

Analyzing Iraqi Political Cartoons: A Semiotic Model

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Abstract—Pictures have an essential effect on our thoughts and decisions. People have also noticed everywhere how these pictures produced in the form of cartoons affect their viewpoints. Advertisers and cartoonists do so since people are addicted to social media to the extent it can manipulate their thoughts unconsciously and obnoxiously. Besides, people do not have the courage to express their viewpoints in public clearly, so they tend to use the satire to keep their face. This motivates the researcher to analyze the underlying structure of the satire presented in caricatures to read the message clearly. The present research aims at revealing the way, the political caricatures are produced and the main characteristics of political caricatures. Incorporating a methodology depending on selecting some samples randomly. The research is a semiotic analysis of political caricatures announced through the election campaign 2018 in Iraq. It concentrates on the format caricatures used as a communicative channel on various platforms to come up with essential senses and prevailing political matters. The present study is carried out by adopting Barthes' semiotic model which is an apparent semiotic approach. It is a good means to analyze the implied structure, including the dictionary and implied senses of creating influence of political caricatures. In addition, it provides readers with a good means to interpret and understand political caricatures. The present paper is quite important since political cartoons work as an approach to comprehend human consciousness.

Keywords—Semiotic analysis, political cartoons, election campaign, Barthes' semiotic theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

Artists often make use of caricatures to express their viewpoints indirectly. Undoubtedly, these cartoons are a good free tool of expression. This genre adds the "cool" image to the print media which lures folks. English language luckily offers writers a lot of methods to manipulate with words and get audience persuaded (Abbasian and Azeez, 2021).

Nelson (1975) states that any person can hardly neglect this means as it is fun enough to express profound ideas. The term cartoon "refers first to metaphorical codification and second to a satirical or hilarious style by which a cartoonist implicitly reports, strictures, and enjoy his addressees" (El Refaie 2009:181). Political caricatures have often granted folks the ability to look critically at political truth.

In many situations, political cartoons prove to be more influential in proclamation knowledge and elaborating ideas than verbal texts. In the contemporary world, political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced, and played by language and cartoons. Hence, it could be viewed that politicians are concerned about using language or caricature and cartoons to communicate with the prospect audience (Shaikh et al., 2010). They communicate messages and critiques camouflaged as humor. Moreover, it is notoriously important to say that ideas can be expressed through the manipulation

of character's features such as noses, mouths, and eyebrows alongside the verbal messages.

Hence, through cartoons, cartoonists try to interact with the present political issues in a sarcastic manner that can be figured out and understood quickly from the body language which referred to visuals. Therefore, this paper tends to point out how visuals and verbal messages in political cartoons can be used to grasp and promote for one party over another in Iraq context during the election campaign in 2018.

The research raises the following two questions:

1. How are political issues depicted and exposed using caricatures?
2. How do these caricatures affect people's thoughts?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have tried to avoid writing about politics obviously. They, on the other hand, care about writing researches about politics vaguely. It is evident that contemporary mass media have become a dominant route of communication that grasps the attention of the folks using verbal and non-verbal elements as tools to express viewpoints and ideas from a certain perspective. Recent studies on

cartoons have expressed their interest in analyzing cartoons from various perspectives. Mhamdi (2017) has made a study exploring the utilization some political caricatures in the Tunisian context during its transitory phase in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. It has figured out the way, the political caricatures have been employed to mirror the socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions in Tunisia at that time. Moreover, it points out the dominant stereotypes of Tunisian political caricatures throughout the transferring period. The outcomes notify that political cartoons are actively incorporated to reflect the socioeconomic and geopolitical conditions in Tunisia that subsequently occur. Tunisian cartoonists try to portray the status quo during the passing period and empirically imply their critical messages through nicely crafted cartoons. They also uncover an implied approach that includes oral and written elements to come out with meanings and exemplify the signs. Besides, the cartoonists' goal is chiefly to sarcastically urge and surprise their audiences, guiding them to question the truth of their situation and critically react to the status quo.

Some other researchers, however, try to focus more on the verbal elements to convey their messages as Hajjaj (2018) who has published a paper presenting semiotic analysis of just visuals used in 10 Jordanian cartoons. His paper's aim is analyzing the body language employed in various cartoons. It sheds light on the implied meaning embedded in body movements. The explanation of these visuals semiotically has pointed out that visuals used in Jordanian cartoons to uncover diverse implied meanings. Clothing, for example, is used to display the authority relationships among figures, the extent of responsibility that figures are in charge of, and other worth mentioned points about the figures, such as levels of misery.

Gestures have been used to show figures' characteristics or feelings, while facial expressions are used to mirror the figures' feelings or attitudes.

Moreover, characters' stance has communicated figures' conduct or behaviors. Particularly, the usage of posture is distinguished from other body language aspects. For example, the similar posture is used to show two discrepant meanings in the two cartoons being analyzed.

Some cartoonists, however, are able enough to convince the addressees by playing with symbols, signs with the addition of little apparent language as Ako and Ottoh (2011) analyzed that. They explore the semiotics of cartoons using various samples chosen from *The Punch* and *The Guardian*, newspapers based in Nigeria. They try in their paper to fill the space between the way of analysis using sign and the caricatures. Their paper also attempts to display the relationship between caricatures and the semiotically used resources. It also delves into the sociocultural milieu of cartoonists. The paper explores the metaphorical play of seen aspects in caricatures by considering the communicative elements such as signs, clues, and figures. It makes the figure nature of the caricature more prominent by referring to, and shedding light on the signs incorporated. The paper sums up by mentioning that caricatures are actually different meaning based as one figure may appear to someone as a symbol, to another one as a figure and to a someone else as a clue. The

drawn conclusion is that caricatures are analyzed differently depending on the viewpoint of the reader.

Therefore, Tsakona (2008, P.88) tries to explain how content and sarcasm can be generated by two semiotic aspects either, the oral and the apparent, or only using the apparent way. He said that because of their intensive form and to the interplay between language and form, cartoons are often understood to be straight and plain to get a way of communicating a meaning. His paper aims at displaying that cartoon sarcasm is not always easy to catch comprehensively, therefore, the reader should pay attention to all the oral and apparent details of each cartoon. He has used General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) to explore some of the popular hilarious techniques in both the oral and the apparent modes. His analysis aims at taking the GTVH a step further toward the fusion of linguistic and semiotic methods to sarcasm.

In addition, cartoons can be used wickedly to save face as politicians usually do. Al-Momani et al. (2016) wrote a paper entitled "A Semiotic Analysis of Political Cartoons in Jordan in Light of the Arab Spring." Their study makes an analysis of political caricatures published in Jordan before and through 2013 election campaigns. It tends to show the sociopolitical situation after the 2011 Arab Spring and concentrates on the alteration of the reaction of the folks regarding politics and its people. It suggests that the fun involved in caricatures transfers influential points that call for investigating the interplay between the different symbols utilized in caricatures and their social and ideological implicatures. A model of analysis derived from Barthes' comprehension of the dictionary meaning and the implied one is considered. The analysis identifies different messages in a number of cartoons before and after 2011. Unlike cartoons published in the period between 2007 and 2010, the linguistic and denoted messages in cartoons of 2013 connoted a sense of salvation, achievement, victory, freedom, dignity, and democracy, merits that had rarely been highlighted in previous cartoons. This attitude has been incorporated by themes such as positive images of youth, public awareness of political and national issues, and resistance toward corruption.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present paper analyzes nine cartoons captured from diverse Iraqi media sources and portrayed by different cartoonists. These cartoons have been published in different websites on the internet. As the purpose of this paper is to analyze cartoons visually and verbally, the aforementioned sample contains cartoons with different body languages such as clothing, gestures, facial expressions, and postures.

IV. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A. Clothing

Clothing transmits concept that expresses authority relationships among folks (Owyong, 2009), and this is notoriously clear in the selected sample. A number of these cartoons depict the more authorized speaker wearing a tie and

the less authorized figure wearing none. Fig. 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.

The linguistic message

The caption hung on the wall saying “Gul sar w intakhib abu aldular” which means “say that's it. And vote for the Dollar's father.” The other caption written in blue saying “sawtuk amaneh” which means “your vote is a fidelity.”

The denoted message

The main visual signs are a candidate wearing a suit and holding money to provide to voters wearing ragged clothes in return for their votes.

The connoted message

In this caricature, the candidate is buying votes to support his campaign pretending that your vote is a fidelity and should be given to the one who deserves. On the other hand, it implies the political corruption which results in lagging behind the developed countries.

Fig. 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 indicates less power and a lot of underestimation.

The linguistic message

The caption says “surah musarabah ma qabl alintkhabat” which reads “a picture leaked before the elections.”

The denoted message

The main visual signs are a candidate wearing a suit tapping on the shoulder of a voter wearing old clothes and smiling at him.

The connoted meaning

In this cartoon, an Iraqi candidate wearing formal clothes tapping on the shoulder of a voter wearing old clothes. He is doing so to appeal for him and persuade him kindly to vote for himself. Besides, this cartoon shows that wearing formal clothes expresses how much that person has authority and how much he is rich to the extent he might succeed in buying votes. Wearing old clothes, on the other hand, display how much that man is underestimated and he does not have the right to say “no.”

Moreover, clothing also figures out character's personality (Moody, Wendy, Sinha, and Pammi, 2010). In Fig. 3, the front side of the picture represents the angelic side of the candidate's personality, while the shadow depicts the opposite, as implied in the picture of a bull.

The linguistic message

The above caption says “al-murashah” which means “the candidate,” the one forward says “qabl alintkhabat” which means “before the elections,” and the one backward says “baad alintkhabat” which means “after elections.”

The denoted meaning

The main visual signs are a candidate wearing white and having wings while his shadow reflecting a bull with horn and a tail.



Fig. 1. Your voice is fidelity. Say it is done and vote for the dollar's father



Fig. 2. A picture taken before the elections



Fig. 3. The candidate before and after the elections

The connoted meaning

Wearing white reflects how much that person is loyal, honest, kind, helpful, and tolerant. Furthermore, it points out the notion that how much candidates are transparent and sensitive once they apply for the elections, but they immediately change once

they win and forget about the promises they have given to the voters to deceive them. Besides, wearing oversized clothes due to being obese reflect the irresponsibility of the candidates and the only thing they do just piling up money and weight.

B. Gestures

Similar to clothing, gestures are also used to communicate non-verbally. Hand movements are demonstrated to be a crucial attribute. Besides, they have been used in various ways, as placing hands on a head, to express the misery of voters due to clashes among candidates as shown in Fig. 4.

The linguistic message

This cartoon has only one caption says “intakhbo” which means “Vote” written on each side.

The denoted message

The main visual signs are a man tapping on head due to the war among candidates.

The connoted message

In this cartoon, an Iraq citizen is going crazy due to the war among voters. Candidates tend to make other campaigns fail except theirs. They do so by waging a word war as accusing them of stealing, corruption, and some other kinds of stigma attached to them. By doing so, they drive people crazy and confuse them to the extent they cannot make up their mind.

Besides, placing a hand on others' shoulder reflects the plea of the candidate to get the satisfaction of the voters while folding hands on his back expresses his dissatisfaction or powerlessness. Hand gestures are also used in these cartoons to reflect characters' attitudes as shown in Fig. 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.

The linguistic message

The cartoon above carries three captions. The one on the people backwards reads “ahal aldaarah” which means “district's people,” the one on the man forwards reads “naab” which means “deputy,” and the one written in red says “zahaymer” which means “Alzheimer.”

The denoted message

The main visual signs are a man wearing a suit, and sunglasses, holding a cigarette, and putting the other hand in his pockets. He is walking snobbishly while the ordinary citizens standing backwards, wearing cheap clothes, and looking at him while unfolding their hands.

The connoted message

This cartoon displays the haughty deputy who is walking without paying attention to those people whose votes make him win. By doing so, the voters get shocked and spreading their hands implying that they get back empty-handed. Their facial expressions asking him about the promises that he gave them. He has forgotten all these promises and he is walking a head turning a blind eye on them.

C. Facial expressions

Regarding the effect of body language in communicating messages non-verbally, we cannot condone the role of facial

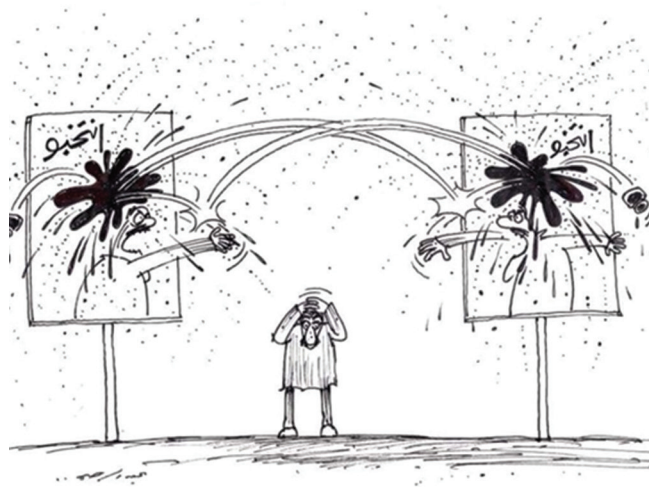


Fig. 4. Elect

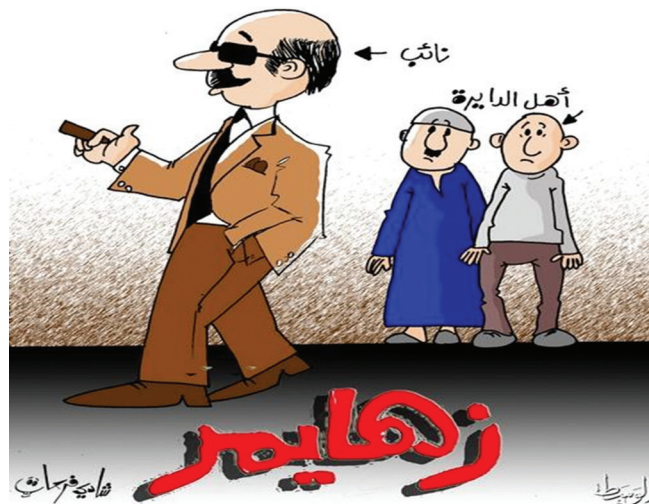


Fig. 5. Alzheimer

expressions. They are an essential communicative aspect of body language that is normally feelings related (Elliott and Jacobs, 2013). The face is assumed to be the most influential tool that reflects particular emotions (Ekman, 1965). In the cartoons analyzed so far, facial expressions are utilized as tools that have marked an effect in expressing attitudes and emotions. For instance, in Figs. 2-5, the candidates are either closing eyes or wearing glasses which connote their dishonest intentions because if they open their eyes, they will reveal the truth. They will express their twisted intentions of not achieving any of their promises.

Smiles, as well, can be an indication of delight, merriment, or even discomfort (Sandra, 2003). In Fig. 6, it is quite clear that the big smile on the face of the candidate (the father) symbolizes a happy and relaxed character.

The linguistic message

The cartoon above carries two captions. The one at the top says “Allah yedem alena naamat al-intkhabat” which means “May God keep the elections blessing” and the one down says “Baba mush shayfek” which means “I can't see you daddy.”

The denoted message

The main visual signs are a father tapping on his big belly, and the son who is afraid he cannot see his father.

The connoted message

This cartoon shows that some people gain a lot of weight before the elections due to being invited to banquets by some candidates. They do so to deceive people and get their votes. This stresses the idea of corruption and the means used to get votes.

Besides, according to the Iraqi culture, the nose's length is a symbol of lying as it is obvious in Fig. 7. One of the innate features of candidates to win is to give a lot of colorful hopes that contravene with what is going on the ground to encourage people to cast their ballots for him.

The linguistic message

The aforementioned figure has four captions representing the process of elections. The one at the top says "al-hamla al-intkhabiya" which means "the carelessness of elections," the one on the right says "Al-bidaya" which means "the beginning," the one on the middle says "Al-nihaya" which means "the end," and the one on the picture inside says "Intakhbony" which means "Vote for me."

The denoted message

The main visual signs are represented by two pictures. The one on the right side portrays the candidate with a normal size nose posted at the beginning of his campaign giving



Fig. 6. May God keep the blessing of elections. I cannot see you, father



Fig. 7. The elections carelessness

words to the voters. And the one on the left represents the same candidate but with a long nose posted at the end of the campaign.

The connoted message

These two pictures presented in this cartoon stress how much lies are there in the election campaigns.

D. Posture

Another significant usage 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) defines posture as a coding system incorporating the descriptors consisting of trunk orientation (e.g., turned) and legs positions (e.g., crossed). The same posture may express various meanings or opposite meanings as shown in Fig. 8.

The linguistic message

The above cartoon carries three captions. The one on the right says "Al-siraat Al-tayfiya" which means "sectarian conflicts," the one on the left says "Iraq," and the one down on the ring says "Al-Intkhabat" which means "the elections."

The denoted message

The main visual signs are a man with three faces leaning on the rope of the ring representing the sectarian conflicts among the parties in Iraq. He is on the ring against a hunched man representing Iraq. They are against each other due to the elections.

The connoted message

This cartoon represents how much Iraq is tired of the conflicts among parties. Each segment wants to get the biggest portion of the cake. The posture of hunching indicates weakness and aging. However, it also indicates the readiness of Iraq to stand against all these conflicts. This again stresses the same idea of corruption.

Sometimes putting hands on the back and spreading them outward and upward might express indifference as shown in Fig. 9.

The linguistic message

This cartoon carries one salient caption saying "madry lesh katlen rouhhm ala khidmat al-shaab" which means "I don't know why they are fighting to serve the folks."

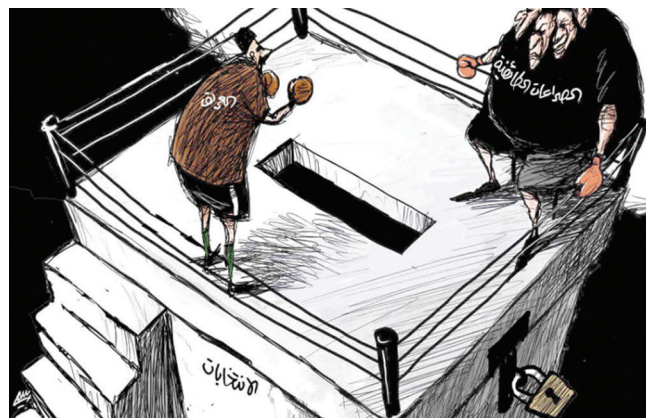


Fig. 8. The elections is a game between sectarian struggles and Iraq



Fig. 9. I do not know why they are killing themselves to serve the folks

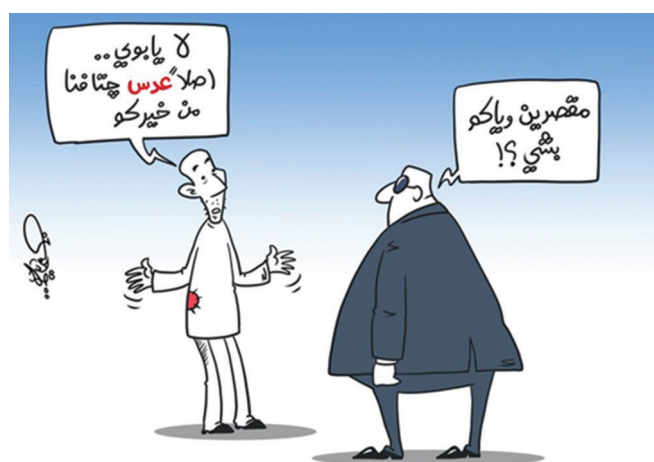


Fig. 10. The dialogue between a candidate and a voter

The denoted meaning

The main visual signs are two men; one folding his hands at the back and the other moving his hands forward questioning the efforts exerted by candidates to get satisfy folks.

The connoted meaning

In this cartoon, it is clear the indifference of people regarding these campaigns. They are folding hands and moving them forward implying their attitude. They are fed up with these campaigns which are full of lies.

The linguistic message

This cartoon carries two captions. The one on the right says “muqasreen wyakm bshy” which means “have we done something bad to you?” And the one on the left says “la yaboy aslan adas chtafna mn kherko” which means “no, actually the lentil of our shoulders is made by you.”

The denoted message

The main visual signs represented in Fig. 10 are two men; the one on the right wearing a suit and sunglasses, with big belly, and the one on the left wearing ragged clothes moving his hands outward.

The connoted message

The one spreading his hands on the right expresses how much he is controlling the situation, while the one on the left spreading his hands upward reflects the idea that he is dominated by the other one.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study is to analyze the body language of cartoons. It has analyzed the implied meaning communicated through it. This semiotic analysis of the selected Iraqi cartoons has figured out that visuals used in Iraqi cartoons incorporate diverse implied meanings. In the aforementioned caricatures, clothing has been taken into consideration to figure out the authority relationships among figures, the level of responsibility that figures are in charge of, and some other points regarding the figures, such as levels of misery. Gestures are also employed in this study to mirror characters' personality characteristics or feelings, while facial expressions have indicated characters' emotional states or attitudes. Postures have also 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. The research has revealed that caricatures are mainly used to save the face of critics. They do not express their opinions in public, they use caricatures, though. Moreover, people, in general, agree with them since they keep watching these caricatures and comment on them. This is clear from the high views of these caricatures and they are used as a content of some talk shows. Therefore, the research has answered the two questions raised previously.

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