

Analyzing Political Cartoons in Arabic-Language Media after Trump's Jerusalem Move: A Multimodal Discourse Perspective

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Abstract : Communication in the modern world is increasingly becoming multimodal due to globalization and the digital space we live in which have remarkably affected how people communicate. Accordingly, Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies with the underlying assumption that other semiotic resources such as images, colours, scientific symbolism, gestures, actions, music and sound, etc. combine with language in order to communicate meaning. One of the effective multimodal media that combines both verbal and non-verbal elements to create meaning is political cartoons. Furthermore, since political and social issues are mirrored in political cartoons, these are regarded as potential objects of discourse analysis since they not only reflect the thoughts of the public but they also have the power to influence them. The aim of this paper is to analyze some selected cartoons on the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital by the American President, Donald Trump, adopting a multimodal approach. More specifically, the present research examines how the various semiotic tools and resources utilized by the cartoonists function in projecting the intended meaning. Ten political cartoons, among a surge of editorial cartoons highlighted by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) - an international Jewish non-governmental organization based in the United States - as publications in different Arabic-language newspapers in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Iran and UK, were purposively selected for semiotic analysis. These editorial cartoons, all published during 6th–18th December 2017, invariably suggest one theme: Jewish and Israeli domination of the United States. The data were analyzed using the framework of Visual Social Semiotics. In accordance with this methodological framework, the selected visual compositions were analyzed in terms of three aspects of meaning: representational, interactive and compositional. In analyzing the selected cartoons, an interpretative approach is being adopted. This approach prioritizes depth to breadth and enables insightful analyses of the chosen cartoons. The findings of the study reveal that semiotic resources are key elements of political cartoons due to the inherent political communication they convey. It is proved that adequate interpretation of the three aspects of meaning is a prerequisite for understanding the intended meaning of political cartoons. It is recommended that further research should be conducted to provide more insightful analyses of political cartoons from a multimodal perspective.

Keywords : Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), multimodal text, political cartoons, visual modality

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