

A semiotic Analysis of Political Arabic Cartoons –A case Study of Iraqi Cartoons

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Abstract

Due to the great effect of pictures on our thoughts and decisions, we have noticed how these pictures produced in the form of cartoons affect our viewpoints. This research aims at revealing the structures and important features of political cartoons.

Using qualitative measures, this paper is the semiotic analysis of political cartoons published during the election campaign 2018 in Iraq. It tackles the ways cartoons used as communicative tools on internet to produce significant meaning and dominant political themes. Barthes' semiotic theory has been adopted here which is the first visual semiotic model.

Literature Review:

Many researchers have tried to avoid writing about politics obviously. They, however, tend to write researches about politics vaguely.

It is evident that contemporary mass media have become a prevailing channel of communication that catches the attention of the public using verbal and non-verbal elements as tools to express opinions and thoughts from a certain viewpoint. Recent studies on cartoons have expressed their interest in analyzing cartoons from various perspectives.

Methodology:

sample consists of 9 cartoons taken from various Iraqi media sources and drawn by different cartoonists. The cartoons were published in different websites on the internet.

Homogenous sampling, a form of purposive sampling, is used for the representative sample of the population

As the present study's purpose is to analyze cartoons visually, the aforementioned sample contains cartoons with different body languages like clothing, gestures, facial expressions, and postures.

Discussion

and

Analysis:

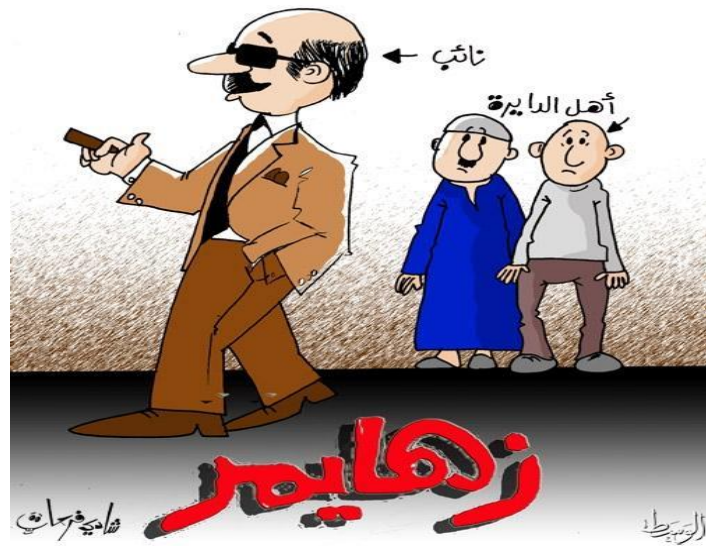
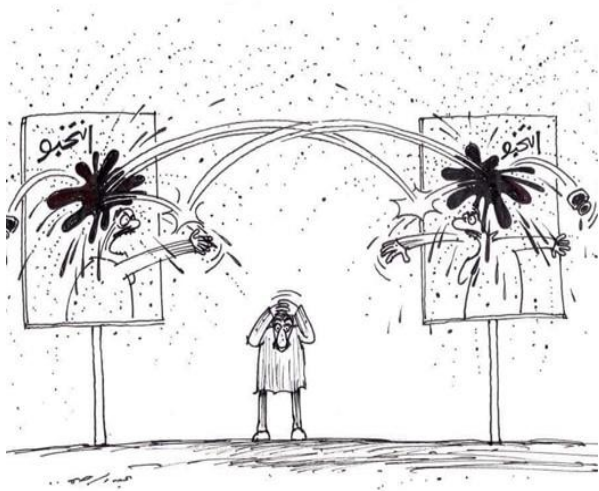
Clothing

Clothing transmits meaning the expresses power relationships among people (Owyong, 2009), and this is notoriously clear in the selected sample. Some of these cartoons depict the more powerful speaker wears a tie and the less powerful character wears none. Figure 1 shows a cartoon in which the candidate wears a suit while the voters wear casual clothes. These clothes indicate the candidate's position with the associated power particularly over the voters. Figure 2 shows the candidate wearing a suit tabbing on the shoulder of a voter dressed in ragged clothes. As the first figure illustrates, the connotation of power implied in formal clothing is also obvious in the second one. The ragged clothing indicate less power and a lot of underestimation.



Gestures

As the clothing, gestures are also used to communicate non-verbally. Hand gestures are found to be a crucial attribute and have been used in diverse ways, such as placing hands on a head, to express the misery of voters due to clashes among candidates as in figure 4. Besides, placing a hand on others' shoulder reflects the plea of the candidate to get the satisfaction of the voter while the folding his hands on his back expressing his dissatisfaction or powerlessness. Hand gestures are also used in these cartoons to reflect characters' attitudes as in figure 5 in which the candidate is putting his hand in his pocket showing indifference to voters' case while voters are just putting hands down expressing their disappointment.



Facial

Expressions

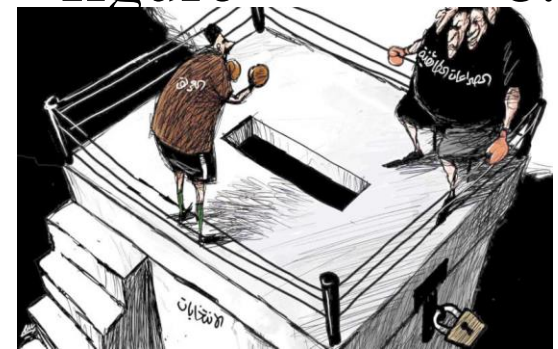
Regarding the effect of body language in communicating non-verbally, we can't condone the role of facial expressions. They are another essential communicative means of body language that are typically emotions related (Elliott and Jacobs, 2013). The face is assumed to be the most effective channel that reflects specific emotions (Ekman, 1965). In the cartoons analyzed, facial expressions are used as tools that have marked effect in expressing attitudes and emotions. For instance, in figures 2, 3 &5 the candidates are either closing eyes or wearing glasses which connote their dishonest intentions because if they open reveal their eyes, they will express their twisted intentions of not achieving any of their promises.

Smiles can be an indication of happiness, pleasure or even irritation (Sandra, 2003). In case of figure 6, it is quite clear that the big smile on the face of the candidate (the father) symbolizes a happy and relaxed character



Posture

Another meaningful use of body language in Iraqi cartoons is posture, such as standing, hunching over, or even propping against a wall. Harrigan (2005) (cited by Hajjaj, 2018) identifies posture as a coding system employing the descriptors including trunk orientation (e.g. turned) and legs positions (e.g. crossed). The same posture may express various meanings or opposite meanings as in figure 8.



The character on the left representing Iraq is drawn with a hunched back. Although the posture of hunching might indicate weakness and aging but here it expresses the opposite as it is salient in the posture of the characters on the right. Sometimes putting hands on the back and spreading them outward and upward might express indifference and fear as in figures 9 and 10 respectively.



CONCLUSION

The goal of this study is to analyze the body language of cartoons. It has analyzed the connotative meaning communicated through it. This semiotic analysis of visuals in the 9 Iraqi cartoons has figured out that visuals used in Iraqi cartoons communicate various connotative meanings. In these cartoons, clothing has been used to depict the power relationships among characters, the level of responsibility that characters take on, and other details about the characters, such as levels of misery. Gestures are also used to figure to reflect characters' personality traits or emotions, while facial expressions have indicated characters' emotional states or attitudes. Posture communicated characters' reactions and behaviors. It is noteworthy that posture is a little bit different from other body language attributes since the same posture might express opposite meanings as expressed earlier.