GDPMR
Global Digital & Print Media Review
www.gdpmjournal.com

Check for updates   **Cite Us**

Zoya Shakeel[*]   Muhammad Farooq Alam [†]

Multimodal Genre Analysis of Political Cartoons during Pakistan's Economic Crisis

Abstract: *This article analyzes the genre of political cartoons through the prism of multi-modality, focusing on editorial cartoons published in the Dawn newspaper during the 2023 economic crisis in Pakistan. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the visual and linguistic strategies used by cartoonists to convey political messages in a humorous way and analyze how these messages are interpreted by the audience. The research design utilizes a qualitative methodology that involves a deep evaluation of linguistic elements of cartoons and Kress and Leeuwen's framework for analyzing visual grammar. The findings of this study imply that political cartoons use various visual and linguistic elements, including exaggeration, contrast, framing, metaphors, and irony, to convey critical commentary on social and political issues. Overall, this study adds to the body of knowledge in the field of political cartoon analysis and sheds light on the genre traits and communicative techniques utilized in political cartoons.*

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Farooq Alam (Assistant Professor, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: farooq.alam@numl.edu.pk)

Introduction

In order to project political and social topics, this article explores political cartoons which are employed in editorials of Pakistani English newspapers. A preferred version of reality can be created and disseminated to the general public through print media discourse. Political cartoons are a potent medium through which cartoonists can express their ideas and opinions regarding subjects such as current affairs, historical people, or political events. In contrast to a conventional newspaper narrative, which employs hundreds of words to accomplish the same objective, a political cartoon concentrates on an image, picture, or drawing to convey the message, information, and ideas. Heitzmann (1998) asserts that cartoons are more successful at reaching a wider audience than editorials are. They can

[*] M.Phil. Scholar, Foundation University, Islamabad, Pakistan.
[†] Assistant Professor, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

be subtle, brash, or both. Political cartoons are popular because even those with little reading skills may grasp and identify with the concepts that are amusingly and successfully expressed.

The media is remarkably contributing to the global dissemination of information in the twenty-first century. Additionally, it is crucial in the development of the identities of political figures, individuals, groups, and nations. Despite the fact that these editorial cartoons appear to be a comedic take on a nation's political and social difficulties, they actually aim to portray serious problems in a subtly powerful manner. They depict different facets of people, nations, relationships, situations, and other conditions. For the past 200 years, cartoons have been a part of print media. They presented a funny picture of tough social and political realities that could scarcely be disregarded. Without knowing the background of a political cartoon, it might be difficult to understand it. Additionally, it depends on prior knowledge and strong analytical abilities. A straightforward cartoon might prove to be more meaningful and useful in this case than numerous words. They touch on practically every element of our lives today, from pop culture to environmental issues. They mostly serve the purpose of humorously disseminating political information. As a result, cartoonists instil a particular viewpoint in their target audience. They create the reality they wish to convey by creating a particular interpretation of it. A political cartoon is a picture that clarifies a point about a political subject or current event and makes the viewer laugh. To communicate their ideas through their images, cartoonists employ a range of techniques. It is a form of art that provokes individuals to consider various viewpoints.

This article investigates the linguistic and semiotic features of cartoons seen in Pakistani English newspapers' editorial sections. More specifically, the study investigates how political cartoons in Pakistani English newspapers use satire to highlight political and social issues, what political and social issues have been projected through cartoons, how linguistic and semiotic choices within a cartoon's design project the perception of its

creator, and how these decisions subtly shape public opinion.

This study also aims to investigate different socio-political themes and issues reflected in the visual and linguistic elements of cartoons and the way these elements contribute to creating a distinctive genre. Through socio-semiotic analysis, the researcher tries to identify the different features of these cartoons that evaluate their genre from other different genres like advertising or entertainment.

Significance of the study

The significance of the study is that it demonstrates how cartoons may be used to depict harsh political and social issues in Pakistani society in a politically correct yet humorous manner. The study shows how the cartoonist expertly projects injustice, corruption, economic crises, and other social ills to inform the general populace. It also investigates the genre of these political and social cartoons with the help of socio-semiotic framework and genre theory. Readers will become aware of the different persuasive components used in political cartoons, such as symbolism, analogy, exaggeration, labelling, and irony, through this study and the way these components try to modify the meaning and purpose by shaping its genre. By using cartoons, the study would portray the true socio-political landscape of Pakistan.

Objectives of the study

- To investigate the social and political concerns of Pakistani English newspapers about editorial cartoons.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of conveying a message by different linguistic and semiotic choices made by cartoonists.
- To examine the effect of these linguistic and semiotic choices on readers.
- To investigate the distinctive genre with the help of socio-semiotic analysis.

Research Questions

1. What are the political and social concerns highlighted by the political cartoons in Pakistani English newspapers?
2. What linguistic and semiotic techniques do political cartoonists employ to successfully convey their messages?
3. What effects do these linguistic and semiotic choices have on the readers?
4. How does multimodal analysis help in shaping the distinctive genre?

Literature Review

Political cartoons have been examined using social semiotic genre analysis in a number of works. Ahmed and Shah (2016) employed social semiotic genre analysis to look at the visual and linguistic elements of political cartoons in Pakistani media in a study that was published in the Journal of Pragmatics. They discovered that a variety of visual and linguistic techniques were employed by the cartoons to create and reinforce cultural and political views and that these techniques were influenced by historical and cultural circumstances. Vis and Frijhoff (2013) conducted another study that was published in the Journal of Language and Politics that employed social semiotic genre analysis to look at how gender was portrayed in political cartoons in the Netherlands. They discovered that a variety of visual and verbal techniques were employed by the cartoons to create and perpetuate gender stereotypes and that the cultural and historical settings had an impact on these prejudices.

The social semiotic approach is highlighted in Van Leeuwen's (2005) introduction to the theory and practice of critical discourse analysis. It addresses a variety of discourse analysis-related subjects, such as the connection between language and social practice, the significance of context in determining meaning, and the use of linguistic and visual resources in discourse construction. An overview of discourse analysis as a theoretical and methodological approach to understanding language and communication

may be found in Jorgensen & Phillips (2002). It covers a variety of discourse analysis-related issues, including the connection between language and power, how context shapes meaning, and how visual and verbal resources are used to produce discourse.

Systemic functional grammar is a linguistic theory that emphasizes the connection between language and social practice, and Martin, J. R. (2011) gives an account of it. It covers a wide range of systemic functional grammar-related themes, such as how context affects meaning, how language and visuals are used to form discourse, and how language and ideology interact. The theoretical framework of social semiotics, which looks at how social practices and textual elements interact to form meaning in communicative texts, is introduced by Hodge & Kress (1988). It covers a wide range of social semiotics-related issues, such as the connection between language and culture, how context shapes meaning, and how to employ visual and linguistic resources to build conversation.

Accordingly, El-Falaky (2019) used the Kress and van Leeuwen (2002, 2020) approach to analyze Egyptian political cartoons. They obtained their information on editorial cartoons from the Egyptian publication Al-Arham. Egyptians and their officials, social relations and women empowerment, the economic situation in the nation, national values and identity, the 2013 June 3 Revolution, democracy and the all-powerful US, social equality, political inequalities, etc. were all shown in the cartoons. According to the findings of their investigation, Al-Ahram uses editorial cartoons to communicate its political and ideological message to its audience. In Pakistan, political cartoons have a long and illustrious history of criticizing intolerance, injustice, political corruption, and other societal ills.

All the above research was made on the semiotic analysis of political cartoons of different eras and newspapers for the sake of their understanding and evaluation of themes, and linguistic, semantic, semiotic and structural characteristics of those editorial

cartoons. However, this research is conducted to identify the genre of political cartoons by investigating the socio-semiotic and linguistic choices of cartoonists.

Research Methodology

The research is based on a qualitative analysis of editorial political cartoons from the Dawn newspaper of Pakistan, using Kress and Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar as a guide. The analysis focuses on identifying the visual and linguistic features of the cartoons, as well as the socio-political context in which they were produced and consumed. The research also used genre theory to analyze the genre of those cartoons with the help of multimodal analysis. The researcher selects Dawn newspaper to collect the cartoons from it. The sampling method that is used in this study is the purposive sampling technique. The researcher purposively selected 10 cartoons from the Dawn newspaper, published from January 2023 to April 2023 which show the economic crises of Pakistan. From those 10 cartoons researcher selected only 5 because of the length of the article. It is a fact that cartoons mirror social thought and manifestation in both the way they are published and the features they depict.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on multi-modality, which is concerned with the study of meaning-making in social contexts through the analysis of various modes of communication, including language, images, and other visual and audiovisual resources (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). According to this framework, meaning is not solely conveyed through language but is also constructed through the selection and combination of different modes, such as colour, font, layout, and visual metaphors. Thus, in order to understand the meaning of political cartoons, it is necessary to analyze the various modes used in their production and reception. This study adopts a multimodal genre analysis approach, which involves the analysis of the recurring patterns of multimodal features that are characteristic of a particular genre (Jewitt, 2009). This approach allows for the identification of the visual and linguistic features that constitute the genre of political cartoons and the ways in which they contribute to the creation and negotiation of meaning in their social and cultural contexts.

Data analysis

Political cartoons are a form of visual communication that uses caricature, symbolism, and satire to comment on political and social issues. By analyzing the signs and symbols used in political cartoons, multimodal analysis can help to uncover the underlying meanings and ideologies that shape the genre. To investigate the genre of political cartoons is by examining the visual and linguistic codes that are used to convey meaning.

This analysis focuses on a number of political cartoon components. It depends on the approaches that cartoonists employ and the impact that they hope to have on the audience. The cartoonists aim to present a genuine picture of society through these works. The cartoonists highlight social ills and themes including injustice, corruption, the collapse of the economy, etc. using a variety of symbols and metaphors. Additionally, it is demonstrated through these cartoons how strongly they convey their cartoons' agendas of public welfare and national interest.

30 January 2023

Through multimodal analysis, the researcher is able to identify that this cartoon represents the economic condition of Pakistan. By looking at the appearance of the represented participant, it is clear that this person is the Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shahbaz Shareef. The active volcano represents the symbolic image of the economic situation of the country while the closed eyes of the government depict the carelessness and ignorance of towards that serious issue. By analyzing the linguistic and semiotic features of the cartoon it is clear that Pakistan is facing a very serious economic crisis and the government of the country only focuses on the deals of IMF which is not good for the country's welfare and for long term benefits but only about the current downfall of the

economy of the state. This cartoon depicts the government of the country only talking about the achievement of making a deal with the IMF and not focusing on the serious downfall which will be the consequences of that deal which is not beneficial for the well-being of the country.


16 February 2023

With the linguistic and semiotic analysis of this cartoon, it is clear that the represented participant is the common man of the country and the appearance shows the bad economic condition and the suffering they are going through. In the picture, the stone is a symbolic representation of the mini-budget presented by the new government, which is a burden on the poor people of the country. The linguistic and semiotic features of the cartoon show that the mini-budget presented by the government of the country is a burden on the common people of Pakistan. The country is facing a severe downfall in the economy and for the people of developing countries such a budget is not friendly enough rather it is a burden. If the budget is going downwards then it is clear that the economy is at its worst position. This is a cartoon depicting the worst economic period in the history of Pakistan.


21 February 2023

Linguistically and semiotically in this cartoon, there are four represented participants. The government is chasing two men with bad health and old dresses with no shoes which is basically the real image of the common man of the country. One who is standing with bags of money and smiling is the depiction of an elite class of the country with good health and dress. The cartoon depicts the exact opposite of what the IMF wants the Pakistani government to do. They should support the poor of the state while applying taxes on the upper class to do some justice. However, the government of the country is applying taxes on the lower class while subsidising the rich. This biasedness of the government is making the situation more intense as the country is facing economic crises. From the linguistic analysis, it is clear that IMF wants the country should make some privileges for the lower middle class while making some strict tax rules for the rich so that people will stay calm in this downfall of the economy.
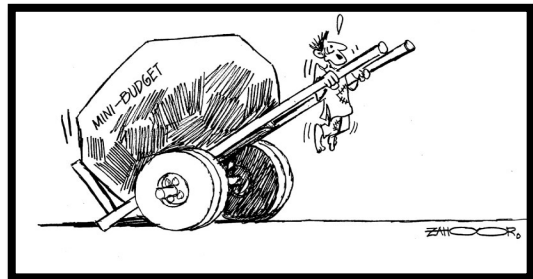
1 March 2023

By semiotic analysis this represented participant is a common person with only a torn tent and nothing to eat. The image portrays the current scenario where the people cannot provide the basic needs of their families because of the crucial condition of the economy of the country. This cartoon clearly depicts the worst economic condition of the lower class of the country as the upper class is enjoying the luxuries of life because the tax system of the state is not harming their wealth. With the help of linguistic analysis, it shows that the current situation is killer inflation and the commoners of the country are unbearably coping with it. The condition of the country in

2023 is worse as compared to the last few years because of the increase in the rate of the dollar and stock exchange. This high and sudden increase causes very severe economic crises in the state which is a very bad situation for the lower middle class of the country. This is an irony on the government and the nation for their ineffectiveness and inability to run the country as the economy is getting worse day by day.
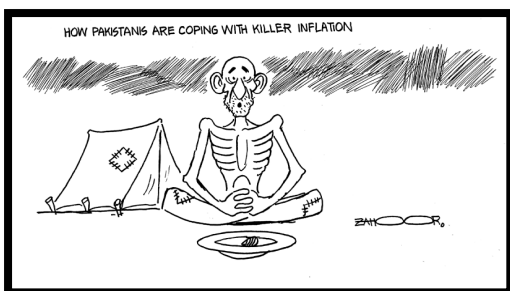
16 April 2023

The cartoonist has hit the economic condition of the country as it represents the worst economic situation of Pakistan. This picture depicts the future danger to the economy of the country. The represented participant is the Finance Minister of Pakistan Ishaq Daar, and the bag of dollars is the symbolic representation of the wealth of the country the instrument which is there is hand in of the participant is a measuring meter which measures the increase in the dollar. Linguistically the picture shows that in the coming future, Pakistan will be in debt of 1.3bn dollars because of the extreme increase in the rate of dollars and sudden decrease in the economy of Pakistan. The cartoonist is trying to show that in future the economy of the country will be more crucial while the loan from the IMF becomes more powerful.

Genre Analysis of Cartoons

The genre of a political cartoon can be determined by analyzing its visual and linguistic features, as well as the socio-political context in which it is created. Political cartoons often use caricature, symbolism, satire, or irony to comment on political and social issues. They also employ humour and exaggeration to draw attention to particular aspects of a political issue. The genre of a political cartoon can also be influenced by factors such as its purpose, target audience, and the socio-political context in which it is created. With the help of this multimodal analysis, it can be easily identified that from which genre these cartoons belong.

Editorial cartoons are a genre of political cartoons that aim to comment on and provide opinions on current events or issues, often with a focus on politics and social issues. They are typically found in newspapers or other news outlets and are created by cartoonists who use visual metaphors, caricatures, and symbolism to convey their message. Editorial cartoons are typically designed to appeal to a wide audience and are often designed to provoke a response or spark debate on a particular issue.

In the case of the economic crisis in Pakistan, the editorial cartoons in the Dawn newspaper are using the genre of editorial cartoons to communicate their opinions and commentary on the situation. By using caricatures, metaphors, and other visual techniques, they are providing a critical view of the government and other parties involved in the crisis. Overall, the genre of editorial cartoons is well-suited to addressing political and social issues, making it a likely choice for political commentary on the economic crisis in Pakistan

Conclusion

In conclusion, the multimodal genre analysis of political cartoons, published in the Dawn newspaper during the economic crisis of 2023, provides valuable insights into the genre and its communicative potential. We found that the cartoons predominantly employed visual

elements such as exaggeration, contrast, and framing to draw the viewer's attention and convey a critical message about the economic crisis. Additionally, we observed the use of linguistic devices such as metaphors, symbolism and irony to reinforce the cartoon's message.

Our analysis also highlights the significance of the socio-political context in shaping the content and tone of political cartoons. Specifically, we note the influence of the economic crisis on the cartoons' themes, as well as their intended audience, which comprises the Pakistani public. Furthermore, this research indicates that political cartoons serve as an important means of conveying critical commentary on expressing social and political issues.

Moreover, there is a scope for future researchers to explore the use of visual and linguistic elements in different genres of political cartoons, across different socio-political contexts. In doing so, we can deepen our understanding of the communicative potential of editorial cartoons and their impact on public discourse. Overall, our research contributes to the broader field of editorial cartoon analysis and underscores the value of multimodal analysis in unpacking the complex communicative strategies employed in political cartoons.

References

Chilton, P. A. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Hodge, R., & Kress, G. (1988). *Social semiotics*. Polity Press

Jewitt, C. (2009). *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. Routledge.

Jorgensen, M., & Phillips, L. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. Sage.

Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. Arnold.

Machin, D. (2012). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. Sage.

Martin, J. R. (2011). *Systemic functional grammar: A next step into the theory: Selected papers from the 10th International Conference on Systemic Functional Grammar* (Vol. 32). Equinox Publishing.

O'Halloran, K. L. (2011). Multimodal discourse analysis. In K. Tracy, C. Ilie, & T. Sandel (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (pp. 1-13). Wiley-Blackwell.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing social semiotics*. Routledge.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.