



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Political Discourse and Ideology: A Semiological Discourse Analysis of  
Pakistani Urdu and English Newspapers**

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**ABSTRACT**

Semiotic discourses are an important genre of print media. They are considered a graphic language and are intended for everyone. Caricatures have become a compelling technique of promoting the target audience's chosen ideologies. This study analyses the semiotic discourses of one Urdu (Jung) and one English (Dawn) newspaper from May 1, 2022 to June 30, 2022. The current study adopts an integrated methodology. In semiotic discourses, both visual and verbal activities have been decoded and utilized. The analysis of the researchers has been validated by focus group talks. According to the research, both English and Urdu newspapers are extremely polarized and create semiotic discourses with their target audience in mind. Economy, national politics, foreign politics, social issues, and Pak-army representation are some of the emerging themes in Dawn. Semiological discourses are among the best venues for ideological investment, and the dissemination of desired ideologies in Urdu and English media is polarized.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Ideology, Print Media, Representation, Semiology

**Introduction**

Political cartoons work as a strong communicative tool and give much information about the current political scenario in a blink of an eye. They provide a commentary on the socio-political scenario around us. People get more attracted to pictures than text. According to Eco (1979), a picture speaks more than a thousand words, and we regard our sense of sight as more reliable than our sense of hearing. Jacobson (1971) opines semiotics possess nonverbal power and act as meta-language. A gesture or a sign imparts meaning more quickly than written text. Barthes (1968) says a sign is a trace, clue, or mark representing individuality and universality. Semiotics is culturally oriented, and they carry multiple layers of meanings. Political cartoons keep us updated about the surroundings, mainly social, religious, and political circumstances. Semiotics help understand human thinking patterns from a social and psychological view. In our society, humans use language to communicate, but it is also evident that people can communicate through nonverbal means. Kristeva (1969) opines that every speech act delivers a message but may be done through language of words, posture, gesture, clothing, or any other means in a social context. Semiotic discourses work as powerful means to disseminate a particular ideology to the target audience most effectively.

**Political Cartoon as a Genre**

Political cartoons are critical to grabbing the attention of a large audience. In a country like Pakistan, where the literacy rate is comparatively low, caricatures are one of the most effective ways to grasp the attention of people belonging to all occupations. Semiotics is meant for everybody and hence, are decoded accordingly. They perform a dual

function. On the one hand, they entertain and provide a commentary on the socio-political scenario around us.

Moreover, they are culturally loaded, and one needs culturally trained senses to decode them. They sometimes carry some political hegemony in them. Different media groups employ this subtle technique to disseminate desired ideology among the target audience. They are never neutral. Semiotic discourses have become an essential print media genre and are exploited wisely.

Thomas and Wareing (2001) maintains that the Multimodal framework helps to understand the interplay of visual and verbal practices. Sometimes certain things are exaggerated through the caricatures, but despite this, they are never ideology-free. Desousa & Medhurst (1981) opine that Political cartoons serve four functions: entertainment, aggression, reduction, agenda setting, and framing specific political policy and history. Caricatures embody the dominant political themes of the day. Steuter et al. (2008) maintain that cartoons are not a typical print media genre. Instead, they can change minds, make beliefs, transform ideas, and guide directly and indirectly. Morris (1992) argues that cartoons are speech bubbles and have been significant for ages. Medhurst and Desousa (1981) believe semiotic discourses carry graphic persuasion and are designed tactfully. They can influence and persuade the target audience.

### **Literature Review**

This section briefly introduces the works already done in a similar domain. Sheikh et al. (2013) examined political cartoons published in Pakistani newspapers to analyze how different political ideologies are disseminated through print media semiotic discourses. The caricatures were evaluated at the levels of symbolism, exaggeration, labeling, analogy, and irony embedded in them. The research explored how cartoons subtly propagate desired ideology to the target audience to win their consent. The analysis comprised linguistic and semiotic levels. The study concludes that political cartoons play a significant role in shaping public perception of different political agendas.

Kazanoglua (2015) explored how different ideologies are disseminated through cartoon series meant for children. The data was collected from the first Turkish Cartoon series, "Pepee," which consisted of eight seasons comprising two hundred and eleven episodes; it was broadcasted from September 2008 until January 2015. An integrated research approach was applied to analyze the data using qualitative and content analysis techniques. The analysis of the data revealed that the selected cartoon series was meant for the propagation of the dominant controlling groups' desired political ideologies, proving that there is an ideology within and behind semiotic discourses.

Rahman (2018) researched the representation of Islam and Muslims in American print media and semiotic discourse, finding that the west is highly terrified of Muslims. It argues that Muslims are hardliners because of the violent ideology of Islam. Most often, Islam is associated with a phobia through semiotic discourses. The data was analyzed using Fairclough's (2003) and Barthes' (1974) research models at semiotic and linguistic levels. The research concludes that through the semiotic discourses of American print media Islam and Muslims are misrepresented.

Sajid et al. (2020) observed the power of images in shaping the perception of people's post-9/11 American representation in Pakistani print media semiotic discourses. The data for the study was collected from the Pakistani English newspaper Dawn. To analyze the data, the researchers employed a multimodal discourse analysis approach. The study drew upon Machin's (2007), Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for re-contextualization, and Fairclough's (2003) for linguistic analysis. The study revealed that no use of language is ideology-free, and words and pictures work together to propagate a desired ideology to the general masses more comprehensively.

## Material and Methods

The present research employs an integrated approach that draws upon Kress's (2010) and Krueger's (2001) research models. The data for the study was collected from two Pakistani newspapers. One English (DAWN) and one Urdu (JUNG). The delimitation of the study is that it only deals with the semiotic discourses of the mentioned English and Urdu newspapers from May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, to June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Since the data collected for the study comprises more than one mode, i.e., language and visual, Kress' (2010) multimodal social approach to contemporary discourses has been employed. This model works at the following levels:

1. What meaning is being made in the text?
2. How is meaning being made in the text?
3. What resources have been drawn on to make meanings in the text?
4. In what social environment is the meaning being made?
5. Whose interest and agency is at work in the making of meaning?

## Results and Discussion

### Cartoon: 19 May, 2022

Zahoor | Published May 19, 2022



TALIBAN WANT "GOOD TIES" WITH US \_\_\_\_\_



Zahoor's Cartoon

Hodge and Kress (1993) assert that multimode communication is more effective. Word-picture conjunction technique is more persuasive in propagating the desired ideology using the minimum number of words. They argue that different visual and verbal practices are employed in reproducing the meanings more comprehensively. Similarly, the semiotic under analysis embodies a bundle of interpretations about the 'Taliban' and the 'US' representatives. In the picture above, it can be observed that both Taliban and US representatives both are standing in a relaxed position. The way they are standing, folding their hands at their backs, this posture in eastern culture shows that a person is relaxed and comfortable in a situation. The hat of the US representative on the head of the Taliban representative shows his willingness to accept the terms of the US representative. This hat has symbolic significance. It shows that for their economic benefits, the Taliban are ready to accept a few terms of US representatives for their help. And the posture of the US representative also shows that he is comfortable with having good ties with the Taliban. On the head of a US representative, Turban has a symbolic significance that somehow. They have also accepted the terms and conditions given by the Taliban, which suit their interest here. The pointed nose of the US representative shows his stubbornness, but they are standing together to get their desired benefits.

Hodge and Kress (1993) affirm that communication at present involves multi modes, which are done to disseminate the message to the maximum number of people. Media discourses use different techniques in the form of visual and verbal practices to convey

desired messages lightly. The semiotic from the selected newspaper illustrates the sociopolitical scenario of Afghanistan. So, now they both seem to agree to hold talks to have good relations with each other. The economy is one of the reasons that they both are ready to have good ties between them.

Pine and Haukanes (2021) opine that certain things are represented in the background deliberately at the cost of others. The resources drawn upon to propagate the intended ideology include the use of capital letters in bold font (TALIBAN WANTS GOOD TIES WITH US), the background, the wide open eyes of both representatives, the use of black and grey colors are the discursive moves used to propagate intended ideology explicitly and implicitly. The semiotic also illustrates that there is a pun in the use of the word 'Good Ties.' Here the use of the noun 'Ties' is ideologically loaded. On the one hand, it conveys the visible meanings imparted by the caricature of the representatives of the Taliban and the US wearing the same tie, which has urged them into bonding or relationship. It also implies that this tie has tied them together; now, they have become part and parcel for each other, whether they are willing to have GOOD TIES with them or not. They are bound to be close to each other. It also represents a cultural exchange because the representative of the Taliban is wearing a tie with his traditional dress. Similarly, the representative of 'The US' is wearing a turban and has a beard and mustache; these two things are usually associated with Taliban Culture.

The representatives of their respective ideological groups are eyeing toward their front. It may connote that both representatives are looking at the rest of the world about what may come from having/exchanging good ties between these two ideological groups. The expression 'GOOD TIES' is central to their relationship. It implies that both the representatives want their GOOD TIES/interests at the top. Now, they have become necessary evils for each other. Perhaps, both ideological groups have realized that they are part and parcel of each other and will have to work together for each other's interest. It is said that politics is a game of interest, and there is no finality in a political scenario. Similarly, yesterday's enemies have become each other's partners to reap their respective interests. The overall message propagated by the semiotic is that Media discourses represent the social and political scenario around us. Besides, visual and verbal practices in semiotics are meaningful and highly ideological.

## Cartoon: 29 May, 2022

Zahoor | Published May 29, 2022

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Reed (2021) opines that meanings belong to culture rather than specific modes, and expressing something visually and verbally makes a difference. The use of visual and verbal practices in semiotic discourses is an effective technique to convey meanings comprehensively. Similarly, semiotics under analysis highlights the existing political scenario in Pakistan and how PTI (Pakistan Tahreek-e- Insaf, a political party) prepares for coming elections. The leader of PTI (Imran Khan) has been shown standing on the container aggressively. The speech bubble shown in the picture reflects his mindset. It carries the linguistic message that is as under:

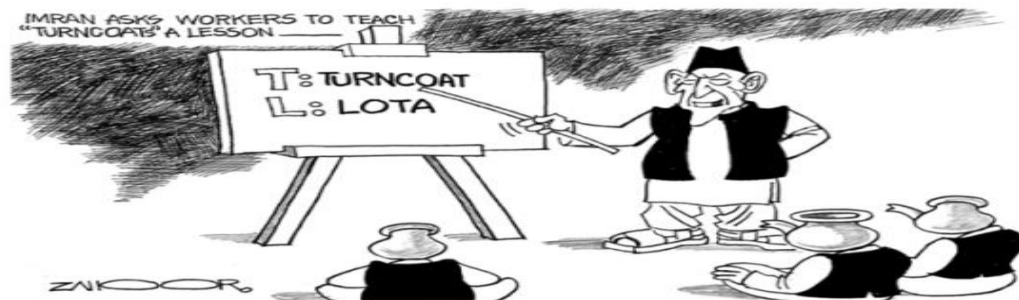
### "We Will Be On The Streets Again If The Elections Is Not Announced"

It implies that the way the sitting government in Pakistan, PMLN (Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Shrief), is working is not acceptable to PTI and its leadership. Therefore, the leader of PTI initiated an anti-government moment. The use of the first person pronoun 'We' is ideological. It connotes the concept of unity and collectiveness on the part of PTI's leader, shown in the semiotic. The idea of de-naturalizing language is also there, as the standing posture of the PTI's leader on the container shows. The container shown in the picture is more significant in size but highly de-stable. It may topple at any time because the supporting wheels are broken. The irony is that a leader on the almost-toppled container claims to destabilize the existing government. He wants to hear his voice before he falls into a shaky container.

The use of bold font and capital letters in the linguistic text implies that the message being imparted is of vital significance. Moreover, using the helping verb 'will' instead of 'shall' with 'we' connotes a degree of certainty on the part of PTI's leader. The caricature implies that the sitting government is hostile (PTI). The linguistic message implicitly conveys that PTI is fully ready to compete with the other political parties in the upcoming

## Cartoon: 28 June, 2022

Zahoor | Published June 28, 2022



elections. The container with damaged wheels connotes the destabilized position of PTI now. Perhaps, it is because PTI's leadership is keen to have general elections held as soon as possible. The overall impression of the semiotic is that though PTI is facing a hard time, its leadership is confident of overcoming the situation through the results of upcoming elections.

The semiotic above clearly mentions that PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) is trying to propagate a desired version of reality about the turncoat politicians (people who change their loyalties for material gains) in Pakistani politics. This has become a common practice in Pakistani politics these days. Therefore, the semiotic analysis represents the ongoing political scenario in Pakistan. Here, the characters shown are symbolic. The PTI's leader (Mr. Khan) symbolizes all such leaders/teachers struggling against politicians who are habitual in changing their parties/loyalty for material interests. At the same time, the students wearing lotas on their heads are the symbolic representation of politicians involved in this practice. The teacher in the semiotic is wearing the traditional dress of a Pakistani teacher. However, as shown in the picture, the students wearing sherwanis of the same color are very. The irony lies in the teacher telling the lotas about lotas. The term 'lota' has become an essential lexical item in Pakistani English, especially in political discourse. The black and white colors are prominent in the dress of the teacher and students. It might imply that laws must be made in black and white to stop this practice, and lotacracy must be rooted out to run the political affairs in the country smoothly. The students, who symbolize such turncoats, imply that lotas are mysterious and untrustworthy politicians. They have a dual



identity that can be changed at any moment. The background shown in the picture is rural and connotes that attempts should be made from grass root level to eliminate lotacracy. The black heaps in the background imply the trouble they have caused in the past to derail democracy in Pakistan. Using visual and verbal practices imparts the meaning that politics should be made free of lotaism.



This semiotic was published in the Pakistani Urdu newspaper 'JUNG' on May 12th, 2022. In the semiotic above, the economic position of Pakistan is described. This caricature shows that imports in Pakistan are increasing rapidly. The characters shown in the above caricature are symbolic. The increase in imports is affecting Pakistan's economy badly. The sitting government is working hard to reduce imports as much as possible to compensate for the economy's load. Many essential items, including medicines, are in consideration to stop buying as imports spend a considerable part of income abroad. The word 'Maeshat Ward' shows that Pakistan's economy suffers badly and is on a ventilator. It implies that the Export sector has been badly neglected.

The given semiotic represents the economic DE stability of Pakistan at present. The semiotic shows that Imports (Daraamdata) have crossed all the limits. This is obvious from the man lying on a huge-sized bed, who seems relaxed. He has good mussels, which implies that other countries are getting maximum advantage from Pakistan's DE stable economic state. Pakistan depends heavily on import from other countries and pays them massive amounts. The words written at the feet of this giant-like man are 'make him starve' (IS KO FAKAY KARWAYN). This is symbolic. It connotes that instead of feeding the interests of other countries in the form of imports, they must be stopped gradually. Attention should be paid to improving the export sector that is breathing its last, as is evident from the picture representing Pakistan's export.

There are undoubtedly other industries in Pakistan that are suffering from loss. They have reached the extent that perhaps the only option left with the government is to close them. It has been highlighted by the language used, such as 'Loss bearing Cooperation should be eliminated. The creature under analysis highlights the economic conditions of Pakistan and they have represented with the patients admitted to the hospital ward. Different industrial sectors are breathing their last because the government neglects them. The caricature, on the one hand, highlights the causes of the bad condition of the economy and industry by representing them with human figures in a miserable conditions. On the other, it indirectly invites the attention of the authorities concerned to take remedial measures

before it is too late. Therefore, the caricature under analysis supports Dijk's (2003) stance that print media discourses reflect the existing socio-economic reality of a particular society at a specific time.



This semiotic highlights the worst economic condition the sitting government of Pakistan is facing. The swimming pool is symbolic here. The government drowned in the pool and asked that

**'Ap Logo Ny Kaha Tha.....Pool Itna Gehra Nhi... Ye To Bohatt Gehra Ha....'**

"It was informed that this pool is not so deep but profound."

This above linguistic message with the caricature makes it easy for the readers to understand that the sitting government unknowingly drowned in the deep pool of economic problems. Previously, when they were in opposition, they were confident to face the economic difficulties bravely. In addition, when it was in opposition, the sitting government claimed it had an expert team to resolve the economic problem efficiently in a month. However, after assuming power, they realized that economic hurdles were giant. Mr. Asif Zardari is shown sitting outside the pool, looking relaxed and satisfied. It is because he is enjoying that his plans are successfully working. Now, he is enjoying and sitting that how the sitting government became the puppet in his hands.

On the one hand, he encouraged the PML (N) leader to become the prime minister of Pakistan. He assured them that he was with them through thick and thin. But the semiotic analysis shows that instead of helping the government of PML (N), which is almost close to drowning in the pool of economic trouble, he is relaxing and enjoying the troubled state of economic affairs the government faces. The leader of PPP has been represented as a timeserver and discreet man. He should have been standing there to help the almost-drowned government representative.

The representative of the government, most probably (Miftah Ismail), minister of finance, seems too small and incapable of handling the stormy pool of economic troubles. This implies the difference between appearance and reality in political affairs and how to rule the country. Things from a distance seem easier to handle but are too demanding when facing reality. The crafty nature of PPP's leader has also been shown. It reflects that he enjoys trapping others in difficult situations, as mentioned in a pool of economic troubles.

The linguistic text implies that the leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League (Noon) did not investigate the gravity of the situation. Only on behalf of PPP jumped into the pool of difficulties and now face the consequences. Using ellipses in the linguistic text implies a boggled and confused state of the government's representative. The persons shown in the semiotic are symbolic. They represent their respective parties. The prominent chair in the

picture with the linguistic text "IMF LIFEGUARD" connotes that without the help of the IMF, Pakistan's economic issues cannot be solved. This institute is keeping Pakistan's economy / Pakistan alive. After facing several troubles, Pakistan's only option is to ask IMF for economic support, which it does to reap its interests and implement its ideologies in Pakistan. The overall impression of the semiotic is that Pakistan's economic conditions are worst, and its politicians, instead of helping each other, are enjoying the miserable conditions of others—the only option left to beg from IMF.



Dijk (2003) argues that media discourses are highly politicized, and semiotic discourses are the best site for ideological investment. With the help of word-picture conjunction, a lot can be said by using a few words accompanied by pictures. Politics is a game of reaping self-interests; nothing is absolute. Here in the picture, the political scenario of Pakistan is represented by Chess Board, which is controlled by an expert master Asif Ali Zardari. Mr. Zardari's very picture occupies more space than the other men personified as chess pieces. The controlling master has tactfully placed all three chess pieces in the posts he thinks to suit them. An important thing to note is that he has put his son, Mr. Bilawal, at the forefront, implying that he is suitable for the foreign minister of Pakistan. It means that Mr. Zardari is an interest seeker in the real sense and wants to see his family members occupying higher political posts. The other two men (chess pieces) are the personified representation of the speaker National Assembly and the senior minister of the Punjab province of Pakistan. It connotes that Mr. Zardari wants to control the political scenario of Pakistan from all sides by placing the chess pieces of his own choice. The underlying ideology is that different ministers and other government officials do not have their own free will. As shown in the semiotic under analysis, someone else controls them.

Moreover, using the first person pronoun 'I' implies a degree of certainty on the part of Mr. Zardari that he is certain about his plan. He has been shown occupying more space wearing a cultural Sindi dress. He is a symbolic representation of the Sind province of Pakistan. It connotes that Pakistan People's Party has now controlled Pakistani politics. His raised ears imply that he is fully alert and is hearing and seeing the political activities in the country very carefully. It means these chess pieces can be placed in other places feeling the pulse of circumstances. The impression of the semiotic is that word- the picture technique has been employed to propagate the message that the leader of the PPP is very much alert and making the needed changes according to the changing political scenario of Pakistan.



## Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected from the selected newspapers reveals that the semiotics that appeared in the English newspaper (Dawn) carry themes related to the economy, national politics, international politics, social issues, and semiotics associated with the representation of Pak-army. The frequency of occurrence of these themes is 7.2%, 7.2 %, 1.2%, 0.6%, and 0.6%. At the same time, the semiotics that appeared in the selected Urdu newspaper carry themes related to the economy, social issues, and national politics. Their occurrence frequency is 2.4%, 18.6%, 1.8%, and 7.8%. These findings reveal the ideological bent of these two media groups. English newspaper also carries news items through its semiotics about international issues. It is because of its target readership.

Moreover, headlines related to the representation of Pak-army have been found in English newspapers but not in Urdu newspapers. Mainly, it was observed that Urdu newspapers represent the army positively, but surprisingly no semiotic appeared in the selected data from the Urdu newspaper. It might be because of the ideological shift of those who control this particular media group. Similarly, Urdu newspaper uses semiotics about economic issues more than its counterpart. Such problems are more critical for the middle or lower middle class. The research contends that there is nothing absolute about the ideological inclination of a particular group, and the concept of ideological shift has become more prominent these days. However, print media semiotic discourses represent the prevailing socio-political scenario of a society at a particular time.

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