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## A Study of Multimodal Communicative Acts in Selected Nollywood Film Advertisement Posters

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### Abstract

Movie posters employ multiple modes of communication in their display to communicate with the audience. Identifying the modes and the meanings realised through them as projected in most scholarly works on film posters are not sufficient in interpreting the intentional goals of the image designers or advertisers. It is against this backdrop that this article articulates the pragmatic functions of Nollywood film posters' advertising language as a form of language in action and intention in the situational context of users. Eight (8) Nollywood film advertisement posters which were purposively selected were analysed using insights from van Leeuwen's (2005) theory of multimodal communicative acts and Bach and Harnish's (1979) speech acts theory. The findings from the analysis reveal that communicative acts of informing, stating, expressing, describing and asserting are frequently demonstrated via visual and verbal modes in the advertisement posters. The less employed multimodal communicative acts are questioning and ordering. These multimodal communicative acts utilised demonstrate the persuasive illocutionary and communicative intentions of Nollywood film advertisers which is primarily aimed at enhancing viewing patronage. The article concludes that the adaptability of Nollywood advertisement posters to the context and situation of users is considered pertinent to the appropriate interpretation of meanings realised from the complex modes of communication employed in them.

**Key words:** Advertisement; film posters; intention; multimodal communicative acts; Nollywood

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## **Introduction**

There is no gainsaying that the essence of language is communication and since communication is chiefly achieved through language, it is important to study and account for the way speakers encode their utterances and how meanings are decoded from those utterances in communication. The advertising industry relies on language as a pervasive tool to direct their communicative intentions. Since films are generally considered relevant in projecting morals and providing entertainment to the viewing audience, film advertisement via marketing and publicity are pertinent in reaching out to potential consumers and viewers in various forms possible to achieve their intended goals. A major outlet of film publicity is posters which exhibit verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. This complex and total system of communication embedded in film poster advertisements have drawn the attention of scholars who have thus proffered an array of scholarly studies on film poster discourse particularly in the linguistic areas of multimodal discourse analysis and semiotics (e.g. Oyeboade and unuabonah (2013); Chen and Gao (2013); Darmalingam, Bokil and Mohammed (2015); etc.

Based on the knowledge of the researcher, pragmatic approach to the study of Nollywood film advertisement posters is almost deficient. This contextual approach is considered germane in any meaning-making venture. That is why Odebunmi (2006, p.25) asserts that “context is the spine of meaning. It is rather extremely difficult to proceed with any reasonable search for meaning without considering the contextual pressure”. Saeed (2009, p.190) corroborates Odebunmi’s assertion by admitting that “speakers and hearers rely on context in constructing and interpreting the meaning of utterances”. The submissions of Odebunmi and Saeed are considered apt to the explication of meaning construction and comprehension. It is to this end that the articles seek to fill the void in existing literatures by incorporating pragmatic approach to the multimodal analysis of selected Nollywood advertisement posters. This is achieved by examining the illocutionary or communicative intention of the meaning conveyed via the multimodes in the selected data.

## **1. Literature Review**

### ***1.1. Pragmatics of Advertising Discourse***

Advertisement is one of the most important tools used in modern business enterprise. The primary purpose of all forms of advertisement is to create awareness. Bolen (1984, p.9) defines advertisements as paid non- personal communication through various mass media by business firms, non- profit organizations and individuals who are in some way identified in the message and who hope to inform or persuade members of a particular audience. Usually advertisements have defined target audience and usually perform two functions. One is to inform while the other is to persuade. In the same vein, (Cook 1992, p. 1) maintains that advertisements are not concerned with language alone; they also examine the context of communication. Advertisements also make use of language to change a user’s behaviour, to motivate the public and to sell something. Advertisements are usually designed in such a manner that our mind would associate the people in the ad with the product. Cook (p.12) also comments that advertisements are made up of text, context, substance, paralanguage, situation, co-text, inter-text, participant and function. Watson and Hill (1984, p.2) identify seven modes of advertisements and they are; commercial consumer adverts, prestige adverts, small adverts, government adverts, charity adverts and advertising through sponsorship.

Advertisements can be thus referred to as a tool used by commercial and non – commercial organisations in informing the general public about the benefits of available goods and services ideas and even companies. Commercial advertising media can include posters wall paintings, internet, websites, billboards, street furniture components, musical stage shows, stickers on apples

in supermarkets, streaming audio and video and so on which are all encapsulated in various forms of media of advertisement such as the electronic media, television advert, print media advert, web advert, subliminal advert, 'netvertising,' and so on.

From a linguistic pragmatic point of view, the sole purpose of advertisement is to achieve the intention of the source. Makinde states:

Every advertisement is directed at a certain audience who would approve of the product by agree with the proposition stated as benefits derivable from the product, and thereby endorse its usage by purposing to make a purchase or have a change of attitude. Thus, the perlocutionary effect of advertisement is said to have been achieved at this point (2014, p. 70).

It suffices to say that, for a full system of communication, advertisement and its system, are usually constructed and deconstructed by the designers and decoders (respectively) of advertisements by relying on the import of context on the language used in the advertisements in order to achieve their communicative and commercial intents.

### **1.2 The Genre of Nollywood and its Publicity**

The Nigerian Film industry (Nollywood), has grown rapidly in recent years and has become a key player in the African and global film Market. It is known for its vast and diverse productions that span across various genres, themes, and context that reflects the various aspects of Nigerian culture and society.

Nigerian films serve as useful resource for socialising, informing and, educating the human resources in Nigeria. They are also vital tools for national development. Also, it is a means of communication and understanding of Nigerians' cultural ethics and heritage. Jedlowski (2013, p. 25) notes that "In the past ten to fifteen years, the Nigerian video industry has grown exponentially. According to a UNESCO report released in 2009, it is now the second-largest film industry due to the large number of films produced as Nigerian video films travel all over the world, transforming Nollywood into a transnational land global phenomenon". The Nigerian film industry is one of the most patronised medium through which the country is viewed and understood. According to Haynes (2010, p.15), "Nollywood (Nigerian film industry) is the third biggest film industry in the World, and will eventually be seen as one of the world's major film cultures". Similarly, Euphemia, Onoja, and Unekwu's (2015, p. 98) assert that "Nigerian's Nollywood remains the dominant film industry in Africa that is poised to championing the projection of the Nigerian cultural values through film." Anyanwu (2015, p.127) states that nollywood films producers are faced with the challenge of reaching the wider audience. They utilise diverse publicity techniques and or methodology such as, interpersonal or face to face, radio jingle, telephone, radio, TV, film/movie trailers, print media: newspaper, posters, handbills, previews, reviews, flyers, social media/ social feeds: Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Whatsapp, etc., others: personality interview, road shows, among others.

The significance of posters in Nigerian film publicity lies in the fact that they are quite common as evident in various media such as the internet. They are also considered economical as they can be pasted on walls in strategic places as well as printed in varying sizes and given out to prospective audience as handbills. In all, Nollywood film posters are essentially efficient in portraying the intention of Nigerian film image producers.

## 2. Theoretical and Analytical Thrusts

### 2.1. *Speech Acts*

Speech acts have been one of the basic subfields of pragmatics over the years (Verschuereen, 1999, p. 22). “Speech acts are actions performed via utterances” (Yule, 1996). J. L. Austin (1962) brought the concept into attention through his work, *how to do things with words*. He states that, in every utterance an individual makes he performs an action through it. This act is known as speech acts. Austin (1962) classified constative and performative acts as broad categories of speech acts. While constatives are acts that express a fact or not, that is the truthfulness or falsity of a speech act, performative acts reveal the intention of the acts an utterance is performing. The latter was divided into: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts as complementary components of speech acts.

locutionary act is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference. It is act is an act of stating or saying something in the normal full sense. Illocutionary acts are the acts performed by the speaker to create effect on the hearer. In other words, it has to do with performing an act by uttering a sentence. The intention is found in the illocutionary force. The illocutionary act is the focal point of most speech act typologies. Perlocutionary acts result from a language user’s utterance and a product of the hearer’s interpretation. It could be intended or unintended consequence of a reaction to what is said. Austin also identifies: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, expositives, and behavitives as the acts performed with people’s utterances.

Austin’s speech acts classification has served as the bedrock of speech acts classification of the other classifications of speech acts that came after it, namely: Searle (1969), Bach and Harnish (1979), Mey (2001), amongst others.

#### 2.1.1. *Bach and Harnish’s (1979) Theory of Speech Acts*

Bach and Harnish attempt to integrate insights from Austin’s, Searles’ and Grice’s theories to obtain a unified theory. Locutionary acts to them, is not a matter of merely decoding the conventional meaning of the sentences but as a subject of inferences that has to be based on linguistic meaning and contextual information concerning the speaker’s intentions. Bach and Harnish (1979) cited in Collavin (2011, p. 386) posit that to go from locutionary to the illocutionary content, if there is any, the hearer has to infer the communicative intention of the speaker, and to do that, the hearer needs more information. One of which is the communicative presumption (which states that there is a mutual belief that when a speaker says something to the hearer, he is doing so with a recognisable intention). They propose two types of Illocutionary acts: Communicative Illocutionary acts and conventional illocutionary acts.

*Communicative illocutionary acts* are acts performed with certain communicative intentions whose recognition by the hearer is necessary for the acts to be successful. Four types of acts can be discerned from this category which is based on the illocutionary intent of the speaker.

Constatives: they express a speaker’s belief and his desire that the hearer form a similar one.

Directives: Express some attitude about a possible future action by the hearer and the intention that the utterance be taken as a reason for the hearer’s action for instance, requests, commands.

Commissives: Express the speaker’s intention to do something and the belief that his utterance obliges him to do it. e.g. promises, offers.

Acknowledgements: Express feelings towards the hearer (or the intention that the utterance will meet some social expectation regarding the expression of feelings). For example, condole, apologise, greet, congratulate, thank, bid, accept, reject.

Proost (2006, p.995) expresses that these acts correspond to Austin's expositive, exercitives, commissives and behabitives respectively, and closely to Searle's representatives, directives commissives and expressives.

*Conventional Illocutionary acts:* In this category, communicative intention is not necessary; its success is a matter of convention, not intention. Among conventional acts, Bach and Harnish make a distinction between two classes. They are:

*Effectives:* when produced by the appropriate person in the appropriate circumstance produce a change, a new fact in an institutional context, for example, decrees, edicts.

*Verdictives:* Do not produce facts but determine facts, natural or institutional context.

These two classes, effectives and verdictives, correspond to Searle's 'declarations'.

### ***2.2 Communicative Acts / Multimodal Communicative Acts***

van Leeuwen (2005) proposes that traditional speech acts should be renamed 'communicative acts' because all signs evident in discourse (including verbal and non-verbal are combined in order to realise their communicative intent. In other words, text combines language, visual images as well as graphics as an integrated whole. Thus, text should be identified as an inscribed 'genre'. van Leeuwen (2005) also asserts that the concept of a communicative act is not only concerned with representation, but also with a deliberate use of all the communication modes to signal something. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p.121), it is not only linguistic representations that are used to either 'offer' or place a demand. In their view, speech functions can be extended to images. Hence, van Leeuwen (2005, p.120) considers that images can also 'offer' or 'demand'. The precise nature of such offers and demands comes about through a combination of different visual and contextual features, just as in the case of the speech act resulting in multimodal communicative acts. Therefore, "A multimodal communicative act is a semiotic concept that accounts for all modes in a communicative event. It incorporates the linguistic features of a text which are usually regarded as speech acts, and non-linguistic features like images, symbols, pictures and colours" (Oyebode & Unuabonah, 2013).

van Leeuwen (2005) is fluid in his classification of communicative acts, therefore, this article deploys Bach and Harnish's speech act theory to the multimodal communicative acts employed in the image-enabled discourses in order to uncover the intention of Nollywood image producers based on mutual contextual beliefs.

### ***2.3. The Concept of Multimodality***

Multimodality as the name suggests, refers to something characterised by different modes of activity or occurrence. A mode of communication can be defined as a specific channel or medium used to convey information. In a much broader sense, multimodality is the application of multiple literacies within one medium. van Leeuwen (2005, p. 28) states that multimodality is a term broadly discussed by linguists and semioticians, which means the amalgamation of different semiotic modes such as language and music in a communicative artifact or event. Kress (2005, p.5) remarks that multimodality is based on two assumptions, first, communication is always and unavoidably multimodal and this means that in a communication process, several actions occur at the same time to strengthen intended meaning. In spoken communication for instance, not only the speech but also gestures, facial expressions and proxemics contribute to meaning. These extra linguistic meaning making resources are as important as speech. It is thus impracticable to separate these extra linguistic modes from the linguistic modes. The second assumption about multimodality is that "each of the modes available for representation in a culture provides specific potential for communication." This suggests that each meaning-making resource is shaped by the social context in which it is used.

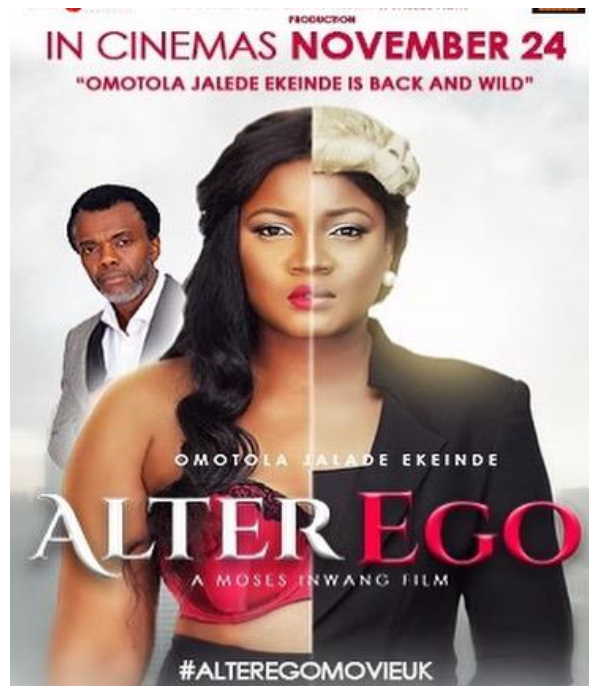
### 3. Methodology

An eclectic approach to data analysis is adopted by anchoring on van Leeuwen's (2005) multimodal communicative acts theory and Bach and Harnish's (1978) speech acts classification. The data set comprises eight (8) purposively selected Nollywood film posters which were retrieved from various internet sources.

The study adopts a fusion of qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data. The qualitative multimodal communicative acts analysis is aimed at describing the illocutionary or communicative intention of the meaning conveyed via the multimodes in the data. The quantitative or statistical multimodal communicative analysis adopted is to support the qualitative analysis in terms of accuracy, and to provide additional information into the characteristics of the data. The blend of these two methodological approaches is to balance and strengthen the findings of the study.

### 4. Data Analysis

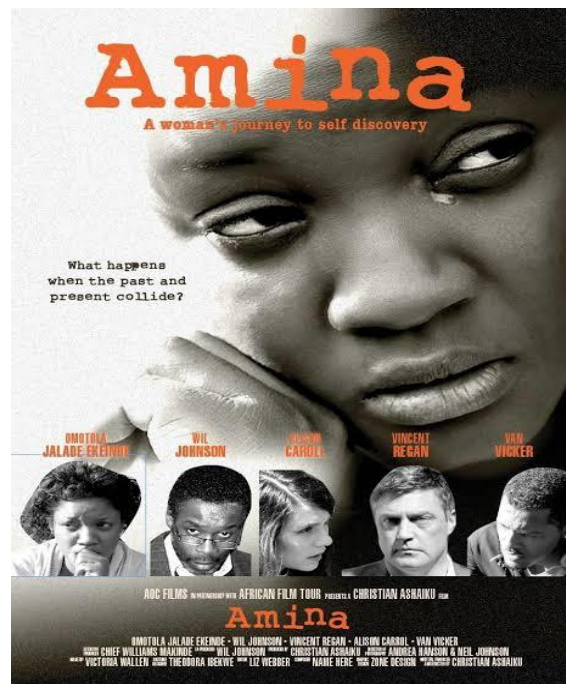
The analysis is done using the datum-datum approach for easy and effective image-discourse interpretation. The selected posters analysed are based on their inclusion of tag lines to validate efficient analysis of the verbal and visual interaction and the communicative intentions of the image producers.



**Datum 1:** *Alter Ego* Film poster  
'In cinemas November, 2024'  
'Omotola Jalede is back and wild'

The taglines in the poster, 'in cinemas November 24' and 'Omotola Jalede is back and wild' are constative acts of informing. The first sentence in Yuen (2004) terms is called call-and-visit-information. It provides information on the date and the venue where the film advertised will be available for viewing by prospective viewers. The second sentence, informs viewers a snip-nip what is expected in the movie in relation to their favourite renowned movie star, Omotola Jalede thereby making viewers anticipate to watch the movie. The shared situational and cultural knowledge of Nigeria between the image producer and most Nigerians about Nollywood actors/public figures is relied on by the viewers in drawing inference that the referent of the tagline is the female character

in the foreground. Viewers are able to deduce the facial expression of the male actor that he is driven aback/ perplexed by her second and new provocative personality as complemented in the verbal message ‘alter ego’ which could be interpreted as ‘wild’. The dressing of the female actor as against the fully clothed portrayal of the male actor implies the sexually objectification of women in modern world to advertise movies.



**Datum 2:** *Amina* Film poster

‘A woman’s journey to self discovery’

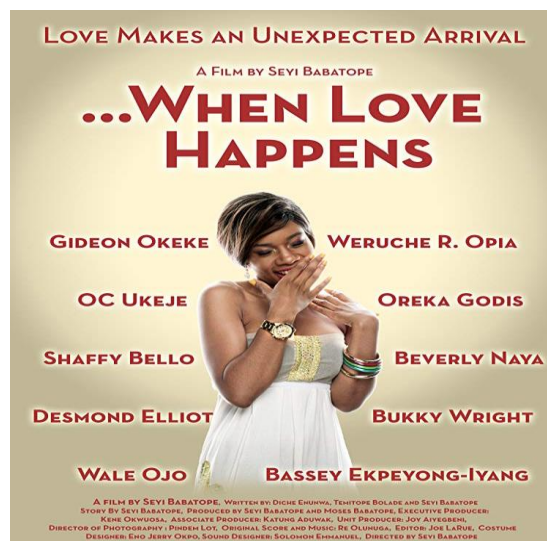
‘what happens when the past and present collide?’

Two communicative acts can be discerned in the image, they are informing and questioning. The informing act is realised by the first tagline ‘A woman’s journey to self discovery’. Viewers are able to infer that the commencement and the aftermath of the journey of self discovery is depicted by the facial expressions of the illustrated characters which are admixture of sadness, curiosity, and lost in thought. The act of questioning is achieved by the second tagline, ‘What happens when the past and present collide?’ This act is based on the implication of man’s inquisitiveness. The audience are able to infer that the answer to the question is in the movie, hence, they are indirectly encouraged to patronise the movie for the purpose of satisfying their curiosity.



Datum 3: *American Driver* Film Poster  
 ‘He is going to drive you insane’

The meaning expressed by the salient film title ‘American driver’ is tied to shared situational knowledge that the white skin toned man holding the steering wheel is the American driver. Hence, the act of driving a car complements the tagline ‘He is going to drive you insane’. The tagline is also a constative act of informing and it is exhibited by the pronouns, ‘he’ and ‘you’ where ‘he’ is the reference to the white driver who is the centrality of the film poster and ‘you’, the viewers. The use of the referent pronoun ‘you’ is to subtly co-opt viewers to enter their imaginary world and have a delightful experience. Similarly, the shared situational knowledge allows viewers to deduce that the tagline ‘he is going to drive you insane’ is an idiomatic expression and does not refer to the literal meaning of driving a car crazily as depicted by the visual act.



Datum 4: *When Love Happens* Film Poster  
 ‘Love makes an unexpected arrival’

There are two sentences in the poster; ‘love makes an unexpected arrival’ is an independent or main clause, while the second, ‘when love happens’ is a dependent clause whose complete



sentence is not indicated. The independent clause is the tagline and it is a constative act of informing.

The first sentence is an assertive constative act and it is used to further introduce the title of the movie and to tweak the interests of the audience. The visual act of the lead or model depicts a lady who is smitten by love, that is, the acts of trying to cover her lips, lowering her gaze show a person who is pleasantly surprised at finding love unexpectedly.



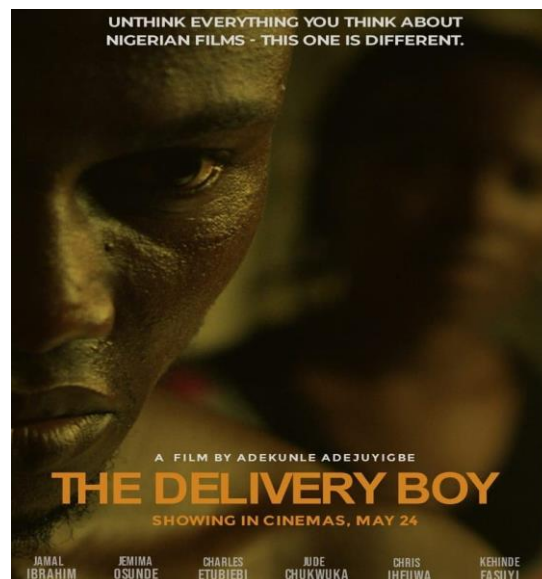
**Datum 5:** *Wives on Strike: The Revolution* Film Poster  
'Wives on strike: the revolution'

The utterance is a constative act, precisely an informative act. The expressions, 'strike and revolution' are salient especially when matched with the stern looks on the faces of the women in the image. That is, these words are synonymous with the non-verbal cues, that is, the kinesics of the women which suggests that the characters in the poster are on strike or what is to be referred to as a revolutionary movement. The movie title is striking because when it is situated in the Nigerian context, and by extension, most African traditional contexts, wives are expected to be submissive and not revolutionary.



**Datum 6:** *It's Her Day* Film Poster  
'It's her day and she will kill for it'

The act performed in the datum is a constative act of informing. By relying on mutual contextual belief and the image, it can be inferred that the expression 'the day' means her wedding day and the second main sentence implies that she can go to any extent to protect the day. The fact that she can kill for her wedding day is strengthened by the image of the lady holding a knife to her husband or husband to be's throat. The general belief held in the larger context outside the movie world is not in sync with the 'inappropriate' act performed by the bride/bride to be. The fake smile of the man suggests that he is coerced into getting married as he looks helpless. The fact that the visual reveals that the bride can kill her own husband, who is actually the main agent to make her day, is aimed at enticing the audience to see something or an act that they are not familiar with. That is, the visual/verbal multimodal resources are aimed at persuading and piquing the interests of the viewers.



**Datum 7:** *The Delivery Boy* Film Poster  
'Unthink everything you think about Nigerian films'  
'– this one is different'  
'The delivery boy showing in cinemas, May 24'

The first sentence in the poster is a directive act of ordering, while the second is an assertive act which explains the need for the first sentence. The last sentence is an assertive act of informing the audience that the movie is a ‘must-see’ and when they can be able to watch the movie. All the speech acts are geared at convincing or persuading the viewers to see the movie advertised by building on the common knowledge shared by a fair number of Nigerian viewers that Nollywood movies are substandard, especially when compared with their Hollywood & Bollywood contemporaries. The advertisement consists of speech act nesting because it has more than one speech acts.



**Datum 8:** *Phone Swap* Film Poster

‘She’s warm hearted, smiles always, trouble shooter’

‘He’s cold rarely smiles, trouble maker’

‘They have one thing in common but...’

All the sentences above as depicted in the advertisement poster are constative acts. They are informative and descriptive. The qualities of the female indicate that she is a pleasant person, while the qualities of the male suggest that he has an unpleasant personality. The scripts of each of the characters, based on the adjectives used to describe them, are non-prototypical in nature. That is, the mental picture of the female is incongruous to that of the male. So, the last sentence stating that they have one thing in common would create surprise to the readers of the advertisement and a longing to know more and thus fill the gaps the ellipses punctuation mark occupies in the text. The visual cues in the advertisement also show that the characters have conflicting attributes. Thus, the linguistic and visual modes complement each other in order to further create a vivid picture of the contradictions in the characters in the advertisement.

**Table 1:** Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Multimodal Communicative Acts in the Data

Speech acts	No. of frequency	Percentage
Constatives	11	85%
Directives	2	15%
Commissives	0	0%
Acknowledgments	0	0%
Total	13	100

### **Results and Discussion**

Table 1 shows the statistical representation of the analysis. The constative acts had the highest percentage of occurrence with 85%, while directive acts followed with 15%. The constative act dominates the communicative acts because film advertisement posters are primarily designed to inform the public of the production of the films in order to spur their interest in buying the films. There are no occurrences of commissive and acknowledgement acts. The statistics reveal that the genre of Nollywood film advertisement posters predominantly uses the act of informing, stating, expressing, describing and asserting.

Directive acts had 15 % of occurrence. They are imperative and rhetorical in nature. The rhetorical question used is based on the common ground that people are inquisitive in nature and this inquisitiveness would want them to patronise the movies so that their curiosity can be satisfied. The ordering act employed, is to show that Nollywood advertisement posters sometimes use persuasive force when the case may be to communicate to the audience so as to achieve the desired effect.

The commissive acts such as promising and offering; acknowledgment acts of apologising, appreciating, etc. were not found in the data. Thus, it is apt to say that the genre of movie advertisements uses acts that are informative, descriptive, expressive and assertive in order to give a preview into the content of the movies. Also, questioning acts are used not as a negative face-neglect strategy but to evoke the emotions of the audience to want to watch the film advertised so that they can assess the meaning or answers provided to the questions in the movies.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the data reveal that the contextual features of mutual contextual beliefs, shared situational and world knowledge are prevalent which indicate that Nollywood advertisers tend to relate the movie advertised to the social background of the viewers. These pragmatic features also assist greatly in realising other intended goals of the image producers. This finding coincides with Capone (2004, p.1355) view that in situated speech acts, the rules of language and society combine in determining the meaning intended. This implies that the advertisement posters exhibit typical cultural specific meanings. The knowledge of the Nigerian context affords viewers effective interpretation of the intended meanings communicated in the film advertisement posters.

The analysis of datum 1 and 4 shows that the portrayals of women in advertisement are sometimes sexually objectified which is due the higher degree of attractiveness and sexuality which the female gender possesses. Since advertising is about attracting attention to goods and services, they negatively serve as one of the tools employed by Nollywood image producers in appealing and attracting attention to poster advertisements.

The article has been able to assess the visual and verbal intentions of the advertisers of Nollywood advertisement film posters. This is made visible through the theoretical thrust of the study which is majorly hinged on van Leeuwen's multimodal communicative acts theory. The adoption of the theory to the analysis of the data has shown that the posters are context-sensitive. Hence, the adaptability of the posters to the context and situation of users is considered pertinent in the appropriate interpretation of meanings realised from the complex modes of communication employed in them.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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