

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Multimodal Perspective on Economy-Related Semiotics in Pakistani Print Media: A CDA-Based Study

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Abstract: Graphic satire is one of the important genres of print media and performs a dual function. It comments on existing social issues and encourages the process of opinion formation. This study analyzes economy-related cartoons related to the Pakistan and IMF relationship in particular and related to the problem of dearness in general. The data for the study was collected from Pakistani English newspaper Dawn (daily). The time span for data collection ranges from January 2023 to March 2023. The study employs integrated research to analyze economy-related cartoons at linguistic and semiotic levels. The study employs Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Barthes' Semiotic Theory to decode the visual and verbal practices used in the data. The Study reveals that the concept of word-picture conjunction has been used to highlight Pakistan's dependence on the IMF for her survival. Besides, it contends that dearness-related issues find frequent representation in print media discourses. Furthermore, the study emphasizes on the need for sustainable economic solutions, encouraging policymakers to address the root causes of economic instability instead of depending on foreign aid.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Cartoons, Language and Economy, Semiology, Ideology

Introduction

A political cartoon is a visual representation that uses humor, and symbolism to comment on political and social issues of a country. It communicates the artist's opinion about prevailing socio-political issues of a particular context. At present media discourses are considered an important site for ideological investment to control the mindset of the audience. In this regard, it is pertinent that newspapers actively engage readers by using language, symbols, and visual cues in cartoons that require interpretation.

This study attempts to decode semiotic discourses related to IMF and economy-related issues to lay bare underlying ideologies embedded in them. The cartoons focus on public concerns and can summarize complex issues in a single image, which would otherwise need lengthy written explanations. In cartoons, both words and visuals are used to convey messages. Through the tools of verbal and non-verbal elements, caricatures express important social and political issues taking place in a context. Giarelli (2003) argues that cartoons act as a form of social action. They show how language and images directly express the realities of society. Caricatures are drawn with a tactful style and often include text, thought bubbles, and captions to add context or humor. This research focuses on analyzing the language and visuals of these caricatures that are represented in media, especially in the Dawn newspaper. This research aims to analyze how political cartoons

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address specific social and political issues. According to Heitzmann (1998), cartoons are meant for everybody and are decoded accordingly.

Giarelli (2003) opines that decoding a political cartoon is not always an easy task. It often requires knowledge of text and context. This research focuses on understanding the linguistic and semiotic features of caricatures represented in Pakistani newspaper Dawn. The purpose of this research is to investigate how Pakistani newspapers represent a critique of current social, economic, and political issues. The present study employs a qualitative method to explore the meaning, at linguistic and semiotic levels.

Literature review

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. It says that there is a larger truth beyond just human interpretation. Through semiotics, it is explored that creating new ideas relies on a set of rules. Semiotic discourses help in understanding the world better and creating meanings. They illustrate that mostly sign-based behavior of the people find expression through them. One example of this is political cartoons, which use both images and words to convey messages. The blend of visual and verbal communication is called multimodality. It includes the guidelines for how visual elements work together to help people grasp the message behind cartoons. Political cartoons are a tool for highlighting social and political issues.

Riaz et al. (2021) conducted a study on political cartoons about Covid-19 in Pakistani English newspapers. They found that these cartoons can create fear and uncertainty about the safety of Covid-19. It also demonstrates that when political leaders ignore safety guidelines (SOPs), it makes these rules seem like a joke and less important. The study employs Machin's (2007), Van Leeuwen's (2008), and Fairclough's (2003) research models to analyze the data. It concludes that such political images are fear-based in nature to warn people about being careful.

Sitanggang (2018) investigated political satire using cartoons on Pinterest. He has focused on how visuals and textual features work together to create meaning. For visuals, he has used theories by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), and for the text, he has applied Holliday's functional grammar model. Using Lemke's Theory, he analyzed 20 random political cartoons from 2016-2017. The study has revealed that these cartoons provide indirect information by blending different connections between visuals and language to disseminate the desired ideology among the target audience.

El-Falaky and May Samir (2019) conducted research on Caricaturing Two Revolutions: Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Egyptian Political Cartoons. The study employs an integrated approach to analyze data. The analysis of the data reveals that through semiotic discourses Egyptian government has been mocked for its ineffective policies. In the research, it has been examined that these cartoons have portrayed topics such as the Egyptian public and administration, gender inequality, economic challenges, social norms, national identity, U.S. dominance, and political conflicts.

Ifechelobi (2021) conducted a study on caricatures in Nigerian newspapers using Visual Semiotic Theory to explore different layers of meanings. The concept of multimodality has been central to this research, recognizing that communication involves not only spoken and written

language but also other forms like images, colors, and layouts. Each of these elements has its own meaning and significance.

Using Visual Semiotic Theory, the study has examined how visual language impacts interpretation and understanding. It has been shown that analyzing visuals as a form of communication expands readers' ability to interpret multimodal texts and enhances their understanding of complex visual messages.

Sari et al. ([2021](#)) have researched on a topic, A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Pantene Advertising. They have concluded that advertising is a persuasive tool aimed at influencing and convincing the general public. Ads are published daily through various platforms, such as magazines, newspapers, television, and radio. The study has focused on Pantene shampoo, which is particularly popular among female consumers. The researchers have used Halliday's ([2014](#)) transitivity system and Kress and van Leeuwen's ([2006](#)) framework to analyze how Pantene ads both visually and verbally communicate the idea of strong and beautiful hair. Their investigation has also examined how effectively these ads portray women with strong, beautiful hair and the significance of the differences in these portrayals. The findings highlight that advertisements shape consumer perceptions regarding how to be beautiful and acceptable in society. Being white is a symbol of being more powerful. The present study is significant as it attempts to critically decode economy-related cartoons by employing an integrated research approach.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the economic caricatures reflecting the economic conditions of Pakistan.
2. To identify the semiotic and linguistic techniques employed in these caricatures to convey their intended messages.

Research Questions

1. How do the economy-related caricatures in Pakistani print media reflect the country's economic conditions.
2. What are semiotic and linguistic techniques used to convey economy-related ideologies?

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature as it attempts to analyze economy-related caricatures published in the selected newspaper from January 2023 and March 2023. Dawn newspaper was selected for data collection because it is a widely read newspaper. The collected data is multimodal in nature as it comprises linguistic and visual modes. Kress and van Leeuwen's ([2010](#)) Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Barthe's ([1974](#)) Semiotic theory have been operationalized in the study. The proposed model works at the following levels:

What meanings are being made?

How meanings are being made?

What resources are being drawn upon?

In what context are meanings being made?

Whose interests are being served?

Barthes' ([1974](#)) theory of semiology comprises iconic, identical, and indexical levels. The selected data for the study have been analyzed by employing the mentioned research models. The analyses of the semiotic discourses have been done at connotative and denotative levels. Moreover,

to validate the findings of this study, a focus group discussion has been conducted by the researcher. The group discussion lasted for one hour and was visually recorded.

Data Analysis

Figure 1



The caricature provides a satirical critique of the reliance on IMF deals to address economic crises through a combination of written and visual elements. Barthes's semiotic theory has been used to analyze the denotation of a caricature depicting a man playing a flute labeled 'IMF Deal' and directing it toward an erupting volcano labeled 'Economic Crisis'.

The man represents a policymaker or authority figure, and the flute symbolizes the tool of external financial aid. In the background, the volcano that erupts smoke and debris symbolizes the uncontrollable and intensifying nature of the economic crisis. The written text "IMF DEAL" and "ECONOMIC CRISIS" convey the meaning of the visual representation. To put an emphasis on the IMF deal and economic crisis, the cartoonist has written both the words in capital letters. In this cartoon, the volcano is a metaphor for the growing severity of economic issue, while the flute may be taken as a symbol of financial policy. The peaceful acts and composed facial expressions of the flute player contrast with the tumultuous volcano explosion, emphasizing a gap between the policymaker's efforts and the crisis' actual circumstances. The person playing the flute is not facing the huge mountain of economic crisis rather he is backing the volcano and busy playing flute, which symbolizes that this policymaker thinks that he can manage the economic problems with this IMF deal, but the reality is opposite. It is evident from the picture that the crisis has become too worse and has started erupting, it shows that now the country's economic issues are uncontrollable and cannot be resolved by merely relying on IMF aid. The government needs to do something else to control the situation. The connotation of these elements is deeply symbolic. The flute is often associated with harmony and control. But here it represents ineffective and superficial solutions. It suggests that IMF policies are not adequate enough to address the root causes of economic instability. The volcano conveys the uncontrollable and destructive nature of the crisis while debris coming out of the volcano symbolizes certain impacts of the crisis such as unemployment, inflation, and social unrest. The visual portrayal implies that the economic issue is getting worse instead of being resolved.

Kress (2010) argues that through multimodal discourse analysis, the interaction between the text and the visuals supports the underlying critique. The flute player is positioned in the foreground and separated from the volcano in the background that visually represents the detachment of policymakers from the actual consequences of their decisions. The flute serves as the vector

connecting the man to the volcano and symbolizing the direct influence of IMF policies on the crisis. While the eruption and rising smoke add urgency and indicate that the situation is getting worse and worse. The spatial arrangement emphasizes the looming threat of the crisis as in the visual representation volcano dominates the scene despite being placed in the background. The text under analysis demonstrates that policymakers and ruling class in Pakistan are least concerned about the worst economic circumstances. They are lost in the fantasy world of their own. They have nothing to do except reaping their own interests.

Caricature Analysis

Figure 2



Kress and Hodge (2010) maintain that the resources drawn upon to convey meanings are of vital significance in disseminating ideologies. Similarly, the cartoon under analysis represents a critique of the decision of the government to raise power tariffs under the influence of the IMF. It highlights the horrible effects of such decisions on the ordinary citizens of the country. The text

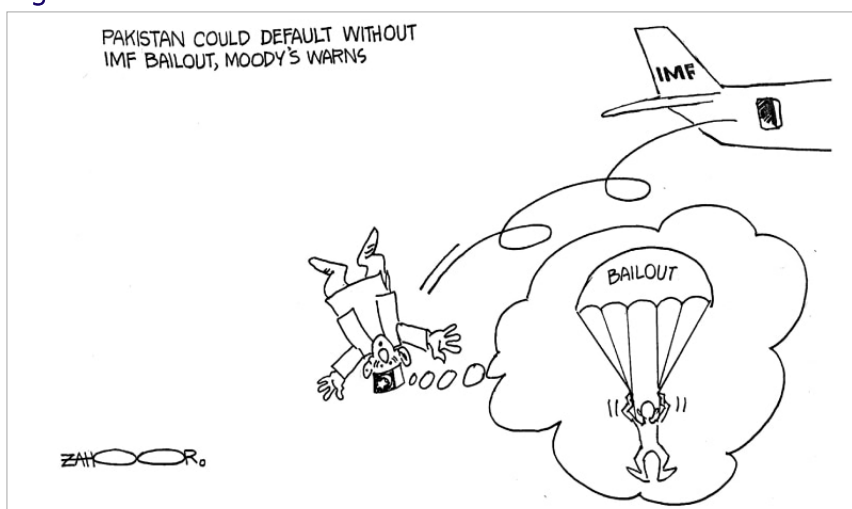
under analysis connotes that ruling class in Pakistan has badly failed to manage the economic conditions and the general masses are taxed heavily day by day. The word "pacify" means submissiveness to IMF policies. Instead of providing relief to the poor masses the sole aim of the government is to obey the policies of IMF. This is done by imposing more and more taxes on the general masses. The person's wide-open eyes and mouth along with messy, spiky hair make it look like he is surprised, scared, and in a lot of pain. It is as if he is being hurt but can't do anything to stop it. Moreover, his tattered clothing and weak body portray poverty and helplessness. The visual and verbal practices used in the cartoon imply that the burden of the tariff hike affects low-income people the most. The black scratches on both sides of the person act as a visual metaphor for the heavy and oppressive atmosphere created by the tariff hike decision. The surrounding lighting mirrors the electric shocks and supports the idea that the increase in power prices has severe and immediate effects on the poor masses of Pakistan. Meanwhile, the look of the control switch mounted on the control panel shows that this pain is intentional. The cable connecting the platform to an unseen source symbolizes the external influence of the IMF driving these decisions. The spatial arrangement further emphasizes this cause-and-effect relationship, with the man placed at the center to represent the people's suffering and the switchboard to the side, showing the origin of the policy.

Barthes (1974) opines that semiological discourses have twofold appeal. Similarly, the caricature under analysis illustrates that there are a number of visible and invisible worries of the people in Pakistan but they are ignored by the ruling class. Denotatively, it shows a man being shocked on a platform with visible electric shocks and labeled text to explain the situation. Connotatively, the man symbolizes the public, and the shock is a metaphor for the terrible impact

of the government's decision. Both the switchboard and cable signify control and external pressure while the text explains how the symbols relate to criticism of IMF policies. The interaction between text and visuals is highlighted by Multimodal discourse analysis. The cartoonist has used word-picture conjunction in this caricature to convey the meanings because as it said that words and pictures work in conjunction to convey meanings. The labels and images seem to work in conjunction to construct a narrative of government compliance and citizens' suffering. The background of the caricature focuses on critiquing the government and emphasizing the message. It reflects the power imbalance between global financial institutions and developing nations where the citizens are often left to bear the pressure of economic policies that are designed to meet external demands. The cartoon uses strong images and words to show how IMF decisions affect people's lives. It highlights how ordinary citizens are the ones who suffer the most from these policies.

Caricature Analysis

Figure 3



Kress and Hodge (2010) maintain that the use of linguistic and visual techniques makes the process of communication more persuasive. The combination of word-picture practices is of vital significance in making the process of ideological investment long-lasting. Similarly, the cartoon under analysis depicts the alarming situation of Pakistan's economy. The dangerous state of Pakistan's economy has been depicted in the caricature. As well as

this caricature shows that Pakistan's economy is too much dependent on help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to avoid disaster. The semiotic discourse implies that Pakistan may face challenges in meeting its financial obligations without assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The warning is strengthened by Moody's, a reputable credit rating organization, which emphasizes how urgent the issue is. The main problem is Pakistan's weak economy, which has to be addressed immediately. The visual supports this message: the country is represented by a person wearing a traditional shalwar kameez, a waistcoat, and a hat with the Pakistani flag on it.

Hodge (2010) opines that the concept of person and place as state metaphors are significant techniques in the process of meaning-making comprehensively. Similarly, the person shown in the semiotic embodies the concept of person as a state metaphor. It stands for Pakistan's troubled economy struggling for its survival. Its survival is dependent on the IMF's loan. The man shown in the picture representing Pakistan's economy seems in trouble and desperately attempting for survival. This shows that the country is out of control and heading toward a crash, just like a person falling without anything to stop him/herself. His expression and body language highlight fear and desperation, symbolizing the economic uncertainty Pakistan is facing. The semiotic text under analysis depicts that Above the man representing Pakistan, the IMF has been shown as a plane flying away symbolizing how the IMF holds power to rescue Pakistan but is not directly involved yet. The distance between the falling man and the plane reflects how far removed the IMF is from

Pakistan's immediate crisis. The plane is moving upward, suggesting that the IMF is not directly connected to the crisis on the ground and operates on its terms.

A thought bubble coming from the man shows a parachute labeled "Bailout." This represents Pakistan's hope for financial help from the IMF. The parachute symbolizes temporary relief provided it opens well in time. It represents something that could slow down the fall or prevent an immediate crash but is not a long-term solution. The presence of a parachute in the form of a thought bubble emphasizes that it is the only hope, not a guarantee. It shows how dependent Pakistan is on the IMF's decision to provide aid, and how uncertain that aid might be. The falling man and the IMF plane create a strong contrast. The man is falling rapidly, symbolizing Pakistan's economic decline, while the plane is flying away, representing how external help is distant and conditional. This contrast makes it clear that Pakistan's reliance on bailouts is precarious. The parachute, while offering some hope, shows that bailouts are only a short-term fix, not a solution to the deeper problems in the economy. The curved line connecting the man with the plane indicates that Pakistan was once supported by the IMF. But now it has been left in the middle of a severe financial crisis. Despite being in a powerful position, the IMF is not currently supporting Pakistan and leaving the country hoping for its assistance.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion has been conducted among 06 participants belonging to different domains. A moderator assisted the researcher in the conduction of FGD. They expressed their perception of the caricatures. The purpose of conducting this focus group discussion is to understand the viewpoints of people regarding these caricatures that what are their knowledge about current Pakistan's economic issues. All of the participants understood the idea that Pakistan's economy has been shown so weak and unstable and this is all because Pakistan relies on external aids, particularly IMF. According to them instead of focusing on the root causes of economic issues, the government is taking temporary aids that are doing nothing but worsening the conditions. The findings of the focus group discussion match with the analysis of the researchers.

Findings and Conclusion

The analysis of the data consisting of economy-related cartoons reveals that this theme finds frequent representation in the semiotic discourses of the selected Pakistani English newspaper. It highlights that the economic crisis is one of the burning issues of the day and hence mirrored through the semiotic discourses of English and Urdu print media discourses. The study contends that semiotics is meant for everybody and are decoded likewise by the culturally trained senses of the viewers. The technique of word-picture conjunction is one of the salient features of semiotic-based studies. The study also affirms Fairclough's notion that no use of language is ideology. The prominent typographic techniques employed in the graphic satire include the use of typographic techniques, the use of bold font and capital letters, backgrounding, foregrounding, the use of high and low angles, and the use of person and place as state metaphors. Besides, the study highlights that print media discourses mirror social reality and prevailing socio-political and economic tendencies of a particular context. They are one of the significant sites for ideological investment. The study suggests that without improving the economic condition of Pakistan, the Pakistanis cannot survive on their own.

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