

## Political satire Through Graphic Language: Semiological Discourse Analysis of Pakistani English Print Media

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### ABSTRACT

There are various forms of communication and caricatures are one of the important genres in this regard. It is obvious that throughout the history human beings have been using the technique of multi-modality to communicate their message to other human beings. The concept of using word-picture conjunction has ever been very instrumental in making the communication more persuasive. The present study critically analyses caricatures of Pakistani English newspaper (DAWN daily). The data for the study have been collected from the selected newspaper from November 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023. The present employs an integrated research approach to analyse the data. The rationale behind using the integrated research method is that the data comprise three modes. These modes include words, pictures and remarks of focus group participants. For linguistic and semiotic analyses Hodge and Kress (2010), research model has been operationalised. Whereas, in order to validate the findings of semiotic analysis the researchers have used Kruger's (2002) model of Focus Group data analysis. The findings of the study reveal that print media discourses mirror socio-political scenario of any other/ context they belong to. The issues heightened through the caricatures of the selected newspaper for the mentioned time include national and international politics, games and terrorism / militancy in Pakistani society. It reveals that caricatures have dual function. They provide critique of a particular scenario. Language in graphic form is regarded as two-edged weapon.



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## INTRODUCTION

Political cartoons work as a strong communicative tool and they give a lot of information about the current political scenario in a glimpse of an eye. They provide a commentary on socio-political scenario around us. People get more attracted towards pictures than text. According to

Eco (1979), a picture speaks more than thousand words and we regard our sense of sight more reliable than our sense of hearing. Jacobson (1971) opines that semiotics possess nonverbal power and act as meta-language. A gesture or a sign imparts meaning more quickly than written text. Barthes (1968) says that sign is a trace, clue or mark which stands for both individuality and universality. Semiotics are culturally oriented and they carry multiple layers of meanings. Political cartoons keep us updated about the surroundings especially social, religious and political circumstances. Semiotics help understanding human thinking pattern from social and psychological view. In our society human use language to communicate but it is also evident that people can communicate through nonverbal means as well. Kristeva (1969) opines that every speech act delivers a message but maybe done through language of words, posture, gesture, clothing or any other means in a social context. Semiotic discourses work as powerful means to disseminate a particular ideology to target audience in the most effective way.

### **Political Cartoon as a Genre**

Political cartoons are very important to grab the attention of a large number of audience. In a country like Pakistan where literacy rate is comparatively low, caricatures are one of the most effective ways to grasp the attention of the people belonging to all walks of life. Semiotics are meant for everybody and hence, are decoded accordingly. They perform dual function. On one hand they entertain and on the other provide a commentary on socio-political scenario around us. Moreover, they are supposed to be culturally loaded and one needs culturally trained senses to decode them. They, sometimes carry some sort of political hegemony in them. Different media groups employ this subtle technique to disseminate desired ideology among the target audience. They are never neutral rather subjective. Semiotic discourses have become an important genre of print media and are exploited like wise.

Tsakona (2009) maintains that Multimodal framework helps to understand the interplay of visual and verbal practices. Sometimes certain things are exaggerated through the caricatures but despite this they are never ideology free. Desousa & Medhurst (1981) opine that Political cartoons serve four functions that include entertainment, aggression, reduction, agenda setting and framing specific political policy and history. Caricatures embody the dominant political themes of the day. According to Steuter et al. (2008) cartoons are not common genre of print media rather they can change minds, make beliefs, transform ideas, guide both directly and indirectly. Morris (1992) argues that cartoons are speech bubble and have ever been significant through ages. Medhurst and Desousa (1981) are of the view that semiotic discourses carry graphic persuasion and are designed tactfully. They can influence and persuade the target audience.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section briefly introduces the works already done in a similar domain. Sheikh et al. (2013) examined political cartoons that were published in Pakistani newspapers to analyze how different

political ideologies are disseminated through print media semiotic discourses. The caricatures were evaluated at the levels of symbolism, exaggeration, labelling, analogy and irony embedded in them. The research explored that how cartoons very subtly propagate desired ideology to the target audience to win their consent. The analysis comprised linguistic and semiotic levels. The research concludes that political cartoons play a significant role in shaping public perception about different political agendas.

He explored how different ideologies are disseminated through cartoon series apparently meant for children. The data was collected from the first Turkish Cartoon series “Pepee” that consisted of eight seasons that comprised of two hundred and eleven episodes; it was broadcasted until 2008 September until 2015 January. An integrated research approach based on qualitative and content analysis techniques was applied to analyse the data. The analysis of the data revealed that the selected cartoon series was meant for the propagation of desired political ideologies of the dominant controlling groups and hence proves the notion that there is an ideology within and behind semiotic discourses.

Rahman’s (2018) conducted a research on the representation of Islam and Muslims in American print media, semiotic discourse that found that the west is highly terrified of Muslims. It argues that Muslims are hardliners because of the violent ideology of Islam. Most often Islam is associated with phobia through semiotic discourses. The data was analysed by using Fairclough’s (2003) and Barthes’ (1973) research models at semiotic and linguistic levels. The research concludes that through the semiotic discourses of American print media Islam and Muslims are misrepresented.

Sajid et al. (2020) observed the power of images in shaping the perception of people post-9/11 American representation in Pakistani print media semiotic discourses. The data for the study was collected from Pakistani English newspaper Dawn. To analyse the data the researchers employed a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach. The study drew upon Machin’s (2007), Van Leeuwen,s(2005) framework for re-contextualization and Fairclough's (2003) for linguistic analysis. The study revealed that no use of language is ideology-free and words and pictures work side by side to propagate a desired ideology to the general masses more comprehensively.

He researched the COVID-19-related scenario in Pakistan and politicians violated how different SOPs were issued by the government of Pakistan in the form of smart lockdown and observance of social distancing during their election campaigns in Gilgit Baltistan. The research used the purposive sampling technique for data collection from Pakistani print media. The centralistic texts selected for the study were analysed by using qualitative and interpretive research paradigms. The study asserts that both the opposition and the ruling party did not bother to observe SOP's about Covid-19.

Dezhkameh et al. (2021) critically analysed articles of Iranian and American newspapers about the representation of Covid-19 related coverage. The study focused on exploring ideological differences in news reporting about the same event differently through ideologically different media groups. Dijk's (2006) ideological square framework was employed. The study highlighted that no use of language is ideology free and media discourses of both the countries are polarized. A war of words on both sides is going on for self-glorification and misrepresentation of others. The research suggests that newspapers need to be cognizant about language use because it can be used to manipulate readers' mind.

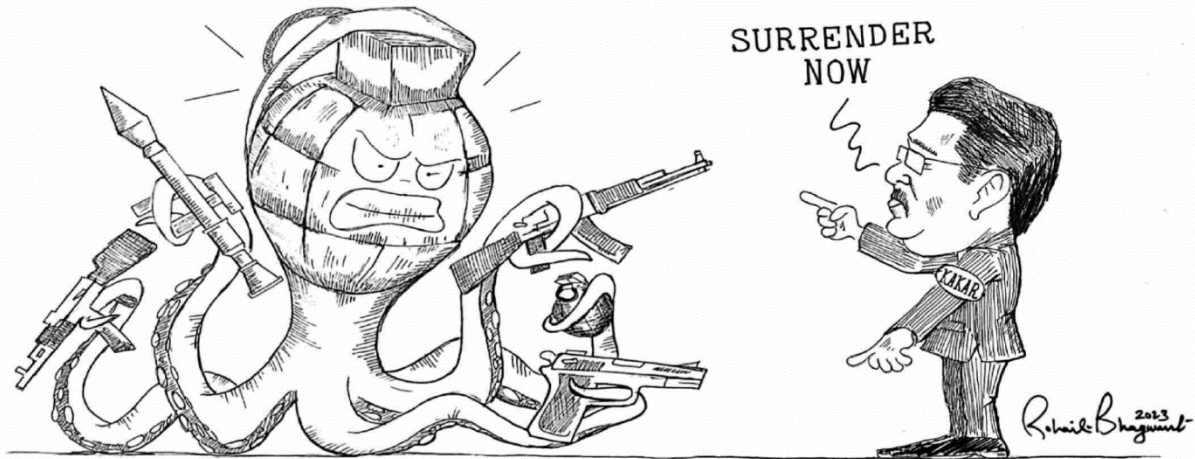
## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present research employs an integrated research approach that has been designed by drawing upon Kress (2010) and Krueger's (2001) research models. The data for the study was collected from two Pakistani newspapers. One English (DAWN) and one Urdu (JUNG). The delimitation of the study is that it only deals with the semiotic discourses of the mentioned English and Urdu newspapers from May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 to June 30<sup>th</sup> 2022. Since, the data collected for the study comprises more than one mode i.e. language and visual, therefore, Kress' (2010) multimodal social sociological approach to contemporary discourses has been employed. This model works at the following levels:

1. What meaning is being made in the text?
2. How is meaning being made in the text?
3. What resources have been drawn on to make meanings in the text?
4. In what social environment is the meaning being made?
5. Whose interest and agency is at work in the making of meaning?
6. Focus groups discussions have also been used in the study to collect data. Some of the people related to academia argue that semiotic analysis privileges semioticians' particular perception and interpretation of text, which may not match with general perception. The first group comprised the participants who are M.Phil. in English, whereas the second group comprised the participants who are M.Phil. in other disciplines. The same selected semiotics from Urdu and English newspapers were discussed in the two focus group discussions. Besides, in order to analyze the focus group data Krueger's (2002) model has been used. This model analyses the data at word, context, internal consistency, extensiveness and finding the big idea levels.

## DATA ANALYSIS

PM KAKAR TELLS MILITANTS TO SURRENDER UNCONDITIONALLY



Kress (2010) maintains that different verbal and visual practices are made to make discourses more persuasive. Cartoons are meant for every body and hence, are decoded like wise. They carry plethora of interpretations. They are culture specific and are mostly decoded in accordance with the cultural training of our senses. The technique of word-picture conjunction is employed to convey underlying message. Similarly, the semiotic text under analysis embodies bundle of interpretations. It is obvious from the semiotic text under analysis that different typographic techniques have been used. The use of linguistic text implies that problem of militancy has been long standing in the history of Pakistan.

Hodge (2010) maintains that use of linguistic spins is never neutral. Most often, it is observed that everything is said against something unsaid. Mostly, said is never the real meanings. Here, in the linguistic text the use of verb 'tell' implies the defensive stance of PM (prime minister of Pakistan). Had there been the use of the verb 'order', the implied meanings would have been otherwise. There is a kind of juxtaposition in the linguistic text. On one hand, PM is asking the militants to surrender unconditionally, but on the other hand, there is use of 'tell' instead of order. The use of expression 'unconditionally' implies that such type of deals have been three in the pat between government and militants but on certain condition. This time, the caretaker PM is asking that mine government is not authorized to deal with you people on certain conditions. Therefore, you are required to surrender unconditionally. The use of typographic technique in the form of bold font and capital letters implies that the care taking government is facing many severe problem and increasing wave of militancy is prominent among them.

Kress (2010) argues that use of visual and verbal devices is a significant feature of multimodality and visual coherence plays an important role in visual communication. Similarly, the linguistic message conveyed by caretaker PM (Kakar) implies that he is not concerned with the deals of past between the previous governments and militant groups. His sole concern is that things 'now'

should be normalized. His government cannot afford any more militancy. At least things must be settled right now. He is trying to assert his authority using discursive and coercive means, as is obvious from his words and posture. The name of Pm (Kakar) is written on the left shoulder of PM. This serves as an identity marker PM right now. Usually, the permanent (elected) prime ministers do not wear such identity markers. Since, he is caretaker and for a short span of time, therefore, he has to assert his status through language and semiotic. The use of typographic technique is obvious here as well. The linguistic message of PM “SURRENDER NOW” implies urgency of the matter. There are two linguistic messages written on the semiotic text. The linguistic message at the top of Octopus could be taken as general one and the linguistic message over the head of PM “Surrender Now” could be taken as particular one. Like the previous governments, he also gave a policy statement about terrorism and militancy. Nevertheless, when he realized that there is continuous increase in militant activities in the country, he delivers the new message. It could be one of the reasons that PM might have felt that he himself is no more secured as is obvious from the posture of the Octopus. Some of the deadly weapons are targeting him. He seems in the boggled position and perhaps do not know how to tackle the situation. The zig- zag line between his linguistic message and his lips implies uncertain state of his mind. It seems that simultaneously, he trying to manage different fronts and is successful in managing nothing. The overall, impression of linguistic texts used in the cartoon is that militancy has been there is Pakistan in different forms through different periods of the history. It is getting unmanageable right now for the caretaker government. Therefore, the PM is desperately attempting to get rid of the situation.

Barthes (1974) opines that semiotic discourses are layered and carry bundle of interpretations. One needs to have linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge to decode them comprehensively. They are are culture specific and one needs culturally traioned senses to analyse them. Semiotic discourses are deeply rooted in to the history and cannot be decoded without having sound knowledge of history. Similarly, the cartoon, under analysis embodies layers of meanings. The semiotic shown looks like a monster with many arms and still growing in terms of size and arms. It resembles an Octopus, a sea monster/ creature having many heads, legs and arms. The more it is cut/damaged, the more it grows in size. It continues getting more and more dangerous with the passage of time.

The militancy in Pakistan has been compared with a sea creature/ Octopus. Pakistan has been indirectly, compared with a sea having immeasurable depth and creatures like Octopus which have ever been increasing in size and strength. It has been in every regime either, in one form or the other. It is obvious from the history of Pakistan different governments have been trying to cope with this mance accordingly. The enormous increase in its size and having more wings and wings and arms implies that it has never been dealt wisely. This issue of militancy has various forms and none of them was tackled properly. However, some injuries might have been given to it. The ever-increasing size of Octopus implies that the more it was suppressed, the more it grew intensely.

Kress (2010) believes that a picture speaks more than a thousand words. It is the case with the cartoon under analysis. The various types of weapons aiming at different directions connote that are armed with latest weapons of short and long range. They are well informed and provided. They are at different fronts and are handling the situation accordingly. They might be working with in the country and across the border. As Octopus is, free to move in the sea, it seems the case with the militants having freedom of all types. The picture illustrates that now the government of Pakistan is facing so many threats from militant groups. Sea imagery has been used to highlight the intense situation prevailing in Pakistan. The sealed lips of the monster illustrate that it is frowned and no more willing to hold dialogue with the caretaker government. The head is tightly sealed and it could imply that it is not ready to listen to others. The technique of person as state metaphor has also been employed in the cartoon. The Octopus stands for all forms of militancy and PM shown in the picture may stand for all institutes of Pakistan. PM seems like a pigmy in front of Octopus. It implies that militants have gained enough power and are now unmanageable by the government. It is obvious the PM is showing his visual and verbal behavior. The overall impression that could be had from the analysis of the picture is that Militancy has been a long existing issue in Pakistan. Now, it has become almost unmanageable for the caretaker government of PM Kakar.

## **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA ANALYSIS**

Sajid (2019) opines that one of the objections that is raised against semiotic analysis is that it privileges semioticians understanding and cannot be generalized. In order to counter this objection one needs to incorporate general perception in semiotic analysis to know up to what extent researcher's analysis matches with general perception. Similarly, the present study employs the tool of Focus group Discussions to validate researchers' semiotic analysis. A Focus group discussion was held among the participants including linguists and scholars from other domains of education. The semiotic text was given to the participants a week before the discussion. The discussion was held at National university of Modern Languages (NUML), Multan campus. The following section reproduces the remarks of the participants that they provided during the discussion. The remarks of some of the participants are as under:

*“Militancy in Pakistan looks like a monster beyond control. It has a long history. If we go through the pages of history, we can come to know it did not have so many wings in the past. No proper attention was given to eradicate it. Had it been tackled properly, the condition of Pakistan would have been better today.”*

*“The angry face of the militant in the picture implies that government seems to small before this monster. In the past, it could have been crushed by taking suitable measures. Now things have gone beyond control.”*

*“The caretaker GOVT of Mr. Kakar is unprovided and perhaps unable to control it. Therefore, the mocking expressions are there on the face of monster/Octopus. The sealed lips of militant*

*represent that the stage of dialogue has been left far behind. Now we are ready to talk in the language of weapons. No more dialogues.”*

*“The government of Mr. Kakar is facing so many problems. Nothing is in its control. It can do nothing because it is not elected government that have more powers to control such serious issues. Government is bogged and confused. It is obvious from linguistic and body language of PM.”*

The obtained data from focus Group Discussion was analysed by employing Kruger’s (2002) for Focus group data analysis. The levels of analysis include words, frequency, internal consistency, extensiveness and finding the big idea. In the light of the data and its analysis, it is found that all the participants were of the opinion that terrorism and militancy have there in Pakistan in one form or the other. No proper measures were taken to control them. Somehow, coercive measures were taken to crush it but unfortunately, they proved useless. It is obvious from the ever increasing size of the monster shown in the cartoon. Instead of using violent means this issues could have settled through dialogues with the heads of the militant groups.

## **CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS**

The present study was undertaken to explore different visual and verbal techniques employed in Pakistani English newspaper ‘DAWN’ through its caricatures. The study has attempted to find out the answer of the designed research question. Its main concern is to locate the use of linguistic and semiotic spins in the dissemination of political ideology. In order to find out the answer the data was collected from the page 06 of the mentioned newspaper. This page publishes a cartoon on daily basis to satirize some current issue of national and international significance. These caricatures provide commentary on socio-political issues. The themes, which have been highlighted through these graphics, include national politics, international politics, games, socio-political scenario of the country and terrorism/militancy in the country and across the border. Now terrorism and militancy have become political issues. The frequency of occurrence political issues through caricatures in highest as is illustrated by the data collected for the present study during the mentioned time span. The study at hand only focused on militancy related issue through semiotic discourses of the selected newspaper. The linguistic and semiotic analysis of the selected caricature reveals that graphic form of language is more persuasive in conveying desired ideology to the target audience. The linguistic and semiotic moves used in the caricatures include the use of person as state metaphor technique, use of capital letters and bold font, visual coherence and word-picture conjunction. It finds that militancy is an issue of serious concern in Pakistan and this problem has been existing in Pakistan throughout the history of Pakistan in different forms. It is suggested that sincere efforts are required to crush the issue. Besides, it maintains that print media semiotic discourses are one of the best sites for ideological investment.



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