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A Multimodal Analysis of Graffiti: A Case Study of Government Schools in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract: *There have always been various modes of communication, and humans not only communicate verbally but non-verbally as well. Graffiti has been one of the effective means of communication. Different visual and verbal practices are employed in this type of communication. The present study decodes critically visual and verbal modes of communication used in graffiti. The data for the study in hand has been collected from government boys and girls schools in southern Punjab. The time span for data collection ranges from January to June 2023. The data has been analyzed by applying Fairclough's (2003) model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Barthes's (1974) model of Semiological Discourse Analysis. The analysis of the data reveals that graffiti is one of the persuasive means of communication. Desired ideological messages could easily be conveyed to the target audience by employing this mode of communication. The percentage of graffiti discourses related to the promotion of female education in the collected data is higher (80%) as compared to data related to the promotion of education for male students (75%). This study contends that the element of change has been observed as far as the promotion of female education is concerned through graffiti of urban and rural schools for boys and girls.*

Key Words: Graffiti, Multimodality, Ideology, Semiology, SDA

Introduction

Discourse and ideology are interconnected. Discourses of any kind play a vital role in producing and imparting desired ideologies. The study of these discourses does not mean the study of language only. Rather, they are meant to disseminate various types of ideologies and cultural norms. Families, schools, and religious institutions are the different social scenarios where ideological discourses are practiced to shape the mindset of the people. Foucault (1972) affirmed that discourse and ideology are one and the same thing due to their connection with each other. He believes that ideologies are different discourses produced by human beings. Wodak (2011) opines that religion is a set of shared beliefs and values that carry specific ideological orientations. The term "Religious Ideology" refers to the set of socially shared beliefs associated with a specific religion. Educational and academic settings like schools, colleges, universities, and religious institutions are the main sources of introducing and propagating religion and moral values to the students.

Semiotics is the study of signs within a society, and consequently, it is a part of social and general psychology. During various activities of daily life, such as reading, looking at a painting, watching a television program, writing, and talking, we are actually displaying sign-based behavior. A graphic illustration conveys a stronger message than words. Thus, pictures play a vital role in disseminating the desired ideologies. Eco (1976) argues that semiotics are culturally oriented and carry a plethora of interpretations.

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The present research deals with critical discourse analysis of the discourses written on the walls of the buildings of the schools (govt. schools for boys and girls in rural and urban areas in the Multan district) at linguistic and semiotic levels to lay bare the embedded ideologies. The use of the word-picture conjunction technique is very effective in propagating the message comprehensively, and the messages imparted through this technique are long-lasting. Mostly, it is observed that graffiti discourses carry themes related to religion, morality, esthetics, history, etc. Different visual and verbal practices are used to disseminate the desired ideology comprehensively.

Literature Review

Jamil et al. (2021) decoded religious content present in PTB and OUP textbooks at the primary level. The data was collected from the mentioned primary Urdu and English books published during 2021. The research employed Fairclough's (2012) research model of critical social analysis. The study reveals that the representation of religion in the selected data is polarized. The role of the economy contributes significantly to the propagation of religious content. PTB books carry a 26% representation of religion than its counterparts OUP, which carry 12%.

Farooq et al. (2021) critically decoded the discourse of articles published in an American newspaper. "The Washington Post". The data was collected from the newspapers' articles published from June 2019 to December 2019. The study employed Fairclough's (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The research reveals that the women of the Islamic world have been represented stereotypically through the discourse of the articles of the mentioned newspaper as the oppressed, narrow-minded, and hijabed who, according to Western perception, are contriving to harm the civilized West by deviating from their set norms. The study contends that Print media discourses act as a distorting prism for the representation of the desired version of reality about Islam and Muslim women to shape the mindset of the target audience accordingly.

Hussain (2019), in her research, critically analyzed linguistic and semiotic discourses of textbooks taught in Punjab and KPK at the primary level (5th grade) during the year 2016-2017. Fairclough's (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Barthes' (1974) model of Semiological Discourse Analysis were employed to critically decode ideologically loaded linguistic and semiotic discourses in the mentioned textbooks. Kruger's (2000) model of Focus Group Discussion was also employed to validate the researcher's findings. The study reveals that the linguistic and semiotic discourses in English textbooks are one of the best sites to propagate certain religious ideologies to the young learners of Punjab and KPK at the primary level.

Sajid (2012) carried out a study to decode ideologically loaded linguistic and semiotic discourses of Western newspapers to represent Islam and Muslims. The researcher employed Fairclough's (1993) model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Barhes' (1974) model of Semiological Discourse Analysis to explore the underlying message in linguistic and semiotic discourses. To validate the researcher's findings, Kruger's (2000) model of Focus Group Discussion was also employed. The findings of the research reveal that Western newspapers are more biased in representing Muslims and Islam through their linguistic and semiotic discourses.

Tahir (2013) decoded ideological discourses related to culture in English language textbooks (PTB &OUP) in Pakistan. Fairclough's (2003) model of Critical Discourse Analysis was employed by the researcher to find out the cultural themes embedded in textbook discourses. The study contends that textbooks are powerful ideological tools in the production and dissemination of the us vs them dichotomy. Textbook discourses impart religious ideology that plays a vital role in shaping the beliefs of the readers. Moreover, it also reveals that religion is mostly state-controlled, which negates the claim that the state has nothing to do with an individual's religion. In terms of their religious association, minorities are represented as others.

Operational Definitions of the Key Terms
Discourse and Ideology

Discourse and ideology cannot be separated from each other. Discourse is an important factor in creating, propagating, and circulating certain ideologies, as ideology and discourse are inseparable. No discourse is

ideology-free. Ideology is a system of beliefs that can be articulated in symbols, rituals, discourse, and other social and cultural practices (Dijk 1998). Various social institutions like schools, colleges, universities, religious institutions, business organizations, and advertising companies are involved in circulating the discourses based on certain ideologies. Different discursive practices are employed to invest ideologies through linguistic and semiotic discourses. Discursive practices go a long way, making certain ideological messages common sense. Schools, media, textbooks, and literacy practices are used to shape the mindset of the target audience in a desired manner because language is not only saying, it is doing as well.

Language and Power

Language is an important tool in proclaiming, upholding, and perverting power relations in society. Certain values are incorporated among people by promulgating certain ideologies, which is only possible through the use of language. Power is mostly acquired, exercised, and established through language. Saussure (1857-1913) believes that political power is exercised through the medium of language. Kress (1989) contends that the use of language is a matter of choice, not of chance.

Fairclough (1995) opines that all the discourses (linguistic & semiotic) are operative and persuasive to win the general consent of the masses. Hence, it can be argued that discourse is the process of incorporating power into language to shape the perception of people in general and to represent things accordingly. The present study explores the embedded ideology in graffiti discourses. The data for the study has been collected from the graffiti discourses, and the sites are two government high schools for boys and girls in Multan district, Pakistan.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in the present research is qualitative in nature as it explores different layers of meanings embedded in linguistic and semiotic discourses on the walls of buildings and schools. The study employs a devised triangulation model by combining Fairclough's (2003) model of Critical Discourse Analysis, Barthes' (1974) model of Semiological Discourse analysis, and Kruger's (2000) model of Focus Group Discussion, respectively, taking into account the nature of the existing data.

Fairclough's (2003) model of Critical Discourse Analysis has been employed for linguistic analysis in order to find out the layers of embedded meanings in discourse. Barthes' (1974) model of Semiological Discourse Analysis has been employed for the analysis of semiotic discourses in order to locate the themes of power, representation, hegemony, and alienation constructed in the discourses at linguistic and semiotic levels. It is a general notion that semiotic discourses present various interpretations regarding their context, as these interpretations vary from individual to individual and culture to culture. Krugers' (2001) model of Focus Group Discussion has been employed in order to validate the findings of semiotic discourses.

Analysis and Discussion
Semiotic 1

This section of the research deals with the analysis of the data written on the walls of school buildings (the school system of both boys and girls in rural and urban areas in Multan) during the year 2022. The researchers randomly selected one writing from each school and analyzed it at linguistic and semiotic levels. The very quote implies that love for seeking knowledge is missing among Muslims. It is extracted from "The Prayer," a famous poem by Allama Muhammad Iqbal, a great poet, philosopher, and thinker of the Muslims. The use of the word 'Ilm'(knowledge) is connotative. It implies that every type of knowledge must be acquired by the Muslims, as has been shown in the picture as well. It is obvious that an open book contains the alphabet from English and Urdu. Indirectly, the quote under analysis here deconstructs the stereotypical notion that
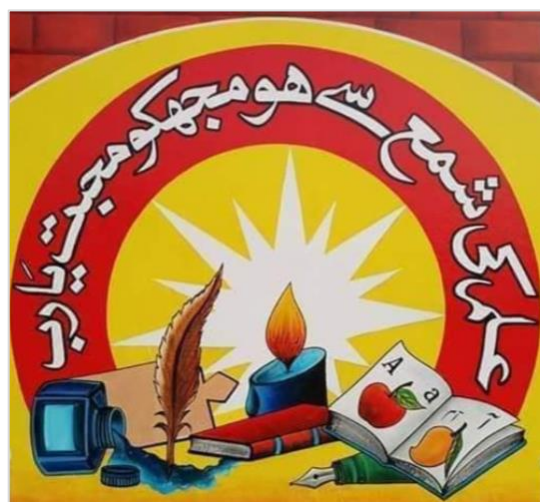
Muslims should only acquire religious knowledge. Instead, being Muslims, we should not only try to seek religious knowledge but also all domains of knowledge to empower ourselves. What is being propagated through this very quote is that in order to comprehend religion, knowledge of worldly domains is an integral part. One of such domains is the knowledge of the English language. What is inferred from the quote is that Islam never disallows seeking worldly knowledge in the form of learning different languages. The process of seeking knowledge should start from the very beginning as initial alphabets from English and Urdu have been shown printed on the book. It implies the intensity of feeling of the poet (Iqbal) towards seeking knowledge. The use of the singular first person pronoun (mujh ko) indicates that he is starting from himself and then reaching to others. Fairclough (2003) argues that everything is said against something unsaid, and most often, it is observed that unsaid are the real meanings. Similarly, the unsaid of the quote under analysis is that Muslims were, perhaps, least inclined towards learning different domains of knowledge. They were exploited in the name of religion. They were told that if they attempted to seek other than religious knowledge, they might commit sin. Therefore, the use of the noun 'Ilm' (Knowledge) has been made inclusively. It is inclusive as it stands for all forms of knowledge, including religious, scientific, and learning different languages. The use of the metaphor 'Ilm ki shamma' (candle of knowledge) is appropriate and conveys the meaning. It implies that one who is knowledgeable and attempts to seek knowledge is superior to others. Like a burning candle (shown in the picture) that shines in the dark and shows the way to the night wanderers. A knowledgeable person is ever burning with knowledge or shining among the others and is capable of leading the others. The overall impression of the quote is that every Muslim should do his/her best to seek knowledge of every kind. For this, he/she not only should pray to God but also should put practical efforts as well.

Eco (1976) argues that word-picture conjunction technique proves beneficial in conveying the meanings comprehensively. Similarly, it is obvious from the picture that different tools used in a medium of education, such as inkpots, pens, books, notebooks, and tablets, have been shown in the picture to catch the interest of the young learners in order to promote the importance of knowledge among them. In the picture, the burning candle surrounded by different educational equipment implies that if one wants to keep his/her candle of knowledge ever burning or shining, he/she should keep himself/herself in touch with education-related material. The feather in the picture shows that education/ knowledge gives a person wings (power) to reach the heights of progress as knowledge is power, and the use of this power enables him/her to explore the hidden treasures of the universe. The use of colors in the pictures is not ideology-free because every color has its connotations. In the picture under analysis, the candle is spreading white light in its surroundings, and the background is yellow in color. Yellow color symbolizes creativity, happiness, and optimism, while white is the color of peace, purity, and innocence. It implies that knowledge brings creativity and makes a person an optimist that gives him/her happiness, peace of mind, and purity of thoughts. The overall impression of the picture that emerges from the analysis of the semiotic is that an attempt has been made to impart the urge to seek knowledge among the Muslims. It also highlights the intensity of the feelings of the poet to bring Muslims back towards knowledge. Moreover, the use of various colors in the picture connotes various domains of knowledge that must be acquired by the Muslims.

Analysis and Discussion
Semiotic 2

Foucault maintains that power exists in various modalities. According to him, discursive and coercive forms of power are among the important domains of power. He prefers discursive power as its effects are long-lasting. Similarly, the quote under analysis highlights the significance of the power of knowledge. The quote is as follows;

"Education is the key to unlocking the world, a passport to freedom" (Oprah Winfrey)

Fairclough (2003) argues that no use of language is ideology-free. The way an ideology is framed is significant
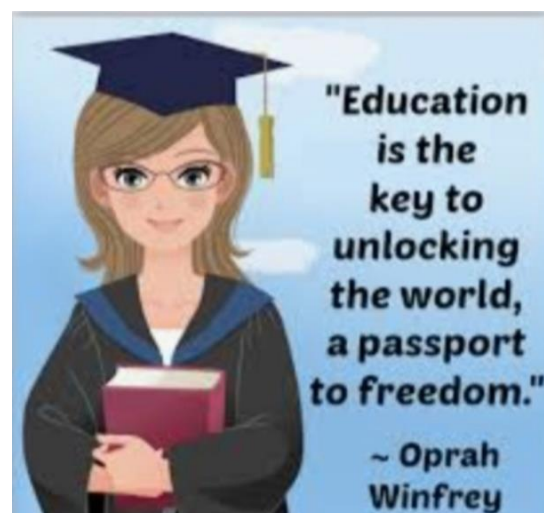
in extracting the meanings from language. The quote under analysis has been written in inverted commas. This typographic technique is used to highlight something very important. Here, the use of this technique implies that a very significant message has been conveyed through it. The message that has been conveyed is about the importance of seeking knowledge. The world has been represented as highly packed with different types of knowledge. The various forms of knowledge help human beings in exploring the mysteries of nature embedded at external and internal levels. The power of knowledge has been metaphorically represented with a key. A person cannot enter the house until he/she has the key to unlock the lock. One can know what lies inside the house without entering the house, and the only means of entering is the key that unlocks the lock. The world has been metaphorically compared with a house that is locked and contains a number of mysteries in it.

Another metaphor that has been used is that education/ knowledge has been assigned the status of a passport. None can enter a country without having a passport. Education is a passport to freedom. It connotes that without knowledge, one lives in darkness and is chained like a slave. Education/knowledge grants freedom from ignorance and grants enlightenment to scholars. Without having education/knowledge, one cannot live freely and cannot explore the unexplored. Moreover, the use of the 'Evidentiality' technique has been made. "Oprah Winfrey" has written the quote under analysis. It illustrates that the quote and the message imparted through it are of vital significance.

Eco ([1976](#)) believes that, in certain cases, words cannot be understood without pictures and vice versa. The semiotic under analysis carries a picture of a young girl dressed in the attire of a scholar. She is eying at the audience, imparting them the message that if they want to unlock the world of mysteries and want to live with freedom– freedom from ignorance, they should get education/knowledge, and they would become empowered with education/knowledge like her. The way she is looking at the audience is an invitation to them to be like her. She is confident and determined. It implies that the power of education/knowledge has granted her strength and confidence to explore the mysteries of the world to liberate humanity from the chains of ignorance. She is dressed like a scholar, "a university teacher." It implies that she is on her way to success. She is young and energetic. It deconstructs the constructed stereotypes that men can only perform difficult tasks. The very background is of light blue color, which connotes passion for life and whim and vigor to go ahead. The girl is looking at the future confidently because she is empowered with knowledge. The dress she is wearing is of different colors, i.e., white, blue, yellow, grey, etc. It implies that she embodies different capabilities in her, and all the forms of power have been granted to her by her education. The concept of knowledge as power has been plaid– up here. The book she is holding firmly is of red color. This color connotes whim, vigor, passion, intensity, energy, and zeal for life. Indirectly, she wants to impart the message that education is the only thing that can empower the female gender in so many domains of life. It is believed that with the help of education/knowledge, females can make their presence felt in different domains of life, provided they are very passionate about seeking knowledge. Another implication of the semiotic under analysis is that it is urging the females living everywhere in Pakistan that they should seek education/knowledge to empower themselves, and in this attempt, they must remain steadfast. It is the only way of making their presence felt in a modern world of challenges. The picture also embodies the Islamic quote that seeking knowledge is obligatory for both men and women. The overall message imparted by linguistic and semiotic texts is that knowledge is power. There is an obvious shift in the concepts and paradigms of power. Now, discursive power is considered more long–lasting as compared to coercive power. The girl pictured in the semiotic may be taken as a 'person as a state metaphor' as she stands for all females of her age. She imparts the message that education in different domains of life has become inevitable to survive in the modern world.

Conclusion

In the present study, the analysis of the data reveals that graffiti imprinted on the walls of schools' buildings plays a vital role in shaping the minds of young learners. The discourses based on quotes, proverbs, Islamic verses, poetry, prayers, etc., related to the importance of education (academic, moral & religious) are meant to propagate certain ideologies. The main purpose of such discourses is to motivate young learners to put their practical efforts to seek knowledge of every kind in order to play their role in the well–being of humanity. They can only explore the mysteries of the world and make progress in every

field of life through the power of knowledge. They can liberate themselves as well as humanity from the curse of ignorance by seeking every kind of knowledge as education/knowledge grants freedom– freedom from ignorance and enlightens the minds of scholars. In this way, education makes a person an optimist and brings in him/her positive and creative thinking that leads towards the heights of success, and he/she becomes a useful member of society. The present study contends that no use of language is ideology-free, and graffiti discourses are one of the significant means for ideological investment.

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