysis

1. Introduction

In recent times, there have been different protests involving the use of placards to criticise certain social anomaly. An example is the #Bring Back Our Girls (henceforth, BBOG) campaign for the release of all the 276 school girls abducted by the Boko Haram sect on the 14th of April, 2014 in Chibok, Borno State Nigeria. According to Nwabuzor and Gever (2015), as a result of the abduction of the Chibok girls, individuals such as Oby Ezekwesili and other prominent individuals across the globe demanded for the release of the girls under the motto "Bring back our girls" campaign. This was achieved through coordinated activities such as peaceful demonstrations, prayers, sit-ins, and observance of other noticeable actions to drive home their grievances. To make demands for the release of the abducted girls, the BBOG group organised different mass protests involving different people from all walks of life. Majority of BBOG's protests were mobilised to pressurise the Federal Government of Nigeria to intensify efforts to initiate an immediate release of all the abducted Chibok girls. As a result of these, activities of the BBOG group were constantly featured on different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram among others.

According to Smith (2015), the abduction of the 276 girls in Chibok made the Twitter social media campaign with the hash tag #Bring Back Our Girls go viral. As observed by Smith, the #Bring Back Our Girls Twitter campaign generated an enormous global attention from the local and international community. As a result of this, BBOG's Twitter page was constantly updated with pictures and tweets of various activities of the group aimed at ensuring a release of all the abducted Chibok girls from Boko Haram's captivity. Some of the pictures posted on BBOG's Twitter page contain a significant number of placards used to campaign for an end to Boko Haram's attacks in the country and the release of the abducted Chibok girls. Other placards criticised the frequent security challenges experienced in different parts of the country.

Existing studies on the Chibok girls' abduction have been examined from the dimensions of Critical Discourse Analysis and pragmatics as observed in the works of Ahmed (2015), Ahmed and Eje (2015), Chiluwa and Ifukor (2014), Nwabuzor and Gever (2015), and Omolabi and Durosimi (2015); and sociological perspectives as evidenced in the works of Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha (2015) and Orlu-Orlu (2017). Despite the insightful contributions of these studies, they made no effort to examine the multimodal interpretations of the placards used during the #Bring Back Our Girls campaigns on the social media. This study fills this gap by presenting a Multimodal Discourse Analysis of some of the placards used during BBOG's campaigns for the release of the abducted Chibok girls. To fill this gap, this study explains different semiotic interpretations inherent in selected placards from the BBOG's Twitter page.

2. A brief review of the BBOG campaign organisation

The inability of the Federal Government of Nigeria to ensure the immediate rescue of 276 female students abducted from Government Secondary School, Chibok on April 14, 2014 by the Boko Haram sect led to the birth of the BBOG campaign organisation. According to Bright (2018), BBOG is the most active and articulate pressure group which apportioned blame on the Federal Government of Nigeria for its inability to rescue the abducted Chibok girls timely. Some of the members of the group are Dr Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, Mustapha Bala, Mrs Maryam Uwais and Hadiza Bala Usman among others. As indicated on the website of the #Bring Back Our Girls campaigners (<http://www.bringbackourgirls.ng/>), the objectives of the group are to ensure the release of all the abducted Chibok girls and improve government's accountability to Nigerians on security issues by creating communication channels that will aid in informing the public on safety measures being taken to protect Nigerian citizens. Other objectives of the group are to ensure the protection of children of school age by curbing future abductions and sexual violence and a passage of the *Violence Against Persons Prohibition Bill (VAPP)* that protects girls and ensure a persecution of individuals responsible for sexual violence.

3. Review of literature on the Chibok girls' abduction

There is a significant body of research on BBOG and the abduction of the Chibok girls. An example is Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha (2015). The study scrutinises the manner two Southern and two Northern Nigerian based newspapers (*The Guardian, The Sun, The Trust* and *Leadership* Newspapers) made reports on the abduction of the Chibok school girls. Their analysis reveals that the selected papers used liberation efforts frame, futility frame, partisan frame, devout frame, cultural frame, scheme frame and economic frame in reporting news on the abduction. Ngwu, Ekwe and Chiaha's study establishes the fact that the mass media audience believed that the way the abduction was framed in the media has made them to think less of any rescue put by the government. In another study, drawing insights from Mey's aspects of Pragmatic acts and Hoyer and Kaiser's visual acts, Omolabi and Durosimi (2015) explore different pragmatic acts performed in visual news reports on the abducted Chibok girls. Their study discloses that pictures perform complex pragmatic acts such as urging, indicating, condemning, accusing, protesting, challenging, warning and shaming as suggested in the picture captions. The study reveals that certain pragmatic acts are craftily performed through the pictures and that they are meant to secretly control readers' assessment, view and action about news report on the abducted Chibok girls. Omolabi and Durosimi's study is similar to this present study because of its use of Hoyer and Kaiser's visual acts as one of its theoretical framework which is similar to Multimodal Discourse Analysis which is the focus of this present study.

With Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, Ahmed (2015) conducts a corpus-based analysis on the discourse reports of Bring Back Our Girls campaign in selected Nigerian newspapers. His study reveals that Nigerian newspapers used different strategies in reporting the campaign of the BBOG organisation. Findings of his study reveal two schematic structures of top-down and bottom-up; four schematic directions of narration, activism, appealing and criticism. He identifies four discursive strategies of rationalisation, authorisation, argumentation and narrativisation. He adds that situational context reveals the field as a public protest aimed at campaigning for the immediate release of the abducted Chibok girls; while the mode is the written/printed form which consists of straight news, feature stories and editorials/opinions. The study of Ahmed (2015) is relevant to this present study because it projects the activism ideology which is one of the features of BBOG's campaigns. It however differs from this present study as it did not focus on the multimodal aspect of the BBOG campaign discourse. In a related study, using argumentation theory and Fairclough's (2012) method to the examination of political discourse, Ahmed and Eje (2015) analyse former President Goodluck Jonathan's speech in reaction to the abduction of the Chibok girls. Discoveries of the study indicate that President Goodluck Jonathan's silence were convincing but normatively deficient. The study reveals further that some of his arguments were drawn from main ideologies that favour the interest of his government, such as attributing the problem of Boko Haram insurgency to economic inequality as opposed to the inability of the government to win the war against terrorism.

Nwabuzor and Gever (2015) is another research work on the Chibok girls' abduction relevant to this present study. Using Critical Discourse Analysis and Frustration Aggression theory, the study scrutinises the social media's instrumentality for mobilising global response to violence and support for the BBOG campaigners. The study discloses that the frequent campaign writings posted on the social media are intended to mobilise global support against terrorism. The study suggests that alongside military intervention, global campaigns should be intensified for a nonviolent release of the kidnapped girls and cessation of terrorist attacks. From the review of related literature, it is obvious that the abduction of the Chibok girls have been the focus of a number of studies in Nigeria. This study differs from previous studies on the abduction of the Chibok girls because from the social semiotic perspective, it presents a multimodal analysis of some of the placards used

during BBOG's campaigns for the release of the abducted Chibok girls. The major objective of this study is to discover and explain the different semiotic interpretations inherent in the selected placards from BBOG's Twitter page.

4. Theoretical framework

This study integrates insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Multimodal Discourse Analysis is built on the foundation that a study of verbal communication cannot be thorough without taking into consideration the nonverbal act of communication. It is a type of discourse that employs and incorporates more than one mode of presentation. According to O'Halloran (2011), it is a developing theory in discourse analysis which extends the study of linguistic codes to the study of language in combination with resources such as gesture, scientific representation, pictures, action, music/melody, and sound which are integrated and has the ability to produce meaning. According to Stöckl (2004), Multimodal Discourse Analysis comprises artefacts of communication and processes that bring together diverse systems (also considered as modes) whose creation and reception requires the participants to appropriately and semantically interconnect all sign selections available.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), and van Leeuwen (2000, 2005) recognise other media of communication, apart from language, which text producers deploy to hide intended meanings and ideological tendencies. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) draw on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics in the analysis of semiotic language and its signification. As a semiotic approach, Multimodal Discourse Analysis accounts for the entire modes in a communicative event and it encompasses the linguistic features of a text which are usually regarded as speech acts, and non-linguistic features like images, symbols, pictures and colours among others. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), semiotic language performs three functions summarily presented below:

- i. *Ideational/representational* meaning: This represents patterns of experience such as configurations of processes, participants and circumstances; and the logico-semantic relations between these choices. In summary, it describes the manner different semiotic resources are represented and interconnected with each other in a given discourse.
- ii. *Interpersonal/orientational* meaning: This involves the enacting of social interactions, relations and values. It refers to the relationship developed between the addresser of the resources and the addressee.
- iii. *Textual/organisational/compositional* meaning: This encompasses the intertwining of ideational and interpersonal meanings into reliable and comprehensible texts.

As clarified by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), pictures convey semiotic encryptions different from writings due to their ability to picture and encrypt social standards, prospects and interactions. With the widespread use of pictorial illustrations through art, the print media and kids' drawings, Kress and van Leeuwen powerfully strengthen the view that pictures convey social concepts with physical, dogmatic and ethnic insinuations. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) drawing insights from Halliday's concept of transitivity process, propose that the analysis of pictures involve the identification of the involved participants, the process or the activity described, the qualities of the participants and the circumstances in which the action described is being developed. This study explores the manner in which the semiotic mode of picture is combined with the written language to achieve certain goals in some of the placards displayed by the BBOG campaigners.

5. Methodology

This study is qualitative. It adopted a multimodal approach for its analysis. The data used for the study consist of ten (10) pictures containing 21 placards. These pictures were selected from the #Bring Back Our Girls' Twitter page (https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria). Over 100 protest pictures with the protesters carrying different placards posted between June 2015 and April 2017 were downloaded from the group's Twitter page. Out of these, a total of 10 pictures containing 21 placards were selected and subjected to a multimodal analysis. This was achieved using insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001, 2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

6. Data analysis

The data comprise ten (10) pictures containing 21 placards used by the BBOG campaigners.

Plate 1



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, April 18, 2017

Plate 2



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, April 18, 2017

Plates 1 and 2 were posted on the 18th of April, 2017. As indicated on BBOG's Twitter page, parents of the abducted Chibok girls demanded to see the President of Nigeria, but were barred from entering the presidential villa. As indicated further on BBOG's Twitter page, these pictures were posted to prevent a disdainful treatment of parents of the abducted Chibok girls. At the ideational level, plate 1 presented two parents (a woman and a man) displaying two black placards with inscriptions written in white. One of the placards contains the inscription *The President celebrated his daughter's graduation. I want to celebrate my daughter's graduation too. #IAMAchibokParent*. The placard with this inscription was used to make reference to the graduation of President Buhari's daughter which took place in July, 2016. In a manipulative manner, the woman displayed this placard to make President Buhari emphatic and take necessary steps that will lead to the release of her daughter and the remaining Chibok girls. The second placard in plate 1 contains the inscription *Boko Haram made my daughter to beg the President for her life. Do you know what else they make her do?*

#IAmACHibokParent. This inscription made reference to one of the videos released by Boko Haram whereby the abducted Chibok girls begged the Nigerian President to initiate their release from the Boko Haram sect. From this inscription, it can be deduced that this parent is worried about the psychological trauma his daughter is going through as a captive with the Boko Haram sect. The placard was displayed to draw the attention of the government and other relevant authorities to the inherent danger and psychological torture the abducted Chibok girls are likely to experience if they are not rescued on time. The inscription *#IAmACHibokParent* in the two placards revealed the identity of the participants carrying the placards as the parents of the abducted Chibok girls.

Plate 2 presented two women (mothers of the abducted Chibok girls) displaying two placards with red and black backgrounds and the inscriptions *#IMarchForChibokGirls My daughter promised to go to school and wipe away my tears. Is it with terrorist she would do so? #3YearsTooLong #NoMoreExcuses #BringBackOurGirls*. From the inscription on the first placard in plate 2, certain issues can be deduced. Firstly, the woman is devastated. She is aware of the importance of education. Due to this, she enrolled her daughter in school to secure a bright future for her. To her, the abduction of her daughter has destroyed this dream. Owing to this, she believed it will be impossible for her daughter to take care of her as long as she remains in Boko Haram's captivity. As a result of this, she asked the relevant authorities the rhetorical question *Is it with terrorist she would do so?* The second placard in plate 2 contains the inscription *#IMarchForChibokGirls Will our Chibok Girls still be in captivity if they were Children of the Rich or the Political class? #3YearsTooLong #NoMoreExcuses #BringBackOurGirls*. The second placard in plate 2 was used to criticise the Nigerian government for its inability to rescue the remaining Chibok girls in Boko Haram's captivity. From the inscriptions on the placard, it could be deduced that the woman carrying the placard attributed the reason for government's inability to rescue the remaining Chibok girls to their low social class status in the society. In the two placards displayed in plate 2, the inscription *#IMarchForChibokGirls* revealed that the two women are not selfish and that they are campaigning for the release of all the abducted Chibok girls. The inscriptions *#3YearsTooLong #NoMoreExcuses #BringBackOurGirls* were used to criticise the government and other relevant authorities for allowing the abducted Chibok girls remain in Boko Haram's captivity for a period of three years and at the same time used to demand for an immediate release of the remaining girls.

Plate 3



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, February 26, 2017

Plate 3 was posted on February 26, 2017 to honour the memory of 58 boys killed by the Boko Haram sect in Federal Government College Bunia Yadi on February 25, 2015. Plate 3 presented a picture of Dr Oby Ezekwesili and two other members of the BBOG before a public protest. In addition, the plate contains a placard with a white background, the inscription *WITH HEAVY HEARTS, WE REMEMBER: OUR BUNIA YADI BOYS/ #Bring back Our Girls Now* and the names of some of the boys murdered by Boko Haram in Bunia Yadi. The BBOG group expressed its sorrow over the murder of these boys by writing the first sentence *WITH HEAVY*

HEARTS, WE REMEMBER: OUR BUNI YADI BOYS in upper case and by highlighting *BUNI YADI* which is the location of the incident in red. To show the grief of the BBOG group and their demand for an end to terrorist attacks, the names of the boys were alternatively written with the black and red colours in five columns. The picture was posted to prevent a recurrence of such tragic incident.

Plate 4



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, February 13, 2017

Plate 4 was posted on the 13th of February, 2017. At the ideational level, plate 4 presented victims of the Southern Kaduna, Agatu, Zaria, Onitisha, Imo and Jos violence that took place in parts of Nigeria. At the interpersonal level, the placard was displayed to protest the widespread security challenges in Nigeria by using the Southern Kaduna, Agatu, Zaria, Onitisha, Imo and Jos killings as a reference point. The group posted this picture to make the government and security agents restore peace to the country and at the same time remind the government about its promise to rescue the remaining Chibok girls in Boko Haram's captivity. At the textual level, the placard presented gory pictures from the Southern Kaduna, Agatu, Zaria, Onitisha, Imo and Jos violence.

Plate 5



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, January 13, 2016

Plate 5 was posted on BBOG's Twitter page to publicise one of its activities used to campaign for the release of the remaining Chibok girls abducted by the Boko Haram sect. At the ideational level, plate 5 presented four women carrying a placard containing pictures of the abducted girls and the inscriptions: *600DaysOn*, *#ChibokGirls*, *#CryingToBeRescued*, *#NeverToBeForgotten* and *#BRING BACK OUR GIRLS*

NOW. At the interpersonal and textual levels, plate 5 was used to emphasise the commitment of the BBOG group towards the rescue of the remaining abducted Chibok girls. This was achieved with an inclusion of photographs of some of the abducted girls, the total number of days the girls have spent in Boko Haram's captivity and inscriptions beginning with the hash tag symbol. All these features were used to show the government and the general public that the yet to be rescued Chibok girls are important to the society and the BBOG group.

Plate 6



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, January 12, 2017

Plate 6 was twitted on January 12, 2017. It was one of the placards displayed on Day 5 of BBOG's Global Week of Action to commemorate 1004 days of the Chibok girls' abduction. The placard indicated their focus for the day as #Endangered Education and #GirlChildVulnerability. At the ideational level, plate 6 presented two members of the BBOG group carrying a placard with the inscriptions

#DAY 1000

#BBOG Marches To Villa

Come march Against

Endangered Education & Girl Child Vulnerability.

Plate 6 also presented Dr Oby Ezekwesili and other members of the group marching to protest the continued captivity of the abducted Chibok girls. At the interpersonal level, the placard was displayed in order to achieve the theme of the group's Global Week of Action and commemoration of the Chibok girls' abduction. At the textual level, the group expressed its grievances through a public protest. The first two inscriptions on the placard began with the hash tag symbol. This was used to indicate the activism ideology of the group which is an end to the continued captivity of the girls. The inscription *Come march Against* refers to the public protest organised by the group. The inscriptions *Endangered Education & Girl Child Vulnerability* indicated the group's bitterness for the inability of the abducted girls to continue their education as a result of their abduction. The group also used the opportunity to campaign against further abduction of girls which poses as a threat to their education.

Plate 7

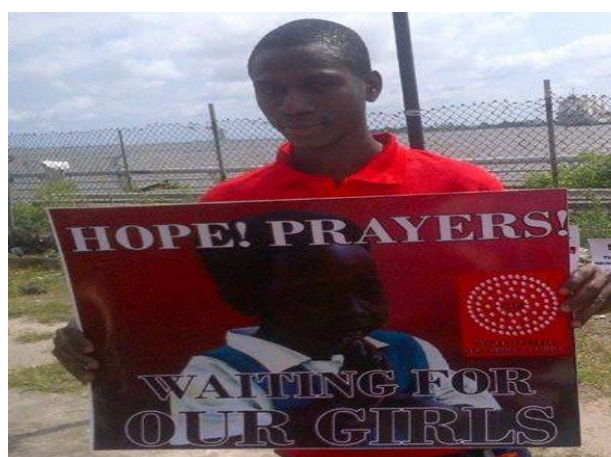


https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, September 11, 2015.

Plate 7 was posted on September 11, 2015. The picture was titled “from the archives”. It was posted as a throwback picture to remind the general public about the initial commencement of the BBOG protests and campaign for the release of the abducted Chibok girls. At the ideational level, plate 7 presented Dr Oby Ezekwesili and other females from the BBOG campaign organisation protesting on the kidnap of Chibok school girls at the National Assembly, Abuja. The picture contains ten visible placards. The captions on the placards displayed in the picture include:

Bring Our Sisters home! Show leniency, SAVE OUR SISTERS, WHERE ARE MY SISTERS? PLEASE FIND OUR DAUGHTERS, RESCUE OUR CHIBOK GIRLS, #BringBackOurGirls, PLEASE FIND OUR DAUGHTERS, CAN ANYONE HEAR ME? and LET PEACE REIGN. In plate 7, the usage of inscriptions such as *our sisters, our daughters, our Chibok girls* and *our girls* are implied messages that displayed the empathic nature of the protesters. In the picture, the use of rhetorical questions are observed in captions such as *WHERE ARE MY SISTERS?* and *CAN ANYONE HEAR ME?* The protesters directed these questions to the government with the aim of gaining their attention. The inscriptions on these placards are linguistic tools used with the intention of castigating the government and spurring them to hasten the release of the abducted Chibok girls.

Plate 8



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, June 30, 2015

Plate 8 was posted on June 30, 2015. It presented a member of BBOG identified as Mohammed. In the picture, Mohammed carries a placard with the inscription *HOPE! PRAYERS! WAITING FOR OUR GIRLS* and the picture of a small boy praying fervently for the immediate release of the abducted Chibok girls. This inscription and the picture of the small boy praying is a semiotic resource that indicated BBOG’s commitment, religious ideology and the recognition of the importance of prayer in easing the freedom of the abducted girls despite their unusual manner of demanding for their release.

Plate 9



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, September 14, 2016

Plate 9 was posted on September 14, 2016. Plate 9 presented three members of an unnamed advocacy group carrying two placards. In plate 9, one of the placards contains the inscription *218 BringBackOurGirls*, while the other contains the inscription *PRESIDENT BUHARI, You know where your children are. Where are our #CHIBOKGIRLS?#BringBackOurGirls*. On the one hand, members of this advocacy group used these placards to demonstrate their support for the rescue of the abducted Chibok girls. On the other hand, with the use of the rhetorical question *Where are our #CHIBOKGIRLS*, they used the inscription on the second placard to appeal to President Buhari's emotion and sense of judgement. With the aid of the Twitter social media platform, managers of the BBOG group used this picture to show the general public that the campaign for the release of the abducted Chibok girls have gained international attention from other advocacy groups.

Plate 10



https://twitter.com/BBOG_Nigeria, April 14, 2017

Plate 10 was posted three years after the abduction of the Chibok girls. The picture presented twelve members of the BBOG group carrying a placard indicating that the abducted Chibok girls have spent three years in captivity with the Boko Haram sect. At the interpersonal level, the picture appealed to its readers' emotions by asking the rhetorical question *Would you be silent if your daughter was amongst?* The placard also contains the inscription "*#BRING BACK OUR GIRLS NOW & ALIVE*". These inscriptions were used as strategies to blame the Nigerian Government over its inability to rescue the Chibok girls three years after their abduction. The inscriptions were also used by the BBOG campaigners to apportion further blame on their pro-government critics who believe they are mounting too much pressure on the government and security officials over the continued captivity of the Chibok girls.

7. Conclusion

To uncover underlying semiotic interpretations inherent in selected placards from the BBOG campaign discourse, this study has examined a multimodal analysis of 21 placards from BBOG's Twitter page using insights from Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001, 2006) Multimodal Discourse Analysis. Findings from the study revealed that at the ideational level, placards were collectively used by parents of the abducted Chibok girls, members of the BBOG group and international advocacy groups. At the interpersonal level, the selected placards were used to condemn the continued captivity of the abducted Chibok girls, the murder of 58 students in Buni Yadi on February 25, 2015 and the murder of innocent citizens in Kaduna, Agatu, Zaria, Onitsha, Imo and Jos violence. At the textual level, the placards were used as tools to campaign for the release of all the girls abducted by Boko Haram. Findings from this study revealed further that all the selected placards arrest the viewers' attention and above all, expose the danger inherent in the continued captivity of the girls, criticised the government for its inability to rescue the abducted girls and at the same time urged the Federal Government of the need to accelerate its action on the release of all the abducted Chibok girls and end all the security challenges in the country. It is believed that findings from this study will be a great guide to researchers interested in social media activism, protest studies and Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

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