A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF VISUAL IMAGES IN UNCHR REPORTS ON DISPLACED IRAQIS

Asst. Prof. Ahmed Sultan Hussein (PhD)[1] and Sahar Abdul-Razzaq Fattah[2]

[1]Dept. of Translation, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq

[2]Dept. of English, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University, Baghdad, Iraq.

[1]E-mail: ahmed_sultani_phd@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

[2]E-mail: saharabdulrazzaq120.com@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The advent of UNHCR reports has given rise to the uniqueness of its distinctive way of image representation and using semiotic features.So, there are a lot of researches that have investigated UNHCR reports, but no research has examined images in UNHCR reports of displaced Iraqis from a multimodal discourse Perspective. The present study suggests that the images are, like language, rich in many potential meanings and are governed by clearly visual grammar structures that can be employed to decode these multiple meanings. Seven images are examined in terms of their representational, interactional and compositional aspects.Depending on the results, this study concludes that the findings support the visual grammar theory and highlight the value of images as semiotic resources in conveying multi-layered meanings.Applying Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006)modelMultimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)of analyzing the images in UNHCR reports on the displaced Iraqis succeed in revealing their semiotic structures. The analysis of the selected images shows various relations existed

between the participants and the viewers on the visual level through employing different visual modes.

Introduction

Iraq has experienced one of the worst crisis of displacement in the world where more than 6 million Iraqis have been obliged to flee their homes, specifically from 2014 to 2017(Reid, 2019).The role of the mass media has never been ignored in influencing public political stances towards migration and displacement. In other words, these attitudes are both reflected in and influenced by what and how news are reported. Therefore, the main function of the mass media is to provide information that people employ to make sense of the world and to realize their place within it.

The images in the UNHCR reports play an important role in communication that depicting and presenting the situations of displaced persons in some ways to enhance readers' understanding of content. The images of these reports on displaced Iraqis are selected randomly from the official website of the UNHCR.The website is (www.unhcr.org).Multimodal Discourse Analysis MDA sets up a systemic way of analysing not only the language of the media text but also its various semiotic modes such as images, photographs, graphics or diagrams in a media text (Çoşkun, 2015, p. 40). The value of these semiotic modes of communication for creating meaning has been neglected and provided in what O'Halloran (2004) called an "impoverished view" within the area of discourse analysis. Accurately, MDA refers to an expansion of Halliday's theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) to other semiotic modes as suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). It is hoped that this study will be of value to those concerned with multimodal discourse analysis, as well as to those interested in mass media reports.

1. Literature Review

2.1   Semiotics and Media

Nowadays, one of the most prevalent subjects, especially in connection with media, is semiotics. It elucidates the differential effects of the media messages and enables the observer to construe the structure of the messages as well. As the shortest definition of semiotics is that it is "*the study of signs*", the broadest one is ascribed to Umberto Eco (1976) who provides that *"semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign"* (as cited in Arackal, 2015, p. 1).

The term 'media' usually refers to books, magazines, newspapers, television, radio and other social media (Arackal, 2015, p. 3). Thus, semiotics or semiology can be considered as one of the major branches of the analysis of media materials or what so-called a non-verbal communication (image). It is a method that presents media in a new challenge through the analysis and interpretation of connotative data to experimentally express how media create meanings from the sign system (Bouzida, 2014, pp. 1003-1004). Images are very important in media, particularly in newspapers, magazines, television and the internet. They are usually employed to say things that they cannot be said in language (Çoşkun, 2015, p. 42).

2.2   Displacement Crisis in Iraq

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) refer to those who have been obliged to leave or flee their homes due toarmed conflicts or violations of human rights, and who have not crossed their internationally recognized state borders (Cohen, 2004, pp. 465-466).Millionsof Iraqis have been forced to leave their homes becauseof the conflicts have occurred between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) as well as other associated forces and what so-called "Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham" (ISIS). In 2014, Iraq witnessed a rapid spread of ISIS into many northern and central provinces (UNHCR, 2016, p. 1).

Security is elusive for the most of displaced Iraqis. They do not realize how they will survive or when they can return their home (Ferris, 2008, p. 1).During this crisis, many humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations High Commissions for Refugees (UNCHR) have engaged in a string of large-scale media advocacy campaigns that aim at persuading other countries to do more to help (Berry et al., 2016, p. 1).

According to *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook* (2011), news media can set up an influential way to get support and raise public awareness of the dilemma of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (p. 397). UNHCR employs the most popular online means to speak with its supporters and reinforce its cause. Images become one of the most effective ways to convey and express the refugee and IDPs' stories(UNHCR, 2016, p. 4)

2.3   Multimodality

The insights from a vast array, comprising anthropology, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies and visual media, linguistics and semiotics, have been conceptualized by studying multimodality (Çoşkun, 2015, p. 40). Terminologically speaking, the word multimodal, in linguistics, comes to be connected with the realisation that meaning is communicated not just through the linguistic mode but also by other semiotic modes (visual, sound or gesture).

In fact, the works of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) and Michael O'Toole (1994, 2010) have been regarded as the foundations for multimodal studies in the 1980s and 1990s. Their works are mainly drawn from Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. In these foundational works, Halliday's (1978) concern with both text and context is reflected. Accordingly, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) take a contextual approach with a special orientation to ideology, eliciting general principles of visual design that are clarified across text analysis; whereas O'Toole (2010) evolves a grammatical approach through working closely with particular 'texts' (i.e., paintings, sculptures and architectural designs) to derive theoretical frameworks that can be applied to other studies (O'Halloran, 2011, pp. 1-7).

2.3.1Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

CDA and multimodal approaches have been brought together in a new field that is MDA. As a matter of fact, MDA has been come to light with the efforts of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, in their book Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design (1996, 2006). They start to look at the way that language, image and other semiotic modes integrate to convey meaning. They believe that some of the fundaments of linguistic analysis established in Halliday's theory of SFL and also used as the base of CDA that can be equally applied to visual communication. In this respect, the study in MDA follows two fundamental interdependent directions: includes examining the meaning-making potential and focuses on theorizing the interaction among various semiotic resources (Çoşkun, 2015, pp. 40-41; Machin&Mayr, 2012, p. 222).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose a concept of the 'semiotic landscape' that indicates the importance of the context in explaining the visual mode. This has specific features, a history, boundaries and landmarks. They declare that the place of visual communication in a given society cannot be understood without being in the context of the range of public communication forms or modes available in that society, as well as their uses and evaluations.

Based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, Kress and van Leeuwen's approach of MDA shows how different semiotic modes (like images, diagrams, photographs and graphics) working constructively to create implicit or indirect meanings communicated by texts. Significantly, the contemporary SFL is taken as the principle for key texts in multimodality, especially in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen where the analysis should begin from Halliday's*metafunctions* to establish the underlying system of any case of communication (Ledin&Machin, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) mention that all images perform Halliday'smetafunctionsthrough three patterns:

1. The patterns of representation (that correspond to 'ideational' metafunction) point out the visual resources (people, places and things represented in the image) as well as the representation of interactions and conceptual relations between them.

2. The patterns of interaction (that correspond to 'interpersonal' metafunction) point out the resources that construct relationships between the viewer, the maker of visual texts and those who represented in the texts.

3. The patterns of composition (that correspond to 'textual' metafunction) indicate the ways in which patterns of representation and interaction integrate into a meaningful whole.

3.Methods

3.1Multimodal Discourse Analysis

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), three main visual categories are selected to analyse the present data. These three main categories are as follows:

Hu, C., & Luo, M. (2016). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Tmall's Double Eleven Advertisement. *English Language Teaching*, *9*, 156. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n8p156.

Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Ledin, P., & Machin, D. (2018). Doing critical discourse studies with multimodality: from metafunctions to materiality. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1–17. Doi:10.1080/17405904.2018.1468789

Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. SAGE.

Micevic, N. (2015, September). *UN refugee agency opens two new camps for displaced Iraqis in Baghdad*. https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/9/56056dc66

O'Halloran, K. L. (2011). Multimodal Discourse Analysis. In K. Hyland & B. Paltridge (eds) *Companion to Discourse*. London and New York: Continuum.

Torres, G. (2015). 'Reading' *World Link*: A Visual Social Semiotic Analysis of an EFL Textbook. *International Journal of English Language Education, 3*(1), 239-253.http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v3i1.7200.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2011). *UNHCR Resettlement Handbook*. Retrieved from https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ecb973c2.html. Accessed at Nov. 21, 2018.

---. (2014, January). *Continuing fighting in central Iraq leaves 140,000 forcibly displaced*.https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2014/1/52e274d19

---. (2016), *UNHCR Position on Returns to Iraq*. Retrieved from https://www.refworld.org/docid/58299e694.html

---. (2017, May). *As 1000s flee West Mosul, UNHCR opens 12th new camp for displaced*. https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2017/5/591579e74

Yao, Y., & Zhuo, Y. (2018). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Promotional Video of Hangzhou. *English Language Teaching*, *11*, 121. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n10p121.