
AN ANALYSIS OF RHETORIC AND
HUMOUR IN DUDLEY'S POLITICAL
CARTOONS

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ABSTRACT

This article is a rhetorical and humorous study of Dudley's political cartoons. The article explores the use of rhetoric and humour in Dudley's political cartoons that were printed in 2012. All political cartoons were extracted from The Namibian newspaper. The cartoons were analysed for rhetoric and humour using both visual and language based elements. The analysis used Aristotle's rhetorical proofs of persuasion: ethos, pathos and logos as well as humour theories of superiority and incongruity. The study revealed that Dudley's political cartoons employ ethos when the characters who were chastised and cheered at are individuals who have high profile in society; people whom the readers are looking at and people who are deemed to have goodwill for the nation at heart. Pathos was used to stir up the emotions of the readers so that they could support his arguments. The study revealed that when the caricatures are criticised and put down because of their actions, superiority theory of humour is employed. The cartoons are incongruous when the cartoonist delivers something humorous and different from the readers' expectations.

INTRODUCTION

Political cartoons have been around as a vehicle for social and political commentary, for centuries, even millennia (Vatz (1973). The first political cartoon emerged in Egypt in 1360 B.C. Benjamin Franklin was praised for creating the first political cartoon (JOIN or DIE) in America, which was published in 1754 (Bitzer, 1968). During this period, political cartoons were used to comment on social issues. They were printed in newspapers and commented on issues at both local and national levels.

Lister (2010) says that Dudley had a keen interest in politics since the 1970s. He was a judge's clerk in the Supreme Court and started to cartoon at the age of 20 when he noticed and detested the evils of racism of apartheid politicians in the early 1980s. In 1985, The Namibian newspaper was founded and provided him with a rich environment for the rise and use of political cartoons. Dudley's cartoons gained popularity since the apartheid era when he would expose and ridicule apartheid politicians. Lister (2010 : 68) continues saying that after the apartheid era, it was difficult for Dudley to decide who to ridicule because those in power had become his comrades. After independence, he stopped cartooning for a while, but continued after his comrades started to commit public gaffes.

The political cartoons used in this paper were published 22 years after independence. People with minimal reading abilities could understand and relate to a format that communicated powerful ideas in a humorous manner through analogy, irony, exaggeration, and symbolism. Like other political cartoonists, Dudley's political cartoons express opinions on public issues.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study made use of Aristotle's proofs of persuasion. Borg (2004) says that ethos relates to the speakers and their characters as revealed through communication. The speaker or writer should consider how the language and development of the message reflect good taste, common sense, and sincerity. "Pathos refers to emotions by the readers or listeners". Borg (2004) says, "as Aristotle puts it, persuasion may come through the hearers when the speech stirs their emotions". In other words, it is essential to appeal to the emotions felt by the audience in order to be persuasive. Logos is actual words used by the speaker or writer. Logos relies on the audience's ability to perceive information in a logical way to arrive at some conclusions (Borg, 2004).

Several theories have been developed to explain how and why a text is humorous, but this study has adopted only two theories: superiority and incongruity. Albert (1951) says that the theory of superiority claims that humour is focused on our feelings of superiority over other people or things. Mathews (2011) states that incongruity theory is based on the linguistic perspective, and it dates back to Aristotle's time. People find something funny when they find a text or situation absurd. In other words, audience members expect seriousness but the cartoon appears to be different from what they would have expected.

Data analysis

This study made use of semiotic and content analysis to analyse political cartoons. The cartoons can be decoded well if an audience has background knowledge of the context in which the cartoons are based, so the meaning of the cartoon is inseparable from the argument it makes. According to Schwandt (1997 :114), semiotics is a “theory of signs or the theory investigating the relationship of knowledge and signs”. The cartoons were analysed for both visual and linguistic elements.

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A sample of the analysis of the cartoons (the appendix has all the cartoons used in this article).



Figure 6

Description

Figure 6 portrays the SWAPO Secretary-General Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana during her tenure. She is depicted in full SWAPO attire to emphasise that she is the woman behind the SWAPO secretariat. She points her forefinger in the direction where the veteran sits inebriated on the ground. The veteran has a bottle of alcohol in his hand and on the floor is a puddle of spilt alcohol. It is indicated that the state of being a veteran has decreased to 20% and the state of alcohol has increased dramatically to 80%. The eyes of the veteran are red because alcohol has taken its toll on his body. Behind Iivula-Ithana are pictures of an airplane, an emblem of the Mercedes-Benz, and a signpost giving directions to the State House. It seems that she is excited about them. The airplane has SWAPO colours—blue, red, and green—to signify that it belongs to the party to which Iivula-Ithana is affiliated.

Rhetoric

The question is, can this veteran hear what Iivula-Ithana is saying? It seems that her message will fall on deaf ears because the veteran is not in the state of getting any message. This is not the right time to tell the veteran not to drink their money because he is already drunk. It is likely that Iivula-Ithana’s message is going to be less effective because of wrong timing. This depiction calls for a change from both the politicians’ and the veterans’ sides. It is highlighted that politicians use the taxpayer’s money on projects that are not important, so they are called upon to change and use money for a good cause. Veterans are urged to change their drinking behaviour for the better.

The commentary sentence of the cartoon “Penny says the veterans are gambling and drinking their money away...” is in the active voice. The cartoonist wants the audience to know exactly who says these words, and even shortens the name Pendukeni to Penny. This makes it clear for the veterans to know who is fuming at their antisocial behaviour. The commentary sentence ends with an ellipsis for the reader to fill in the missing words. Iivula-Ithana asks the veteran, “Why are you veterans misusing the taxpayers’ money when we are doing a good job of misusing it already?!” At the end of the question, there are two punctuations: a question mark to ask the veteran and an exclamation mark to express her strong disapproval of the veterans’ gambling and drinking behaviour. Iivula-Ithana is questioning and admonishing at the same time. She is scolding the veterans not to misuse taxpayers’ money because the politicians are doing a good job of misusing it already. They have bought a government jet, Mercedes Benzes, and built an expensive State House. The word we used in the question shows that there is a syndicate involved in the good misuse of taxpayers’ money. The phrase “A good job of misusing it already” is in praise of what Iivula-Ithana and other politicians have done; she is not showing any remorse of their unacceptable actions. The adjectival use of the word good is in praise of something well done.

Humour

Superiority theory portrayed in the picture lies in the judgement of Iivula-Ithana, who thinks that she has a mandate of telling the veterans that they are misusing taxpayers’ money when she is also doing the same. Iivula-Ithana is put in the fore of the cartoon to emphasise that she thinks she is the right member of SWAPO to point a finger to the veterans because of her position, but the rest of the fingers are pointing at her. The veteran sitting on the floor is incongruous; an old man with a head going naturally bald is rarely found in such a state because of alcohol. A man of his age is supposed to build the country positively and be a role model to the young generation. The audience would expect a young man to be drunk like that, but not an old man.

Discussion of findings and conclusion

This section discusses Aristotle’s proofs of persuasion, rhetorical devices, and the elements of political cartoons that are used to bring across the messages. Aristotle’s proofs of persuasion are ethos, pathos, and logos. The discussion will be based on the linguistic and visual persuasion and humorous elements used in Dudley’s political cartoons. Humour will be discussed in connection with superiority and incongruity theories of humour, and thereafter, the relationship between humour and rhetoric of political cartoons.

PROOFS OF PERSUASION

Ethos

Ethos has to do with the character that is being chastised and cheered. Our perception of the type of the character that is being caricatured influences our attitude towards the character. The cartoonist does not caricature ordinary people, but high-profile individuals in society—a person in whom citizens put their trust. Their wrongdoings are exposed for audiences to know exactly the type of leaders they have. These people have influence in the political system in our country and once something goes wrong in their governance, they fail the whole country at large.

Pathos

Pathos has to do with the audience’s emotions. Dudley’s political cartoons make use of pathos through visual and linguistic messages. The persuasion messages he sends play with the audience’s emotions, which can be negative or positive. All cartoons analysed have a persuasive message in them that informs the audience that there is something that needs their immediate attention. This depends on whether the audience understands the context of the cartoon. The audience may see an attractive cartoon but if they

lack the knowledge of the current political issues in the country, the cartoon might not move them. These political cartoons can easily move people who stay abreast with current issues in society, depending on how they take the current issue at hand.

Logos

Dudley's political cartoons use a great deal of logos. He depicts his cartoons based on the current issues going on in society. Dudley does not comment to prove that his arguments are true; neither does he tell the audience where he has taken his information. The fact remains that Dudley depicts his cartoons based on facts of what is going on in Namibian society. The cartoons make sense to those who keep abreast to current information; those who do not may find it difficult to figure out what the cartoons are trying to say. The important thing is that Dudley ridicules and chastises politicians based on the facts of the political climate, so it is easy for the readers who are up-to-date with current affairs to interpret the cartoons.

RHETORICAL DEVICES

Titles and captions

Dudley frequently uses titles and captions in his political cartoons. They make it clear to the readers what the cartoon is all about. Titles and captions do not give more details or explanations of what the cartoons are all about, rather they give a clue about the cartoon. Once readers get a clue then they can figure out what the pictorial representation means. For example, in Figure 11 the title "Budget 2012" is used to introduce the cartoon.

Some of the titles include the names of caricatures depicted in the cartoons. This makes it easier for the skimmers to identify the caricatures. When a reader wonders who the caricature is, the answer is already provided in the title. The use of names in titles also places a strong emphasis on who is responsible for the follies that the cartoonist brings to the fore. This is the person who can be blamed for failed governance or for evil acts that are not acceptable in society.

Exaggeration

There is a constant exaggeration in Dudley's political cartoons. Exaggeration is used in physical characteristics of people and things. The cartoonist overstates these characteristics to indicate that the issue brought to the fore is more serious than the readers see it, and it needs immediate attention for a positive change. The exaggeration is made appealing and humorous, such that everyone who reads the newspaper will be attracted to stop and have a look at it.

Exaggeration also involves the use of words. Words like everybody and nobody, can generalise an issue. Statements that use these types of words may be accurate or inaccurate depending on the situation. In any case, we tend to use them to make a point.

The exaggeration in the cartoons is always based on the truth; hence, there is always something that directs the audience to recognize the subject that is being ridiculed. The caricatures are given funny features but there is something about them that helps the audience to recognise them. In Figure 2, the President is given a king's character but there is something about the depiction that makes him recognisable.

Symbolism

Dudley uses symbols of animals, signs, and objects instead of using explanations. Each symbol used is worth thousands of words, but they can easily be understood because of the context in which they are used. Symbols engage the readers into critical thinking because if they do not know what the symbol represents, they have to figure out what it means and why it is used in a certain context. These symbols always have a message to convey or point of view to bring to the fore. The dollar sign used in Figure 4 indicates that the union bosses are just there for the workers' money. In Figure 4, the sheep are representing workers to symbolise that workers are followers. What has to be noted is that even people of a different time period can easily understand these symbols because in most cases, symbols represent the same thing, as with the dollar sign that is always used to represent money.

Labelling

Halliday (1993:27) explains labelling as putting names on things and so it is a way of specifying what these elements are. The label provides some kind of definitions of what has been identified as part of the whole cartoon. In Dudley's political cartoons, labelling is used to clarify things to the audience. The cartoonist does not want to leave any stone unturned, but wants to make sure that the readers have a better understanding of his message. Labelling is used to state what exactly things stand for. The reason behind the labelling is to grab the attention of the readers. The readers are appealed to read and notice that what is labelled is very important. In Figure 1, emphasis is put on who is practising corruption and who is ignoring corruption. Now, the reader knows that the emphasis is not just on any company, but on NAC where corruption is being practised in broad daylight. The GRN—the Namibian government—can see this evil act, but acts as if it cannot see it or turns a blind eye on it.

Calligraphy

The cartoonist uses bold letters and hand-written letters to appeal to the emotions and attract readers' attention. Calligraphy is used by Dudley to highlight and emphasise the point he is bringing across. If the words are highlighted, one can see where to put more focus because the main message must be there. Bush (2012:71) says, "Calligraphy simply includes making a word or phrase bold in order to draw attention to it. It also involves hand-lettering elaborate fonts in order to depict a symbolic representation." When readers are skimming through the cartoon, they may ask themselves why some of the words are bold or in hand-written form and not in typed form. In this way, the reader's emotions are involved in the interpretation of the cartoon. The bolded words or phrases put more emphasis on issues because one can even notice them from far than those that are written in a normal way.

Calligraphy is constantly used in Dudley's cartoons. Some of the words and phrases have used both forms of calligraphy: bolding and hand lettering, while some used only one of the forms. In Figure 7, the main emphasis is placed on "Taking the bull by the horns!" while less emphasis is on "And the balls". The reader will definitely want to know why some words are in bold and others are not.

Metaphor

Tromp et al. (2013:260) explain metaphor as "a comparison between two dissimilar things". Dudley's political cartoons contain both linguistic and visual metaphor. Both linguistics and visual metaphor represent a clarification of issues, but it can only make sense if a reader understands what the metaphor is trying to get across. Thus, one has to think critically or figure out what a metaphor is all about.

Linguistic metaphor is used to satirise the situation or a person being criticised in the cartoon. In Figure 3, the tears are compared to a flood, which is impossible in reality for a person to cry tears that can flood the meeting. This in itself is attractive and humorous. Once the readers read the metaphorical titles, they would definitely want to know what follows in the cartoon, and what the titles mean, which is one of the devices Dudley uses to keep readers engaged in his cartoons.

Irony

This thesis also observed that Dudley uses ironic expressions to appeal and amuse his audiences. Ruddled (n.d.): 477 defines irony as “the opposite of what you really mean, often as a joke and with the tone of the voice that shows this”. Dudley uses irony to satirise people and situations. When irony is used, it seems to be less serious to act on an issue because of the humorous form it uses. People may take it lightly not knowing that the message behind the ironic expression is strong just like the one that uses other forms of expressions.

In Figure 9, the commentary sentence is an ironic one jokingly telling the audience that Namibia has only one hero, which is not true at all. What the cartoon wants to bring across is that there are so many heroes in Namibia but they are not recognized, but only one hero that is given recognition. The audience is asked to look deeply into this issue and at least change what is happening at the moment. Here, one can see that persuasion can be made through humour together with rhetorical devices.

Idioms

There is occasional use of idioms in Dudley’s political cartoons. Tromp et al. (2013:257) define an idiom as an expression, word or phrase, which has a figurative, or non-literal meaning. This means that you do not translate the phrase or word directly to get its meaning. In Dudley’s political cartoons, idioms are used to get the audience’s attention so that it gets more involved in the cartoons in order to get the message. Four of the cartoons analysed use idiomatic expressions.

In Figure 1, the idiom Tom, Dick, and Harry is used. The audience cannot interpret the idiom as it appears in words, but it has to be interpreted differently from the actual words. For readers to understand the message of the cartoon, they have to understand what Tom, Dick, and Harry mean. Those who do not understand the idiom have to look for the meaning to enjoy the meal that has been prepared by the cartoonist.

Interjections

Interjections are used in Dudley’s political cartoons to show strong emotions. This may attract readers to analyse the cartoon closely to find out why the cartoonist has used such expressions. The interjections may arouse the emotion of pity, surprise, or anger. In Figure 8, the interjection oh has been used to show the emotion of surprise towards the utterance of Kazenambo. The reader may be attracted to look at why the former Minister is being satirised that way. Figure 5 uses the interjection HA HA to show that public servants are furious and want to scare former Prime Minister Nahas Angula with a bigger whip. This can arouse humour because the readers can see how the leader is suffering from his follies.

Reported speech

Dudley makes use of reported speech to ensure that the audience knows who is responsible of the words he uses in the cartoons. The cartoonist knows what strategy to use in order to attract attention and arouse emotions in the readers’ minds. The use of reported speech shows that the cartoonist does not want the audience to keep on speculating of the person responsible for the wrong doing. In figure 6, Penny is made responsible for her follies.

Contrast

Dudley has used an obvious contrast between the real person and caricature. The difference is really visible because there is an exaggeration between the real person and caricature, but there are always characteristics that guide the skimmers to recognize the caricature. There is contrast between the accepted norms and the way the leaders are portraying themselves to the nation. So this deviation from accepted norms to folly catches the cartoonist's attention.

Active voice

The cartoons make use of active voice more than passive voice. Passive voice protects the doer of an action while active voice makes sure that the doer of the action can be clearly identifiable as to make them responsible for their actions. The cartoons put blame on the specific person who is responsible for the unacceptable behaviour. In Figure 3, the active voice "His tears flood our meeting" is used to put blame on the person responsible for the tears that ruined the meeting. An active voice attracts the reader's attention because they know who is responsible for an action.

Ellipsis

Some of Dudley's cartoons use ellipses. Burton-Robert (1998:111) says that when a sentence is uttered, almost anything can be omitted as long as the omitted words can be understood from the context in which it is used. An ellipsis creates acceptable, albeit grammatically incomplete sentences. Readers can only understand ellipses if they know the context in which the cartoon is based. The audience has to presuppose something by means of supplying what is left out. The reader has to supply the word missing in order to make sense of the partial sentence. In Figure 12, the phrase "Selfish leaders..." is incomplete, and the cartoonist leaves space for readers to complete on their own.

CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAKE THE CARTOONS HUMOROUS

Superiority theory

Superiority theory is depicted when there are contradictions in what political leaders do. They promise the nation to deliver what is acceptable but they are doing the opposite of their promises. The readers derive enjoyment when their superiors are lampooned for their acts. Exaggeration also adds to superiority theory of humour because the cartoonist exaggerates top politicians in the way that they feel so superior and think that they are more important than the masses they are leading. In Figure 4, the union boss is exaggerated in a way that a normal human being cannot behave. Audiences may find it humorous when a situation is made bigger than it really is.

Incongruity theory

Incongruity theory is when the "cartoon depicts something unexpected and surprising involving noticeable deviation of an accepted social norm" (Sani et al. 2012:162). Audiences find it humorous if there is a contrast between the real person and the depiction. Dudley's depictions are drawn smaller or bigger than in reality. The reason behind exaggeration is to amuse the readers, because it will not be amusing if the cartoons are depicted exactly like culprits. A sudden change in the role of a person can be humorous. In Figure 10, Rev. Willem Konjore changes his status from being a respected former Minister and Reverend to a woman abuser. This is beyond peoples' expectations because they expect a person of his calibre to behave in a decent way. The symbols and analogy used in the cartoons are incongruous.

Linguistic perspective is incongruous because the words said in certain cartoons are not expected to be said that way. Sometimes, readers expect the cartoonist to say something serious, but they get a twist of what they expected instead. In Figure 10, the phrase “Way to go Willy” is unexpected because it is praising what Willy has done rather than blaming him for his unacceptable behaviour. In reality, Dudley is not praising him, he is just being sarcastic, and he wants to surprise the readers.

The relationship between humour and rhetoric

This analysis is made to show why it is crucial to make a concurrent analysis of rhetoric and humour. These two elements are closely related in a way that they influence each other in one way or the other. There is a predominant relationship between rhetoric and humour in Dudley’s political cartoons. This is shown by both linguistic and visual depictions. The analysis of this argument seems to show the relationship between: figurative language and incongruity; metaphor and incongruity; contradiction and superiority; exaggeration and superiority; contrast and incongruity.

Contradiction is used to show how the leaders contradict themselves. It is used in relation to superiority theory of humour because it chastises and ridicules the top leader. Leaders are criticised for their wrongdoings, and at the same time, the audience is informed to notice what is wrong and right. For example, Figure 2 shows a different scenario of Namibia’s leadership from what the audience ought to know.

The analysis of this argument also shows that the use of exaggeration plays a big role in Dudley’s political cartoons. It is used to shame the leaders. Exaggeration used in the cartoons that are analysed in this article seems to portray superiority theory of humour to ridicule the subject. Exaggeration combined with superiority theory of humour convinces the audience that certain issues are more serious than they ought to think. Figure 13 shows a leader who thinks that whatever workers are putting in the union is his. Those negative qualities are shown by using superiority theory of humour.

In addition, figurative representation portrays close relationship with incongruity theory of humour. Figures of speech put the audience’s mind into active thinking because the words used literally mean something else. Some of the cartoons analysed use ironic, metaphoric and idiomatic expressions for commentary. Mathews (2011:151) explains that “Metaphorical representation and incongruity theory of humour are so similar they oftentimes become indistinguishable”. The idiomatic expression Tom, Dick, and Harry used in Figure 1 is a good example of this argument.

CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals that the cartoons use both rhetoric and humour. Political cartoons are known for their nature of critique and satire. They bring politicians’ follies to the fore so that the public can debate or even laugh from this platform. Political cartoons are based on the true nature of current political issues and the cartoonist just spices up the issues to make them interesting and create new truth. The analysis of each cartoon concludes that political cartoons use many rhetorical elements to persuade the audience to look critically at political issues in society. These elements are used so well that they can make a point and send the message. The elements can be identified through visual and linguistic forms. Some of the cartoons contain either superiority or incongruity theory, while others contain both of these theories. Undoubtedly, there is evident relationship between humour and rhetoric in political cartoons.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

