

A Semiotic Study of Iraqi's Election Propaganda Photos**Prof. Khalida Hashoosh Addai Al-Ghezzezy ¹ (Ph.D.)**

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Abstract

The phenomena of elections propaganda photos are investigated in the present study. A political slogan is understood as one of the most vital ways for candidates and political parties and to communicate with voters, especially when party identification is declining. Generally speaking, political advertising in Iraq began with the use of posters, flyers, and other printed materials. The current study sheds light on how political parties and candidates in Iraq show their program with their audiences. It explores Iraqi elections propaganda photos from a semiotic point of view and takes Barthes' theory (1968) of semiotics as a model for data analysis. The data concerning the candidates are chosen from different Iraqi provinces to find out those electoral campaigns semiotically. In addition, this study deals with various aspects in terms of the signs or symbols used for the purpose of influencing the voter's decision for the right candidate.

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Key words: Propaganda, persuasion, parliamentary election, semiotics

1. Introduction

Language is taken to convey messages or information from the speaker to the receiver (Levinson, 1983). Generally speaking, in order to convey messages or information, individuals have to engage in conversation or use media such as advertisements, books, and magazines. To Fromkin (1988), language is much more than spoken words; this implies that people can use written language to communicate messages or information. Depending on the perspective from which a language is considered, the mission of defining it can vary. Language is primarily a communication tool, according to the primary definition that can be applied to it in general. Thus, language is identified as "Language is a means of communication between members of the public symbol of the sound produced by means of said human"(Keraf, 1980. p.20).

Numerous other linguists have defined language as a system of signs consisting of gestures, written symbols, and vocal sounds. The primary purpose of this system is to convey information. However, humans are viewed as having both verbal and nonverbal language as they are able to communicate through signs and sounds, with the social identity of humans superseding their use of language.

The candidates employ a unique way of showing their slogans or their electoral program during the parliamentary elections. To do this, the candidates seek in the first place how to show signs or symbols that can manipulate or persuade the voters. This is shown in the Iraqi parliamentary propaganda.

The current study investigates the semiotic aspects that are implemented in the Iraqi electoral parliamentary propaganda 2021. It tries to get answer for the following question: (*What are the semiotic aspects that are utilized in the Iraqi election propaganda?*)

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The researcher has chosen four electoral propaganda photos. This study is limited to the Iraqi elections propaganda 2021. A theory of semiotics (1968) for Barthes is taken as a model.

1.1 The Iraqi Political System

In July 2012, Iraq had a total population of 30 million people. Six countries border Iraq: Jordan and Saudi Arabia to the southwest, Turkey and Syria to the north, and Iran across the Arabian Gulf to the east. The January-elected Iraqi National Assembly drafted a new constitution to be ratified in a national referendum on October 15, 2005, which has remained unchanged to this day. The constitution established Iraq as a republic with an elected parliament. The president is chosen by the parliament, who then chooses the prime minister. When a prime minister is appointed, he is responsible for forming his government by selecting ministers and then obtaining parliament's approval. The parliament, on the other hand, consists primarily of elected representatives. Iraq was previously divided into 18 electoral districts. Parliamentary elections are the nation's highest-level contest. According to the Iraqi constitution, the 375 members of parliament are elected every four years.

1.2 Parliamentary Elections

Elections are a critical component of each democratic country's political system. It is vital to the government's operation and institutional system. Election, in general, is the process of selecting a person or group by the public. According to Collins dictionary (n.d.), an election is "a process in which people vote to choose a person or group of people to hold an official position". By such a process, citizens can choose the appropriate person in giving their votes for the right one. In democratic countries, Iraq is among them, elections can give

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the freedom for the person to elect the one who deserves his or her vote. Many countries around the world apply such a system.

Elections are now viewed as a process that practically all countries have successfully handled. The primary objective of this system is to ensure effective political communication. The entire electoral process has been designed to facilitate political communication. Communication between campaign leaders, volunteers, contributors, activists, and supporters is critical. The election system is designed to make the entire process pleasant and public. It is intended to promote relationships and connections amongst groups. The entire political campaign is designed to maximize the influence and effectiveness of political communication. The political campaign can be conveyed via a variety of media channels (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2014).

Parliamentary elections can be conducted in order to select the members of the council of representatives. After that, they choose the President, who chooses the Prime Minister. When the prime minister is appointed, he is responsible for forming his government by selecting ministers and obtaining parliament's agreement. Parliament, on the other hand, is primarily composed of elected members. Iraq is divided into eighteen electoral districts. Parliamentary elections are the country's highest-ranking race. Elections are conducted to elect the council of representatives (329 members) every four years based on the Iraqi constitution.

Medvic (2010) opined that any campaign action requires communication, the majority of which is persuasive in design. Additionally, he notes that they employ arguments designed to persuade voters to support their position because candidates seek votes.

Additionally, political campaigns fulfil four main functions. To begin, they assist citizens in formulating their preferences and ultimately choosing who to

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vote for. Secondly, it is a communicative event where voters, parties, candidates, and the media engage in "crosstalk" as the campaign unfolds. Thirdly, it enhances citizen participation. Political campaigns can affect an individual's intention to elect. Collectively, these campaigns motivate voting through their self-interested search of additional adherents for their causes. Lastly, and perhaps most crucially, political campaigns provide an opportunity for persons living abroad to vote and participate in elections (Medvic, 2010).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Propaganda

The phenomena of propaganda have indeed been defined by numerous writers from many views such as sociology, psychology, politics, mass communication, and history, due to its controversies. The definitions below can help you understand what propaganda is all about.

Harold Lasswell (1937) was the first writer who defined propaganda as "the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations; these representations may take: spoken, written, or musical forms" (p.521).

Ellul (1964) claimed, from a sociological point of view, that propaganda is an endeavor to achieve consistent behaviour in everyone's everyday life. In terms of the persistent social context, it also influences the individual's thoughts and attitudes.

Doob, a psychologist, defined propaganda in 1948 as the endeavor to influence and control the behaviour of individuals toward unscientific goals in an area at a particular time (Willcox, 2005). It's important to mention that the term "unscientific" is fundamentally expressive since it emphasizes the negative connotations of the term propaganda. It also implies that the propagandist's

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goals are ineffective. As a result, Doob's definition falls short of demonstrating propaganda's true value. To sum up, such a definition considers propaganda to be negative (Willcox, 2005).

In terms of politics, propaganda is described as a politician's attempt to manipulate a large group of people (Merril & Lowenstein, 1971). This definition emphasizes the manipulative nature of the word "propaganda", whose ultimate aim is to promote something.

Additionally, according to Walton (1997), propaganda is fundamentally indifferent about the reality; that is, it disseminates information, whether accurate or inaccurate, good or bad, in order to persuade a target audience to recognize the propagandist's preferred attitudes or beliefs. Propaganda is mainly defined as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist" (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, pp.6-7). As a result, propaganda is defined merely as persuasion. According to this meaning, the term simply refers to the ability to convince masses.

2.2 Propaganda and persuasion

The most common definition of propaganda, as stated on earlier pages, is "any attempt to persuade anyone of any belief" (William & Keith, 1949, p.2). Pratkanis and Aronson (1997) opined that modern propaganda involves using convenient persuasion methods. It is a mission to take advantage of and manage the cognitive masses' poor capacities. Propaganda is associated with the qualities of modern persuasion and takes the form of messages focused at a suitable setting. The recipient's capacity to persuade makes it really hard to think seriously about crucial topics and decisions. Qualified propagandists have

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the power and freedom to utilize a variety of strategies in order to persuade the target audience.

Propaganda is a weapon of mass persuasion for public opinion, as Willcox (2005) pointed out, especially during wartime. As a result, it is vital to research the occasions where propaganda is deployed, as well as the methods by which messages are delivered. Propaganda is used in the press and other forms of media, as well as in governments and in establishing belligerents' roles in conflicts. Therefore, propaganda employs tactics that are identifiable by the general population easily.

Hennigan (2010) established a complete and unbiased definition of propaganda, stating that it is a form of persuasion designed to affect the masses' sentiments, attitudes, actions, and beliefs for ideological, political, or economic goals. This is accomplished by distributing one-sided messages that may or may not be factually accurate via direct mass media channels.

Additionally, Miller (1980) defined persuasive communication as the process of shaping, reinforcing, or changing reactions. These replies take the form of messages, which are frequently connected with coercive force or are indirectly coercive by eliciting an emotional response from the addressee. Persuasion, generally, refers to the processes of mediated communication.

AlGhezzezy (2020) stated that researchers interested in election campaigns, public speeches, political forums, legislation ...etc., have studied the language of politics extensively. According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2012), persuasion is a distinct communication style from propaganda utilising techniques to achieve its persuasion goals. A vital aspect of persuasion is interactive communication, which implies that both the audience and the speaker can alter their roles immediately throughout the speech. While propaganda is a one-way communication method, the recipient cannot reply or

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exchange discourse. In other words, persuasion is a process that involves speech and direct communication.

It is usually considered that propaganda is little more than the art of persuasion, which succeeds in influencing attitudes and beliefs. There is little question that persuasion is one of the purposes of propaganda, but in fact, it is restricted and connected. Propaganda is concerned with current patterns and views. It is a fallacy that propaganda is nothing but a form of falsehoods and falsity, but it essentially operates on various levels of truth, from an open lie to a half-truth to the entire fact taken out of context (Cull et al., 2003). Algezy (2017) also asserted that "political cartoons have been used by newspapers and magazines as a method of criticizing the governments and political figures" (p.3).

2.3 The Language of Persuasion

To deliver a message to the people, modern propaganda could be spread across a variety of organizations or institutions such as radio stations, newspapers, television stations, libraries, etc. Propaganda communications are built on language that may be written, auditory, or visual in nature. Emotion, formation of connotations, repetition, and reduction of reality are fundamental components of propagandist language (Mesthrie et al., 2000).

According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2012), propagandists may use word symbolism to generate a sense of dominance. The language is connected with authority characters like as parents, teachers, and national leaders. Agents of propaganda can also utilize sacred symbols and authority in order to influence the recipient's and the public's perspective of society. Furthermore, propaganda's use of language serves to determine the cause while dissipating opponents. During times of war, propagandists may allude to the enemy like a

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savage or cruel to convey the murderousness and criminality of the enemy in a linguistically effective manner.

2.4 Semiotics

Bignell (2002) remarked that semiotics (or semiology) is one of the most prominent and vital ways of thinking on media. The terms semiology and semiotics are derived from the old Greek term 'semeion', that denotes 'sign'. It is regarded as a method of interpreting the meanings through analyzing signs (words, images, symbols, and so on) that communicate meaning. Rose (2001) stated that "semiotics offers a full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning" (p. 69). The main value for semiotics is that it's an advanced analytic method for describing how signs work. Moreover, in the study of media, semiotics has become a popular instrument. It makes it easier for academics to identify meanings that go beyond women's simple presence in cultural aspects (van Zoonen, 1994).

Modern semiotics, which studies how indicator systems are used in social life, was formed by two pioneers: Pierce, who stressed logic and meaning, and Saussure, who emphasized social phenomena. Rather than the idea of generic indicators, semiotics made its first appearance in studies on language theory. Then it becomes a topic for a wide range of disciplines. Pierce is responsible for semiotics being a distinct scientific field, and he elucidated the notion of indicator using many categorizations. The trinity of icon, index, and symbol is one of Pierce's suggested categories. An icon is a graphic representation of the object it embodies. An index is an indication determined by its object, as demanded by the real relationship it forms with it. In terms of symbols, it is a consensus indication that carries a symbolic meaning (Bayav, 2006).

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Rose (2001) asserted that there are steps for analysing the signs of an image. First, one requires to "identify the signs in the image". Next, one needs to "determine what these signs are in themselves". Then, one requires to "find out how the signs relate to each other and the relations to broader meaning systems". The last step is "to go back to the signs through their codes to discover the specific enunciation of ideology and mythology" (p.91).

The symbol is identified as the "sign proper" (Abrams, 1988, p. 245), in that the relationship between the signifying item and what it symbolizes is a social norm rather than a natural one (Lawal, 1997b). The symbol may bear no similarity to the object or concept it represents (Watson & Hill, 1993). Symbols are tied to a particular culture. An example of a symbol is the word.

Index pertains to "a sign of the existence or occurrence of some singularity external to the sign" (Alabi, 1995, p. 23). "Indices bear causal relations to what they signify" (Lawal, 1997b, p. 16). Smoke and symptoms are regarded as indices of fire and diseases respectively.

A resemblance of object representation process is viewed as an icon – "a photograph or a map would constitute an iconic sign" (Watson & Hill, 1993, p. 173). To Pierce, a symbol that relates to the item it signifies solely by the characters it possesses is an icon. "Anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it" as cited in (Alabi, 1995, p. 23).

3. Methodology

The present study uses data concerning the Iraqi elections propaganda photos (2021) gathered from different Iraqi provinces from social media such as Facebook. This study follows a qualitative research. Shank (2002) maintains that it is "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (p. 5). The term

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systematic in this meaning refers to being organized and according to established rules among qualitative researchers. On the other hand, the term empirical implies that this method of study is supported by specific knowledge and experience, so that the researchers can create sense about their own experiences. In qualitative analysis, Moleong (2009) and Nakhilawi (2016) opine that the researcher serves as the planner, interpreter, collector, analyst, and reporter of research findings.

Annie and Blair (2012) maintain that the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research since he or she gathers words, does inductive analysis, and examines the speakers' or authors' utterance. There are several strategies for data gathering, including study preparation, selection of data, categorization of data, analysis of data, and interpretation. The researcher collects photographs from social media and street posters in order to analyze them in terms of the semiotic aspects utilized in the Iraqi election propaganda.

Murray and Chamberlain (1998) maintain that when qualitative researchers pick a sample, the sample should both represent the full population under research and be controlled. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), when a sample is said to be representative of the full population, it implies that when the sample is analyzed, the researcher will obtain the same results as if he investigated the entire population. In other words, a well-selected sample should be typical of the population it reflects.

3.1 The Model of the Study

The current paper is devoted to analyse Iraqi elections propaganda photos (2021) from a semiotic perspective. To do so, Barthes' (1968) theory of semiotics is taken as a model for the present study.

3.2 Barthes' (1968) Theory of Semiotics

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Roland Barthes was a French philosopher, literary theorist, and semiotician who lived from 1915 until 1980. He made substantial contributions to linguistics in general and semiotics in particular. The semiotic theory of Roland Barthes (1968) is a foundational framework for analyzing and comprehending sign systems. This theory has been demonstrated to be both practical and convenient in the study of signals, their structural analysis, and expression of their meaning (Barthes, 2005).

In his study of semiotics, Barthes (1968) sought to develop a semiology that encompasses all cultural objects endowed with metaphorical meaning. According to Barthes (2005), semeiotics can be used to analyze many types of signs and items that have meaning even if they lack communicative target, such as furniture, clothing, and dishes. To Barthes, each object or sign possesses a connotative meaning that extends beyond its denotation. According to Barthes (1990), nothing can be meaningless. For instance, the colour of a telephone carries distinct connotations; pink telephones connote femininity or womanhood, but white telephones connote luxury. To Barthes (1968), any object is regarded to be a part of a certain discourse based on its connotation, including beverages, food, and wine.

Barthes (1968) announced that each sign has two levels of interpretation: denotation, which is regarded as the fundamental level, and connotation, which is regarded as the secondary level.

1. Denotation. As highlighted by Barthes (1968), denotation refers to the literal and direct relationship between a sign and its reference. This type of link between signifier and signified occurs and shows the sign's explicit meaning. The denotative meaning of a sign pertains to the widely recognized and accepted meaning in society. Sobur (2009) asserted that "the denotative meaning involves referential meaning it tends to be described as the definitional, or

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literal, common sense meaning of a sign” (p.263). According to Panofsky (1970), the denotative meaning of a sign refers to the explicit and obvious image that all members of a culture or community recognize. Panofsky (1970) mentioned that “It represents the dictionary meaning of a word or terminology of object” (p.51).

2. Connotation. According to Barthes (1967), connotation is understood to be the second level of interpretation that encompasses signifiers and signified. Connotation refers to the sign that can be deduced essentially from the signifier of a denotative sign. To state the case clearly, there are numerous connotative meanings associated with each denotation. Barthes (1968) puts a focus on the connotative meaning. Fiske (2010) found that the connotative meaning of a sign pertains to the “cultural meaning which is attached to a term, it refers to the interaction that occurs when then sign meets the emotions and cultural values of the reader” (p.54). Barthes (1968) rejected the assumption that a sign has a single level of meaning and asserted that we must read and focus attentively on the sign in order to reveal its infinite number of meanings.

4. Data Analysis

Here in this section the researcher devotes it for data analysis. Barthes’ (1968) theory of semiotics is going to be adopted.

Photo 1



Semiotic Analysis of Photo 1

The image of the disabled carries a semiotic view. It denotes that they need supportments in their needs and whenever they get such needs, they will be happy. Semiotically speaking, this photo has two levels of meaning, denotation and connotation. The denotation meaning, which signifies the primary meaning, in this photo is that the candidate smiles and he uses such expressions to pretend that he is going to support the orphans and the disabled in their demands. The disabled smile in this photo. The other level is the connotation, which goes beyond the primary meaning. In this sense, the candidate uses those expressions to imply that the disabled are somehow neglected by the government and certain things to be done for them. He makes a promise to change their life as they appear in this photo.

Photo 2



Semiotic Analysis of Photo 2

The image of the falcon carrying the Iraqi flag has a symbolic message. It represents that the Iraqi army are like falcons which protect the country. Together, the soldiers and the candidate can protect the country from the terrorism and the corruption. This photo from a semiotic point of view has two levels of meaning; denotation and connotation. The denotation meaning, which is essentially concerned with the primary meaning, is that the candidate uses such expressions to pretend that he is going to triumph together with the soldiers against the corrupters as they did previously in their battles. In this sense, the candidate ensures the victory of the Iraqi army. The other level is the connotation which goes beyond the primary meaning. In this regard, the candidate uses those expressions to imply that there is a battle against corruption in this country. He calls them to vote for him because together they can change the corrupted politicians. There are two battles; one is against terrorism and the other against corruption. This is implicated from those expressions.

Photo 3



Semiotic Analysis of Photo 3

Concerning semiotics, this photo conveys a hidden meaning. The image of the Iraqi women who go out in demonstrations to ask for change has a semiotic view. This means that the candidate uses this photo to have an effect upon their decisions toward choosing the right candidate who will be in a responsibility and to be their voice in the parliament. The role of women in the society is rather neglected. Here the candidate uses the image of the Iraqi women to enhance his electoral propaganda and indeed they suffer a lot and they represent an essential member of the society. In this manner, the candidate can show his propaganda getting more voters.

Photo 4



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Semiotic Analysis of photo 4

From a semiotic perspective, this candidate uses the image of Tahrir Square and the protester carrying the Iraqi flag. This image has a symbolic reference that the October protesters have a goal behind their escalations: seeking their rights and changing the government. In using such a photo, the candidate tries to persuade the voters and declare that he is with October protesters. The parliamentary elections in 2021 have a message for those protesters that they can participate and win and be represented by their will and determination. This electoral propaganda has two levels of meaning that are denotation and connotation. Begin with denotation; it deals with the primary meaning of the sign or symbol. Here the essential meaning of the image is to show the candidate's position toward the October revolution. The other level is connotation, which is concerned with hidden or inferred meaning. In other words, it deals with additional meaning beyond the primary one. The connotational meaning of that image is that the candidate manages to show those protesters their loyalty to Iraq and no other country. No party pushes them behind this movement except the love of the homeland.

5. Conclusion

The current study explores that the Iraqi parliamentary election propaganda employ a unique style to show their political propaganda in a way that may influence the reader or the voter. In such case, the candidates try to choose certain signs or symbols that can manipulate the audience. Such signs can create extra effect among the voters in order to attract their attention. The candidates are in a strong competition among themselves so that they do their best to show their propaganda in a distinctive way, which in turn can affect the opinions of the voters. Two levels of signs are implemented in the electoral

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campaigns. Therefore, the Iraqi elections propaganda contains some signs or symbols that convey meaning.

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