

America in Pakistani Print Media: A Semiotic Discourse Analysis based Study of Pak-U.S Relationship

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ABSTRACT

Print media semiotic discourses are one of the best sites for ideological investment and their role is very significant in the production and dissemination of certain ideology. The aim of the present study is to critically decode the semiotic discourse(s) of Pakistani English newspaper DAWN (daily) with special reference to the representation of Pak- Us relationship through the analysis of the semiotics discourses. The data for the present research has been collected from the mentioned newspaper. The time span for data collection ranges from October 2018 to December 2018. Out of ten (10) caricatures which represent Pakistan attempting to survive at its own rather than depending on America one was purposively selected for linguistic and semiotic analyses. The study is descriptive and utilizes qualitative research design. For this purpose, the researchers have devised an amended research model by drawing upon Fairclough (1995), Kress (2010) and Kruger's (2000) research models to analyse linguistic, semiotic and focus group discussions data. The semiotic analysis has also been validated by incorporating the remarks of focus group participants. Based on the analysis of data the study concludes that noting is absolute in politics as far as Pak- Us relations through semiotic discourses are concerned. Additionally, the research reveals that print media semiotic discourses work insidiously to represent socio- political changes by employing linguistic and meta-linguistic devices and techniques.

Key words: Semiotic Discourse, Ideology, Pak- Us Relations Representations, Newspapers, Political Discourse

INTRODUCTION

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.

Taskona (2009) argues that visual and verbal practices need to be decoded to comprehend semiotic discourses at Iconic, Identical, and Indexical levels. Desousa (1981) opines that political cartoons contain political and cultural allusions. To decode them comprehensively one needs linguistic and metalinguistic competence. Moreover, according to him they are equal to freedom of speech and visual images were de-

liberately created to propagate certain ideologies. Hodge and Kress (2010) assert that political cartoons cartoon the faces of political leaders besides representing language in denaturalized form they amuse the audience. But the purpose is to bring reforms in the relevant domains. Semiotic discourses represent ideology implicitly. Borstin (1963) opines that people see mediated images more than they read the words. Political cartoons are regarded communicative weapons. He argues 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.

Kristeva (1969) argues "every speech act includes transmission of messages through the 'language' of gesture, posture, clothing, hair style, perfume, social context, etc". Similarly, Sapir (1921) opines "every cultural pattern and every single act of social behavior involves communication either in an explicit or implicit sense". In this regard it is pertinent to mention here that among other means of communication language is an important one. It is equally obvious that not only we communicate through verbal means rather

through non-verbal means as well. Meta-linguistic means of communication can stretch our concept of language. According to Jakobson (1975) semiotics can easily be included among meta-linguistic features of language.

Semiotics Discourse(s) of Newspapers

Saussure (1916) defines semiotics as:

“a science that studies the life of signs within society. I shall call it semiology (from Greek word “Semeion” (Sign). Semiology would show what constitutes signs and what laws govern them”.

According to him one of the significant features of political cartoons is to represent language in a de-naturalized way. The message propagated through them is implied rather than clearly stated. Usually political cartoons cartoon the dual faces of the politicians and celebrities. Peirce (1931) proposed an autonomous discipline of signifier and signified. The former called it semiology; and the later called it “Semiotics”. He argues that semiology helps us in understanding sign-based behavior of the people. Similarly, Price (2003) asserts that in certain cases the concept of word-picture conjunction is of vital significance in understating meanings embedded in them. Barthes (1974) argued that fashion, boxing, perfumes, hair styles etc. are sign systems. Fawcett (2015) says that semiotics are culturally oriented, and our senses are culturally trained to extract meanings from them.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) assert that newspapers’ semiotic discourses provide us an insight into the social realities around us. The new realities of the semiotic landscape are brought about by social, cultural, and economic factors. It is observed that visual structures of Pakistani newspapers are never merely formal: they have deeply important semantic and ideological dimension. The visual semiotic has a range of structural devices which have no equivalent in language. According to Barthes (1968) they act as a tool to gain an understanding about a culture. The theoretical premise of this paper is that ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in the semiotic discourse(s) of Pakistani newspapers to represent Pak-US relations through changing time.

Statement of the Problem

Besides having many modes of communication, the significance of print media semiotic discourses cannot be denied. They serve many purposes simultaneously. Through them certain ideologies can be propagated to the target audience by providing humor and satire simultaneously. They keep us informed about changing socio-political scenario around us. Similarly, the present research attempts to critically decode the semiotic discourses of Pakistani English newspaper DAWN (daily) to know about Pak-US relations during the mentioned period of time and how the concept of word-picture conjunction work to insidiously to propagate political ideologies.

Objectives

The objectives of the research are as under:

1. To investigate how Pak-US relations are represented discursively through the semiotic discourses of Pakistani English newspaper DAWN (daily).
2. To investigate how visual coherence works to disseminate desired ideology.

Research Question

How have Pak-US relations been represented discursively through semiotic discourses of DAWN (daily)?

METHODOLOGY

The researchers know that most often semiotic analysis privileges semioticians specialized reading of the texts and semiotic structures. This could be totally opposite to a lay reader’s perception about the same semiotic text. Therefore, to counter this controversy the researchers have incorporated general public’s perception about these images as well. This has been done by conducting two focused group discussions. These discussions were held among the participants who are M.Phil. in English Linguistics and other group consisted of the participants who are educated in other domains such as Management sciences, education, Islamic studies, and Mathematics. This was done to compare the perception and reception of both types of focus group participants about the semiotic text of the newspaper. These were mixed-sex groups whose ages varied from 25 to 50 years. They were given the semiotic text (selected Cartoon) a week before the date of discussions. The duration of each discussion was sixty minutes. These discussions have been visually recorded. The moderator gave prompts to initiate the discussion. The participants were asked to comment on language and the pictures. Their views have been included in the analysis section.

Fairclough’s (1993) model of Critical Social Analysis (CSA) has been operationalised for the analysis of data consisting of linguistic and visual modes in the present research. This research model recommends that CSA intends to focus on social dominance process through language. Besides, it focuses on how social dominance is secured and sustained. Most often things are manipulated through language which legitimizes or naturalizes the social orders. Moreover, socio-cultural factors also account for meaning making process. Critical Social Analysis process focuses on every linguistic spin to explore embedded meanings. Fairclough (1993, P.135) defines (CSA) as critical social analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationship of causality and determinism among discursive practices, events, and texts. It investigates how practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggle over power. Things are naturalized and then made common sense through language. This how people are hegemonized by gaining control over powerful discourses. Therefore, discourse analysis is ideological analysis. Print media discourses of Pakistan very tactfully employ different linguistic and visual practices to propagate desired ideology

to the target audience. Now discursivity is considered long lasting and more persuasive as compared to coercive power. The main aim of the present research is to analyse linguistic and semiotic discourses to know how word- picture conjunction works to impart meanings more comprehensively. It not only considers the “mere” linguistic structures of the text but also the social and institutional conditions of the text production and text reception. Thus, language is “irreducibly a social practice” (Kress and Hodge, 1993, P.202). However, for Semiological Analysis we have drawn upon Kress’ (2010) A Social -Semiotic Theory of Multimodality. It focuses on how meanings are made and whose interests are being served in this process of word- picture conjunction. The following picture has been selected for linguistic and semiotic analyses.

Cartoon: 10 December, 2018

10th December 2018 | Zahoor



Linguistic Analysis

Ivanic (2001) argues that the use of pronouns is highly ideological. Similarly, the use of first person pronoun “We” as a pronoun of power connotes the concept of Usness, unity, and strength. It implies that Pakistanis as a nation at present are united and in a position to stand at their own putting aside what they used to be in the past. The use of first-person pronoun “we” also connotes solidarity, power, and nationhood. Besides, the use of helping verb are is in abbreviated form which most often connotes certainty. Here, in this context it implies that Pakistanis at present are certain that Pakistan is not a subordinate of America anymore. Through the use of adverb of manner and time which is “anymore” it is being highlighted that we have been working as a hired gun, for the interest of America in the past but gone are the days when Pakistan used to be used for American interests, but now democracy in Pakistan is strong enough and we can settle our issues ourselves.

It is pertinent to mention here that America in the past had been imposing do more mantra on us but now the elected prime minister of Pakistan, as being the representative of all the institutes of country is trying to represent Pakistan on equal footing. He has been represented as an embodiment of gun and human being simultaneously. The semiotic under analysis represents Pakistan during the regime of Imran Khan that the country is being led by its armed forces and democratic leaders wisely as the semiotic indirectly represents. This implies that only coercive power is not enough rather,

now the present scenario demands that both democracy and law imposing forces should be on the same page to lead the country towards its destination.

Fairclough (1995) argues that no use of language is ideology free. By changing the form of language, we change its meanings as well. The use of second person pronoun “your” is ideological. Here, in the present case it could be taken as both inclusively and exclusively. Exclusively America is being warned that Pakistan is no more a hired gun for her and inclusively it is message for all the world as well. If Pakistan can confront America on her national interests, the other countries should be ready for the same kind of reply from Pakistan. Now Pakistan has earned an independent identity and can survive at her own. Fairclough (1995) asserts that discourses are deeply rooted in history and without having sound knowledge of history it is hard to decode them comprehensively. The un-said of the semiotic discourse under analysis is that though Pakistan has been doing whatever was ordered by America in the past and America has been demanding more and more. But at present Pakistan is not going to do any more for America putting aside her national interests. Perhaps, right now Pakistani government, armed forces and other institutions have realized that by being at the disposal of America they have lost more at all fronts. This is what has led Pakistan to decide that it should not be hired Gun of America anymore.

The use of capital letters is a typographic technique which is used to highlight something important. This technique is used to make intended meanings more visible. Similarly, the linguistic chunk under analysis is written in capital letters and in bold font. At the same time, the use of weak form and exclamation mark at the end of the sentence implies that it is a well thought proclaim on the part of Pakistan that in order to survive independently some bold decisions have been taken. This should be clear to all. In this regard first step has been taken from the top (by giving message to America) and it should be understood by the people at the bottom (other countries) as well.

Semiotic Analysis

Dansi (2002) argues that words cannot be understood without pictures. Word- picture conjunction goes a long way in making meanings clearer. Similarly, if we look at the posture of Pakistani prime minister in the semiotic under analysis, he seems relaxed which implies that we (Pakistanis) are satisfied on whatever we have decided. In Pakistani culture the folded hands at the back connote relaxed state of mind of a person. But, on the other hand, the American president seems awe stricken by knowing what Pakistan has decided. It seems that he was least expecting such type of response from the previous hired gun. Therefore, he is totally lost as is obvious from his face expressions.

Kress (2010) argues that one of the prominent features of semiotic discourses is that the dual faces of the politicians are cartooned. Similarly, the caricature under analysis mocks at the persons cartooned in it. The prime minister of Pakistan has been portrayed here in the image having lower part of human and upper of a gun which means a mystery. It implies

complex nature of politics and politicians in Pakistan. The politicians should have nothing to do with gun. A politician depending on armed forces is a mystery. This is how two opposing traits have been juxtaposed. It means that a politician depends upon armed forces to make government. From a western perspective democracy is dependent on armed forces in Pakistan. Similarly, the caricature of Uncle Sam, as a personified representation of US federal and national legendary figure has been represented wearing long nose and unusual chin, which according to Greek mythology is a symbol of devil and devilish activities on his part. Therefore, Mr. Sam could be taken as a human in devil's guise (from Pakistani) perspective). This is how dual faces of the persons shown in the semiotic have been cartooned.

Uncle Sam and Pakistani prime minister have been shown wearing their respective flags (national dress). It implies that whatever, they are doing, it only meant for their respective countries. However, reality could be otherwise. Visual imagery is full of connotations says (Kress 2010). In this regard the only speech bubble shown on the hat of Uncle Sam implies only worry at present for America is the way the previous hired gun is behaving. If we look at the background there is so much haphazardness shown in the form of heaps at certain places in black color. One of the possible connotations could be that there have been many ups and downs between the two countries but right now Pakistan is very much clear about what to do next. So, both Pakistan and America have been together at many fronts but as a result as being together both have suffered a lot as is shown from the heaps in the background. The alliance of both the countries have resulted in destruction not only for them but for the world as well.

If we look from America perspective Uncle Sam is wearing the national color and similarly, the Pakistani prime minister is wearing Pakistani color. In this way both are representing their respective countries. However, the upper part of Pakistani prime minister has been shown with a gun in firing position. The obvious target in the present case is America. Perhaps, this is what has made America so astonished. Moreover, the caricature representing Pakistan is a mystery for America. A democratic prime minister instead of holding dialogues is more inclined to decide the things with gun. The western perception about Pakistan has been that it has never been a faithful partner in the war against terror. Kress (2010) opines that in language we use different words to convey our message comprehensively, whereas, in semiotics we use different colors and patterns. Similarly, the rectangular box carrying the message in written form implies certainty about Pakistani mind set at present. It connotes that the decision made by Pakistan is final one that now it is not going to be hired gun of America anymore. The change that has taken place in Pak-US relation could be strange for the masses of both the countries and the obvious change is from Do More Mantra to NO MORE.

Focus Group Findings

The researchers have also validated their findings by incorporating the remarks of focus group participants. The remarks of some of the participants are as under:

“Pak- Us relations have a long history and Pakistan always did for American interests. It is really strange and pleasant change. America can only understand the language of gun.”

“The backdrop of the cartoon is American policies against Pakistan. When China is at the back of Pakistan, it can do anything to challenge America. The world scenario is changing, now China is emerging as a superpower.”

“Pakistan should not have been an ally of America in the war against terror. It was American war and we lost a lot in that war. Finally, this decision is better, but America cannot bear it.”

Almost all the participants of focus group discussions are of the opinion that in present scenario a country can make progress only when its all institutes are on the same page. However, the support of China is also worth mentioning factor here. Armed forces can deliver their best when nation is at their back. Some of the participants also remarked that Pakistan had been serving America for the sake of financial aid. Now that is being met by China. Therefore, Pakistan can afford behaving like this. In this way, the findings of focus group discussions up to great extent match with the researchers' analysis.

CONCLUSION

The research was undertaken keeping in mind the statement of the problem mentioned in the relevant section and to achieve objectives that how are Pak- Us relations represented through the semiotic discourses of the mentioned newspaper. Based on the analysis of the data the research concludes that an element of change has taken place about American representation in Pakistani print media semiotic discourses. The newness of the research is that Pakistan has been represented as a sovereign state refusing America that she is not going to be a plaything anymore. Now instead of following Do More Mantra, Pakistan can stand at its own as has been illustrated by the data collected for the present research. Through our research we want to raise awareness about the power and ideological underpinnings of semiotics within the media discourses of Pakistan about Pak- Us relationship. Such semiotic discourses are used to reflect the changes that take place around us. It can be said that through semiotic analysis we can determine the meanings connoted by a photograph and the codes that achieve this. The findings of the research support Dijk's (2006) proposition that print media discourses serve as a prism and they reflect the desired version of reality on one hand and on the other they keep us in touch with the global changes that take place in the political scenario.

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