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SEMIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EDITORIAL CARTOONS IN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS ON COVID 19

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Abstract

Semiotics discourses of print media play an important role to work out certain ideology. This study aims at critically decoding the semiotic discourses of selected national newspapers with a special reference to the representation of Covid19. The newspapers selected includes *Dawn*, *The Nation* and *Pakistan Times*. The qualitative research paradigm is used for the analysis of selected cartoons. A blended model of critical discourse analysis and semiological analysis has been employed in the article. A step wise analysis is being carried out and the researchers conclude that different newspapers share different aspects relating to Covid-19. *Dawn* argues on the importance of SOPs and the economy. In case of *The Nation* portrayed the drastic impacts of virus on education and it mocked the public behaviour towards Covid 19 considering it as fake news. The newspaper *Pakistan Today* highlights the possibility of second wave of Corona.

Introduction

Art and literature have been the sole contributor in one's life since antiquity. Art in the form of earlier drawings and paintings has evolved as a field of study in criticism. Evidences of earlier life in caves have been traced through the paintings in the caves. Then there is a famous allusion about allegory of cave in which people interpreted the things through their shadowy images. As the human civilization emerged through the earlier phases of history, art also developed through different social and political spheres. Concept of comedy and tragedy were introduced in Greek literature and in case of symbolic art and the use of political caricatures, earlier political cartoons surfaced in the Mesopotamian civilization in 360 BC in which an artist ridiculed the politicians of the time. Cartoons highlighted the political instability and prevailing chaos in the time in the structure of

society. These signs and symbols contributed a lot in the development of many forms of social criticism. In the 2nd half of 20th century a great deal of linguistic theories emerged that share their scope with art and its criticism. Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the idea of signifier and signified which later on was elaborated by other theorists and critics. Saussure (1916) and Aziz and Hassan (2018) defines semiotics as: “a science that studies the life of signs within society. It is called semiology (from Greek word “Semeion” (Sign). Semiology would show what constitutes signs and what laws govern them”. According to Saussure(1916) a social cartoon represents language in de-naturalized way. The implied message is to be decoded which is given in these cartoons. Peirce (1931) and Hassan & Dzakiria (2020) introduced autonomous discipline of signifier and signified. The former named the phenomenon ‘semiology’ while the later named the discipline ‘Semiotics’. He asserted that the function of semiology is to help us in interpretation of sign- based behavior of people. Similarly, Price (2003) argues that in a few cases the idea of word-picture assimilation has great significance in the interpretation of whole discourse. The interpretation of such blended discourses brings new dimensions in the field of linguistic criticism. Taskona (2009) asserts that verbal and visual practices in society need to be exploited for the objective interpretation of semiotic discourses at identical, iconical as well as lexical level. In order to decode the semiotic discourse an interpretation of linguistic and metalinguistic competence is necessary. Hassan & Dzakiria (2019) and Desousa(1981) argues that political cartoons are replete with allusions of society and cultural politics. In the 21st century the semiotic discourse or visual discourse emerged as a critical study of cartoons of socio cultural importance. Cartoons are used for humour, entertainment, satire and analogy (Alkhresheh, 2020; Hassan & Aziz, 2019).

Covid19

Corona Virus disease shifted from animals to humans and it has spread on a large scale. United Nations Organization declared it as an international emergency. First case from China was reported in 2002 and next year in Vietnam. In December 2019, cases of infection were reported from the city of wuhan in china. Within a few days it spread around the world. It has wrapped the world in fear, depression and loss of hope. There is global crisis in health and economic sector. Abodunrin, O. & Oloye, G.(2020) argue that covid 19 has produced impact the economy, education and security. The on going problems that originate from the pandemic worst issues need to be adressed with immediate solutions globally with careful catering of the pandemic. In every country national and international media is portraying the drastic impacts of Covid19 and semiotics sections of newspapers are producing semiotics on it. This study aims to decode the semiotic discourses by blending the methods of critical discourse analysis and methods of semiotic analysis. The focus of the study is on the semiotics of national newspapers.

Research Statement

Corona virus disease has produced drastic impacts on economy and education sector. The spread of pandemic has been reported in the media throughout the world. Role of print media has been very crucial in the prevailing conditions of pandemic. Pandemic has affected the economy of world and specially in third world where people either suffer due to disease or poverty. Throughout media discourses awareness about the pandemic is given alongwith the description of other hazards of pandemic. Socio economic effects of pandemic have been covered through editorial cartoons and the public attitude towards

precautionary measures has been portrayed through these cartoons. This study is aimed at the comparative analysis of semiotics Covid19.

Objectives of the research:

The objectives of the study are given here.

1. To investigate how Covid19 is represented discursively through the semiotics of national newspapers.
2. To investigate the ideological differences of portrayal in national newspapers.

Research Questions:

1. How has Covid19 been represented discursively through semiotic discourses of national newspapers?
2. What are the ideological differences in portrayal of Covid19 in national newspapers?

Significance of Research:

The study will be significant as Covid 19 is a novel phenomenon in the world which has affected the lives of people globally. Pakistan has been affected by the spread of pandemic. The national newspapers are playing their significant role in public awareness. Semiotic discourses of national newspapers are focussing on impacts of Covid19. This study will fill the gap of literature on the subject of semiotic discourse and pandemic portrayal. Further it will inspire future researchers to work in this field on parallel parameters.

Delimitation

This study is limited to semiotic discourse analysis of national newspapers. The semiotics are selected from three national newspapers named as Dawn, The Nation and Pakistan Today.

Literature Review

Mwetulundila and Kangira (2015) believed that print media semiotic discourses command their own place and can engage the audience more than printed words. They carry layers of meanings and are culturally oriented. Besides proving humor, they criticize politicians as well. Another significant feature of political cartoons is that they help us understand what goes around us in social, religious, and political domains. In a mocking manner they unveil the prevalent social evils. The criticism through them is the briefest and sharpest. Through this technique the dual faces of the people are caricatured. They are regarded as language in graphic form and the prominent themes they deal with are related to politics and culture. Chandler(2017) quotes Umberto Eco that 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign'. The traditional definition of sign ' something which stands for something else'. Chandler(2017) The study of medical signs started from the time of Hippocrates that was later on developed by Galen in 129 CE. The Stoics can be regarded as the one who introduced the theory of signs. However, the origin of general sign theory dates back to medieval time in which philosopher and theologian Hippo introduced this theory. The two contemporary theories of semiotic stem from the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce. These two linguistics and philosophers are called the co-founders of modern semiotics. Signs take the form of images, sounds, odours, flavours, words, events and actions. Peirce says that nothing is sign unless it is interpreted as sign. Daniel Chandler (2017) represented the model of sign as a sign signifies three things. These

things include sense, meaning, and reference. Language is a system of signs and this system is based on the idea of signifier and signified. In modern linguistics, signified is considered as meaning. Eco (1979) sign is something which is embellished by the number of ideologies and significance. Study of signs requires special knowledge and an attitude towards the system of linguistic signs which carry some meanings. The use of signs and symbols in different field of studies has been identified with special reference to semiotics. Newspapers use semiotics to infer some meaning and ideology through the use of signs and symbols. The discourse of such semiotics has been studied by a number of intellectuals and scholars throughout the world who published their findings. Borstin (1963) suggested that people observe mediated images more as compared to what they read through words. socio political cartoons are considered as weapons of ideological communicative. He asserts that word-picture conjunction is more effective and is being practiced in print media. According to him, in today's world order visuals are more dominant and carry something for even a lay person. They are meant for all and hence are decoded accordingly. A study on the media semiotic discourse has been published by Mwetulundila and Kangira (2015). They argued that print media discourses have their special comands and they can engage an audience without words. These semiotic discourses are ideologically loaded and contain layers of hidden meanings. Talking about cartoons in newspapers they said that these semiotics help to interpret the social changes happening in the society. Through humourous tone they mock the social evils and display the realities. The semiotics of newspapers are considered as language in form of graphic and the prominent themes they deal with are related to society, culture and politics. Media semiotics are the ways of information and communication. Their sole purpose is to educate masses and spread awareness about a particular phenomenon(Alkhresheh, 2020). Sapir (1921) argued that every pattern of cultural significance and individual act of cultural behavior is based on communication explicitly or implicitly. In this way it is important to say that language is an imprtant way of communication which includes verbal communication. It is also pertinent to say that people not only communicate through liguistic or verbal means, communication is also carried out through non- verbal ways of communication and one of such communication is communication through signs and symbols. Meta- linguistic ways of communication expand our idea of language and its importance in our life. Jakobson (1975) argued that semiotics can be discussed in meta-linguistic properties of language.

Talking about newspaper semiotics, Kress & Van Leeuwen(2006) suggested that semiotics of newspapers provide an in-depth knowledge of the social realities in the society. New semiotic discourses are contributed by social, cultural and economic realities. These semiotics decide new dimensions and prospects of the social reality. Van Dijk (1998) shares the view that method of word- picture combination is very popular to adress certain ideologies through media and to propagate such ideologies meaningfully. Corona virus spread changed the dimensions of life and new meanings are being found and conveyed through media. As the spread of disease is novel and a few studies have been conducted on the semiotic discourse analysis of editorial cartoons on Covid19. Hussain & Aljamili(2020) carried out a study in the field of social semiotics. The focus on social media contribution was given. For analysis the researcher asked 1274 people from public to give their impressions on role of social media in pandemic awareness. The theory of social semiotics proposed by Kress and Leeuwen was used as theoretical framework for the study. The objective of the study was to identify and analyze special semiotic patterns related to

Covid19. They concluded that the semiotics did a great deal of work and people responded to these symbols positively. Azam, Baig & Azam(2020) analyzed the impact of Covid 19 on economy and its fear. The researchers analyzed the political cartoons on the subject of Covid 19. The data for analysis was collected from the newspaper Dawn, based in Pakistan. The researchers utilized the multimodel research method given by Machin. Their study revealed that the selected cartoons disseminated fear and mental illness in the public. However, they also criticised and mocked the higher official authorities for the economic crisis by highlighting the financial problems of people, as these people did not make decisions on time to prevent the pandemic. Alkhresheh(2020) analyzed the semiotics of two international newspapers on the subject of Covid19. The researcher collected the data from newspapers as Dawn and The Economist. A blended model of analysis was used by incorporating the critical discourse analysis given by Fairclough and semiotic analysis model proposed by Barthes. The researcher concluded that the semiotics of the selected newspapers presented the situation of Covid-19 and its long-term impacts have been discussed in the context of culture and social practice. The researcher concluded that both The Economist and Dawn positively tried to convince people to take precautionary measures. The present study analyzes the semiotic discourses of editorial cartoons of national newspapers. The theoretical framework for the study is given below.

Theoretical Framework

According to Machin (2007), every image connotes and denotes at the same time. Denotation is a dictionary or literal meaning, and it only gives the surface meaning, while connotation gives a deeper meaning, and it is according to social, historical, and cultural background. Any image is analyzed in a multimodal analysis while observing some elements: participants, size, gaze, settings, objects, and pose. In any image, any individual or participant is observed by their style, character and behavior, and these individuals also denote and connote according to their gestures towards the audience. Objects in images have connotative meanings mostly, and implicitly they depict a more profound meaning than the surface meaning. They have mostly implicit meanings, and they present a specific context surrounded by a participant or individual. The setting of an image also plays a vital role in describing specific time, occasion, or symbolizing a thought or idea. Settings in pictures are mostly typical than narrative. Cartoonists or photographers can represent their point of view or ideology through a specific setting. Body gestures describe the type of people and their living styles and values. There are different body gestures like controlled, less controlled, rigid, and soft, which explain an individual character and his beliefs. The large, medium and small size of participant and objects are also observed as it represents the important or less important things according to contextual meaning. Bold and small letters in pictures or images are also evaluated according to their font size. These letters and words implicitly or explicitly explain the most important or less important event. The participant's interaction angle is analyzed to see whether it is upward, downward, or in a vertical angle. Machin (2012) explained two types of gaze in pictures; one is offer, and the other is demand. In the offer image, participants have no direct gaze towards the viewers and do not make any friendly relationship. while in the demanding image, participants have a direct gaze towards the viewers and make a friendly and confident relationship with them. Both offer and demand images are explained according to their specific social and historical contexts.

Methodology

Qualitative research methods provide analytical insights to the data interpretation. This study is also qualitative in nature and descriptive method has been used for the analysis. This present decodes semiotics on the representation of Covid19 in national newspapers as Dawn, The Nation and Pakistan Today. For the interpretation of semiotics related to the models of critical discourse analysis and semiological analysis have been blended. Fairclough(1995) model of critical discourse analysis and Barthes model of semiotics have been employed by the researcher. The blending has been carried out by the process of inclusion and exclusion. Both models and their levels are discussed. Three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis given by Fairclough. According to Fairclough linguistic analysis involves the proper understanding of context. A step-wise method has been introduced by Fairclough as

- i. **Text (Descriptive Level):** initially textual categories are described as lexical choices, grammatical structure and vocabulary is analyzed.
- ii. **Discursive Practice (interpretation):** use of language is considered as a social practice. at this level, the text at hand is interpreted in the light of context which further clarifies the situation and the production of discourse.
- iii. **Social Practice (explanation):** at this stage of analysis factors of power and ideology are considered as the motivators for language use. The relationship of text and its production in special socio cultural context is analyzed and reasons of production are communicated.

Barthes Model of Media Semiotic Discourse:

In the model levels of significance are discussed. There are three levels of significance. These levels are discussed below.

Denotative level of Significance:

the first level includes a shared sense of any image, sign or word excluding the possibility of any subjective evaluation. It discusses the visual or literal meaning of any sign or image.

Connotative Level of Significance:

This level of significance includes the subject of culture in which an image appears. The term Connotation has been used by Roland Barthes to explain the way signs work 'it describes the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings or emotions of the users and the values of their culture '(John Fisk 1992).

Myth: it is a semiological system that a sign is combination of the signifier and the signified, therefore, the image is a language /non verbal which is opened to many interpretations, readings and significance.

Data collection

The semiotics of three national newspapers have been selected on the subject of Covid 19. The newspapers selected for data collection include *Dawn, The Nation and Pakistan Today*.

Data Analysis

This section includes semiotic discourse analysis of the semiotics selected from national newspapers on the subject of Covid 19. The analysis of semiotics will be carried out at linguistic level which includes the verbal discourse and semiotic level which includes the semiotics from newspapers.

Figure:1: published in *Dawn* on December,1, 2020.

Cartoon: 1 December, 2020

1st December 2020 | Zahoor



Linguistic Analysis:

The words give their meaning in context (Fairclough). The word as denotes the financial system of the country. In the context of pandemic the economy of Pakistan has been affected by the spread of pandemic. The word is general and it has no negative interpretation as lexical level. At the level of interpretation the word constitutes the affairs of production and consumption of goods and supply of money is interpreted. In order to explain the presence of word 'economy' in semiotic of Corona, it refers to the presence of harsh economic circumstance due to pandemic.

Semiotic Analysis:

At the level of semiotics, the graphic image of 'economy' is given where the spelling 'O' has been interrupted by the Corona Virus which is present inside and making a scary face. At the same time it can be interpreted that the haunting face of Corona Virus has destroyed the economy resulting in unemployment and chaos. Eco (2001) suggests that language connotes and denotes different things at the same. The sign language denoting the fact clear that there is an economic issue prevailing in the country which has been initiated by the pandemic.

Figure 2:

10th November 2020 | Zahoor



This cartoon was published on November 10, 2020 in the newspaper *Dawn*.

Linguistic Analysis:

The cartoon contains the image of a bull whose face resembles the structure of Corona Virus. A group of people is marching towards it and the board holding the 'SOPs' sign is lying behind on the ground. It has been observed that in the critical phase of second wave of Corona, people are not following SOPs. Public gatherings are common and people are not following the necessary measure to control the pandemic. At many occasions government tried to stop the people but there is a social phenomenon that people are not paying attention to that. The lying board containing the 'SOPs' shows the attitude of public towards Corona. Although group of people are scared, but still they are not following the SOPs. As the linguistic interpretation is completed in context in discourse analysis, during the second wave of Corona Virus, economy was badly. People were unable to feed to make the ends meet which resulted in the lawlessness. While on the part of state it failed to impliment the SOPs at one hand and provide basic necessities to the poor at other hand. This is a clear indication of concerns of people and their present condition. At one hand it was a critique of government on their failure to impliment SOPs and the precarious condition of people who are although scared of Corona, but still have to work.

Semiotic Analysis:

There is a bull whose face resembles the structure of Corona which is often published through media. As the virus is hazaderous which has almost hijacked the life around the world. On left side of cartoon, the caricature of bull and virus is shown and on the right side a group of scared people is present. The scary face of bull is terrorising the people and group includes adults and children. it denotes that what is the perception of virus in general public. And the board on the ground signifies the absence of any precautionary measeure for corona. The whole image portrays current scenario. There are two opposite positions of creatures on the cartoon. The bull is standing on left side and scared public is standing at the right side which employs the meaning of fight. The bull is considered as the powerful animal and this case it has shared its powers with Corona. It is observed that Bull destroys when it is free and so this image signifies the power that Corona has which is destroying every thing from education to health and from security to trade. The impacts are everywhere.

Figure 3: taken from the newspaper, *Pakistan Today*, published on December 16, 2020.



Linguistic Analysis:

The pandemic spread multiscale chaos in the country. iIn the end of August, it's spread started to diminish taking the lives of thousands in its first spell. There was a gap of infections in a large number, but in last ten days of October, the infection started to spread more vigorously. The words 'SECOND WAVE' and 'PAKISTAN' are written in capital

letters. So, it can be interpreted that the second wave is expected in Pakistan and this time more severe cases are expected. Two different words are employing that the situations in the country and public attitude towards the pandemic is dragging it to Second Wave.

Semiotic Analysis:

The semiotics used in the cartoon includes a Bear which is very powerful animal. It engulfs what comes in its mouth. There is a van on the opposite side which moving towards it. The van is an carved with the name of the country 'Pakistan'. Crocodile with green color skin is a symbolic character for second wave of Covid19. While the van is proceeding towards it. Van is an embodiment of Pakistan and it is forwarding to Crocodile to be engulf. This connotation of this cartoon is very serious on the subject that it is about to crush the country in its cruel and nasty buccal cavity. The situation of pakistan in second wave of Corona is devastating the structure of society. The whole country is facing its impacts. The myth associated with this cartoon is that it reflects the situation in which all the country is facing tremendous impacts pandemic.

Figure 4: Taken from *Pakistan Today*. Published on April 16, 2020.



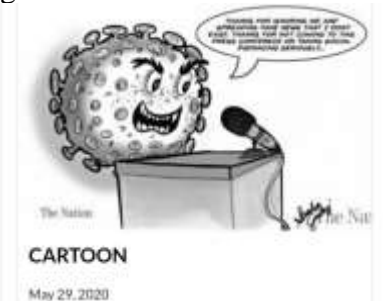
Linguistic level:

The cartoons contains two words which are inter-related. Economy is the state of the country in terms of production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money. The drastic effects of corona on economy are discussed in the discourse that it has been crushed as the semiotics point to it.

Semiotic Analysis:

There two two distinct photos. One of a car that has crashed and this crashed car signifies the situation of economy and the dropping stone on an elevated place. it can be inferred that the cartoonist wants to the alarm the general masses about the severity of corona. This is a serious situation in the country as the whole country is passing through the phase of economic instability.

Figure 5: taken from *The Nation*. Published on May,29,2020.



Linguistic Analysis:

Corona virus is mocking the public on its stance on the existence of disease. This is ironical that people spread a fake news about the existence of Corona and they argued

that there is no such thing like Corona. The date of cartoon publication is May, 29 which clears the situation and at that time in Pakistan infections were on a high scale. There were more than 1000 cases in a day and deaths were common. Lives of doctors and para medical staff were on high risk and many doctors lost their lives. This situation that was created by the immature and irresponsible behaviour of public has been satirized by the cartoonist that how people contributed in its spread by not following the SOPs for its control. There were greater risks to life in public as well. People were not paying due attention that was the main cause of its spread.

Semiotic Analysis:

It can be observed through the cartoon that Corona virus has been personified and it is holding a press conference. In the press conference the tone of the virus is harsh and it is addressing in ironical way. The face of virus is very scary and it seems that it is going to be very aggressive. All this situation is very serious and it is easy to infer that cartoonist is trying to clarify that how much serious Covid19 is. This cartoons mocks the discouraging behaviour of people towards Corona virus and what was public response towards it.

Figure 6: published on september 22, 2020 in *The Nation*.



Linguistic Analysis:

the impact of Corona virus on the education is the subject of this cartoon. As the educational institutions were closed in March, 2020 and the examinations were also cancelled. The precarious situation of Corona has been portrayed linguistically as the only word mentioned in the caricature is education.

Semiotic Analysis:

The cartoon contains the image of Corona virus, surrounding a well in which education is trying to get out. The surrounding virus is not supporting the educational system any more. The closure of educational institutions has been elaborated in this cartoon. The cartoonist wants to inform about the critical situation of education in the spread of Corona.

Discussion

Edward (1997) suggested that such media play a vital role in making personalities positive or negative because characters are the central part of these cartoons. The selected semiotics show a variety of different ideological bias of the cartoonists that how every cartoonist perceives the situation and gives importance to what they think. The second research questions is based on the comparison of these cartoons and their implied meanings. Dawn newspaper attracts a great deal of readership in Pakistan and around the world. Starting from Dawn, two cartoons are selected in which the first cartoon discusses the economical situation and impact of Corona virus on it. The word 'economy' has three

syllable and the first two syllables end at ‘ O’ which has been replaced by the graphic structure of Corona virus. It can be inferred that virus has drastic impact on the economy and the scary face signals towards a challenging economic times. The cartoonist has successfully shown the impact of this pandemic which has affected every field of life. Another cartoon taken from *Dawn* shows the mighty power of virus that how much powerful it is. The Bull is containing the structure of virus and facing the public, but the public has not followed SOPs and these SOPs are lying behind. In Pakistan, many daily wagers and small scale businessman and traders lost their jobs and works respectively. Their lives are badly affected by the attacks of Corona. The cartoon taken from the newspaper, *Pakistan Times* contains the image of Crocodile which is alarming about the possibility of second wave of Corona. Corona has badly affected the life of every person in Pakistan. In the cartoon a van with the name of country Pakistan encarved on it is leading to the crocodile which is telling about the second wave. The second wave has been observed by the country and infections are on high scale. Drastic impacts of Corona are observed everywhere. Economy and health sector have been badly affected. The Cartoon points towards the problems of economy as it has been destroyed by the pandemic. People lost their jobs and unemployment increased in greater amount. This virus has pulled out the workers from factories and they lost their jobs. When the manufacturing is halted, the whole system of economy is disturbed and this has been observed by the public and media. Newspaper, *The Nation*, portrayed the negative effects of virus on education. The education system has seen a drastic set back and the whole system has been closed for months during the first wave of pandemic. Another cartoon mocked the attitude of public towards the presence of virus and spread of virus. Here, the cartoonist has personified the virus who is holding a press conference. In press conference Corona virus is satirizing the whole media that did they report about it. The tone is sarcastic when he says ‘ thanks for ignoring me spreading fake news that I don’t exist’ . this mocking tone harshly criticizes the role of media which portrayed it as a fake news. The situation in the cartoons has been portrayed and it is observed that cartoonists tried to persuade the public to avoid public gatherings. The importance of SOPs has been shared. Two semiotics covered the subject of economy which has been covered by two of the cartoons.

Conclusion

This study shows that print media discourses reflect social reality and language production in any situation and this situation is very drastic and challenging. It is concluded from the study that national newspapers reflect the attitude of people in general towards pandemic. People do not follow SOPs and the role of our personal thinking about the existence of pandemic has been portrayed. Such type of portrayed is only possible through the employment of blended model of discourse and semiotics. It is observed that economy has been commonly shared by two cartoonists and others focussed on the irresponsible behaviour of public. Semiotic discourse has been successfully portrayed in the cartoons of three national newspapers.

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