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The Use of Semiotic Choices in Social Media

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Abstract

The present study examines the choices of semiotic in social media from a multimodal critical discourse analysis perspective. The study of signs and their meaning in society is known as semiotics. A sign is anything that can be used to represent something else – in other words, anything that has the ability to convey meaning. As a result, words, drawings, and photographs can all be used as signs. The aims of the study are to analyze, firstly; the process of word choices and the hidden ideologies behind such choices. Secondly, analyze the dimensions of images and the way of representing the image. Tools of analysis found in Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), and Fairclough (1989) are used to analyze the linguistic elements specially ‘quoted verbs’ and the extra linguistic elements (semiotics) in the selected images that the accompany of news items. Using quoted verbs is a way to express the hidden means and unseen ideologies of the speaker. Visuals, like color, font, shot, distance and others are used relatively different to convey a particular discourse that is completely paradoxical to the social norms.

Key Words: Semiotics, Word choices, Media, Multimodal Discourse.

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استخدام الخيارات السيميائية في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي

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الجامعة المستنصرية

المخلص: تبحث الدراسة الحالية في الاختيارات السيميائية في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي من منظور تحليل الخطاب النقدي متعدد الوسائط. وتُعرف دراسة العلامات ومعانيها في المجتمع بالسيميائية. العلامة هي أي شيء يمكن استخدامه لتمثيل شيء آخر - بعبارة أخرى، أي شيء لديه القدرة على نقل المعنى. نتيجة لذلك، يمكن استخدام الكلمات والرسومات والصور الفوتوغرافية كعلامات. تتمثل أهداف الدراسة في تحليل أولاً؛ عملية اختيار الكلمات والأيديولوجيات الخفية وراء مثل هذه الاختيارات. ثانياً، تحليل أبعاد الصور وطريقة تمثيلها. وتم استخدام أدوات التحليل الموجودة عند فيركلوف 1989 و كريس و فان لون 2006 لتحليل العناصر اللغوية وخاصة "أفعال الاقتباس" والعناصر غير اللغوية في بعض الصور المختارة والمصاحبة للأخبار. وسُلط الضوء على أفعال الاقتباس التي تعد وسيلة للتعبير عن الأيديولوجيات غير المرئية للمتحدث وتستخدم المرئيات، كاللون والخط واللقطات والمسافة وغيرها بشكل مختلف نسبياً لنقل خطاب معين يتعارض تماماً مع الأعراف الاجتماعية.

الكلمات الدالة: السيميائية، اختيار الكلمات، الاعلام، تحليل الخطاب.

1. Introduction

Meaning creators and meaning making are the focus of social semiotics. It investigates how people utilize and build distribution mediums and modes of communication to express their view of the world and to shape power relations. With the help of others. It is based on a qualitative, fine-grained analysis of meaning records. To explore the production and use of 'artifacts,' 'texts,' and 'transcripts,' involves the spread of speech across a multitude of social and cultural situations which is the source of meaning. Since the publication of Michael Halliday's Language as Social Semiotic in 1978, various 'versions' of social semiotics have developed. The account we present in this study is centered on Gunther Kress's version. Others include Theo van Leeuwen. We begin with a historical overview, essential principles; examine its ties to Pragmatics and other methods; analytical emphasis; and application domains (Bezemer:2009).

2. The Aims

The study aims at finding out:

1. the types of semiotic choices employed in social media.
2. the extent to which the images under study mainly depend on linguistic or extra-linguistic elements in achieving their aims,
3. whether the work of these elements is complementary or exclusive,
4. how meaning is constructed in these images.

3. The Hypotheses

1. Semiotic Choices employ both linguistic and extra-linguistic elements, but they are mainly extra-linguistically-based.
2. The role of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements in semiotic choices is complementary.

3. The addressed viewers are got involved into the images via extra linguistic elements especially camera angle and gaze.

4. Semiotics

Semioticians study signs as part of semiotics. The sign, the nucleus of Semiotics, is an action between pairs that is regarded as a signifier/signified relation or rather an expression/content relation (Eco, 1986:1). Chandler (1998:3) defines "any physical shape that has been imagined or manufactured externally (through some physical medium) to stand for an item, event, feeling, etc., known as a referent, or for a class of like (or related) objects, events, feelings, etc." Chandler argues that semiotics focuses on what signs mean just like the focus of semantics on the meaning of words, he defines semiotics briefly as the study of signs. Semiotics studies "the role of signs as part of social life". He adds, 'semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (Eco 1976, 7) cited in Chandler (1998 :2).

5. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodality is to somewhat an eclectic approach that has developed from Halliday's theory of communication (Halliday, 1978) together with the effects of cognitive and sociocultural works. First books and papers on multimodality were published by the mid to late 1990s. These studies focus primarily on visual communication and the image- writing relationship (MAY & Hornberger, 2008: 358). Multimodal researches increasingly expanded in mid 2000s onwards when systemic linguists and language researchers became interested in language with other resources. 'Communication is being inherently multimodal' was acknowledged explicitly (O'Halloran, 2011: 6).

6. The concept of Multimodality

Multimodality according to Kress (2009: 54) cited in O'Halloran & Bradley, is not a theory although it is usually used as so. The term, as a domain of enquiry for multimodal studies encourages "engagement and cross-fertilisation" with other disciplines of the same object of study. See (O'Halloran, 2011:7) also. Back to semiotics, modality comes from the term 'mode' which is used for a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning. This concept, then, is related to sign system, which comprises a system of signs connecting signifiers (expressions) with their signifieds (meanings) (Siefkes, & Arielli, 2018:151).

7. Suppositions of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

According to (O'Halloran, 2011: 36), Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) is based on three main suppositions:

1. It is supposed that communication should include different modes (music, speech, gaze, gesture, writing, and others) and their interwoven relations assist meaning-making.
2. Meaning is built by choosing and configuring various modes of communication.
3. Resources used by communicators are socially shaped to establish a shared culture in which meaning can be conveyed by people. So, a multimodal expression depends on context.

8. Quoting verbs

When we examine the words chosen to reflect how someone has talked in both writings and speech, we can learn a lot. Let's imagine you're having a chat with Jane, and she says:

My house mates simply don't do enough cleaning.

You then tell someone else about the conversation. You might use Jane's exact words. However, you'll need to find a word to indicate that it's something she said. So, to put it simply,:

Jane said, ' My house mates simply don't do enough cleaning!

Or you may say

Jane whined, ' My house mates simply don't do enough cleaning.

The first scenario, in which the word 'said' is used, sounds far more neutral. However, in the second situation, the term "whined" gives the person you're presenting this to a far stronger picture of Jane's mood, attitude, or even character, and thus of the trustworthiness of her statements. Such verb-choices can lead you to make judgments about the situation she recounts, such as whether it is likely to be genuine or whether we can dismiss the complaint as just another example of Jane's complaining character. Caldas Coulthard (1994: 305-6) provides a systematic dissection of verbs of saying that helps us to focus our attention on the implicit judgment and connotation that occurs when they are used.

Neutral structuring verbs introduce a phrase without explicitly assessing it (e.g. say, tell, ask). So, if I report that Jane said, "My housemates simply don't do enough cleaning," that doesn't tell us anything about how we should think about that statement or about Jane. However, speakers who are shown as primarily using these types of speaking verbs can come out as disinterested or even impersonal. As a result of representational methods and transitivity, it may be necessary for authors to draw readers/listeners closer or further away from specific social actors' ideas and feelings.

Meta-propositional verbs make a note of the author's take on a speaker. Declare, urge, and complain, for example, are aggressive, directive, and expressive words. If we say Jane declared, 'My housemates simply don't do enough cleaning,' we can see the difference. This looks to be far more likely to be an accurate account of events than if Jane was depicted as whining. It also gives her a more assertive appearance than someone who complains.

Metalinguistic verbs are used to specify the type of language that a speaker uses. Jane narrated if a speaker remarked, "It was terribly terrible living with all those untidy people." This could be utilized to create an ironic impact in this case. If this were changed to 'Jane recounted,' there is a stronger sense that she is merely reporting on what happened.

Descriptive verbs sort the interactions into categories. For example, the words 'whisper' and 'laugh' denote a speaker's manner and attitude in relation to what is being said. If Jane said, "My housemates simply don't do enough cleaning," the audience's attention would be drawn to how she said it. This, too, denotes attitudes, power dynamics, and the likelihood of truth. In this case, whispering would indicate a lack of power, as she was unable to speak up. If workers 'whispered' that they were having problems with working conditions, this would reveal something about their plight in regard to management, such as the possibility that anyone heard publicly might not have their contract extended.

Transcript verbs mark the progression of the argument (e.g., repeat) or connect the quotation to other portions of the argument (e.g. pause). So, we might find, ' Jane said, 'that they are all, to put it mildly, lazy.' He went on to say that press releases could present the person or people they're promoting as' or 'continuing to create the appearance that they're providing more information when, in fact, it's the same point. All of these verbs can be employed to make particular participants appear more authoritative or servile, legitimate or illegitimate. They can assist in defining the functions of groups of people or events that aren't clearly specified.

8.Fairclough's Model (1989)

The object analysis, the process by which an object is made and received, and the social and historical factors that regulate these processes are all part of Fairclough's (1989) paradigm. A distinct step-by-step investigation is required for these dimensions. The social and ideological processes encoded in language, as well as the power relations that exist in the community, can be discovered through studying the forms of language.

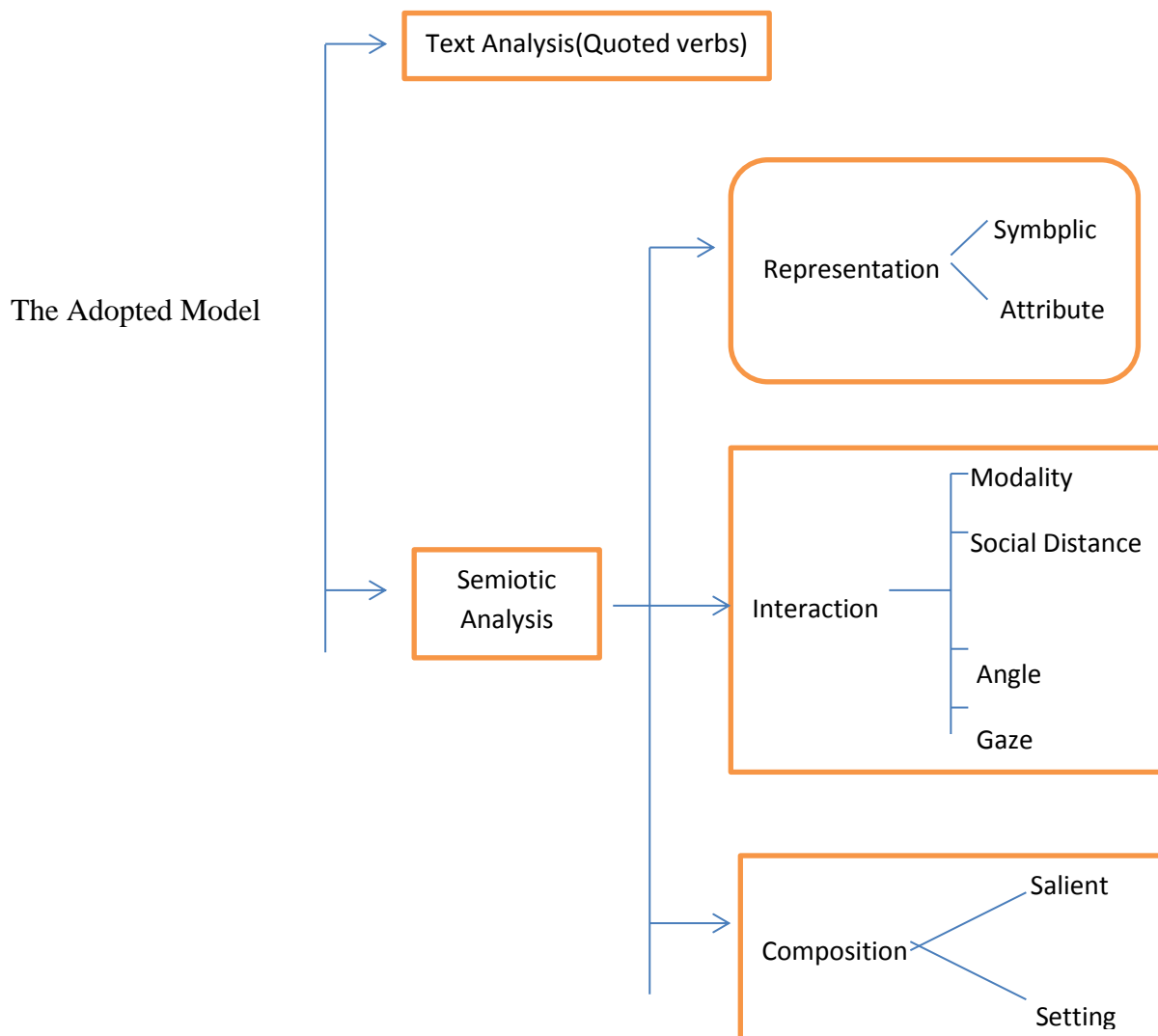


Figure (1) The Adopted Model

Text Analysis (Description)

The text is Fairclough's model's first analytical focus. Fairclough (1995b:57) defines text analysis as "the linguistic description of the formal qualities of the text above the sentence level, encompassing grammar, vocabulary, phoneme, semantics, and cohesive organization."

Processing Analysis (Interpretation)

It entails a review of the manufacturing process, as well as interpretation and consumption. This dimension is concerned with people's interpretations, reproductions, and transmissions of texts. It elucidates the link between speech and textual processes. Reading is the result of an interaction between the text's qualities and the interpreter's resources and interpretative strategies for influencing the text. Due to the nature of the text, the range of alternative interpretations will be confined and limited.

Social Analysis (Explanation)

This dimension is focused with authority difficulties. Examining how discourses operate in many realms of society is part of this dimension's analysis. It depicts the interaction of discourse with social and cultural realities..

9.Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006)

According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), visual grammar describes how people, places, and other items are visually combined into meaningful wholes. They imitate the compositional constructs that make up Western visual semiotics traditions in order to examine how they're used to make meaning with modern picture signals.

The Representational Dimension

It expresses the link between what we put out into the world and what we are going through on the inside. This comprises both narrative (which describes and renders dynamic "cascading acts and occurrences, change processes, and ephemeral spatial configurations") and conceptual (which considers static participants and represents them in terms of class, structure, or meaning) (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006:59).

A . Narrative Process

Kress and Van Leeuwen indicate that "the participants are connected by a vector, represented as doing something with each other or for each other". Vectors can be identified by (objects, limbs, or tools) in action. The participants who make the vector are called "Actors" while those who receive them are called "Goals".

B. The Conceptual Process

This relates to the ideas shown in the image and how the participants can be analyzed or classified. Conceptual processes can be analytical (visualizing the visual elements in a given structure), or symbolic (about the participant, what it is or what it means).

The Interactive Dimension

The interaction between the interactive participants, producers, and viewers of the image is addressed in the second dimension by Kress and van Leeuwen. They refer to the picture producers who use characteristics like the participants' "gaze," their "distance" from the viewer, and the "angle" through which the viewer sees the participants to visually encode social meanings in the photos.

Compositional Dimension

Image's elements can be classified into three systems:

1. The value of information. It links these elements together, and places items giving them specific informational values according to different areas of the image: left or right, top or bottom, and center or margin.
2. Salience. The purpose of drawing elements, participants, and other structures is to attract the viewer's attention to varying degrees. This can be demonstrated by factors such as foreground or background placement, relative size, contrast and sharpness of colors, etc.
3. Frame. Frame devices are realized through elements that create actual dividing lines, or rather actual frame lines. Their presence or absence can separate or connect elements of an image, showing that they do belong or are not affiliated to some degree.

Data Analysis

Sample No. 1



Figure (2) Employees of Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission conduct a manual recount of votes following the parliamentary elections on Oct. 27

5.4.1. A. Text analysis (quoted verbs)

The first sample that is under analysis which is an essay entitled “Iraqi Voters Want Weaker Militias and a Stronger State”. This essay is about the last but not least election in Iraq. There are many verbs which are used in this essay. These verbs have its own meaning that describe the intended ideologies of the speaker precisely. Verb like (helped, show, said, had, emerged, won, have, alleged, defended, coupled, launched, made, given, played, etc....). each of these verbs indicates the hidden belief of the speaker. The verb "helps" appears at the beginning of the article “*when the PMF—with Iranian backing—helped end the Islamic State’s reign of terror through large parts of the country*” when the author of the article reports that the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces have helped put an end to the terrorist gangs in Iraq. The verb "helps" is used here instead of as many verbs to indicate that the Al-Hashd Al-Abyei forces were willing to do this work, which is the defense of Iraq. Where the verb "helps" is used to show that the work was not an obligation but a voluntary one. The verb "to translate" appears in the article “*Those victories on the battlefield, however, didn’t translate into success at the ballot box this month*” where it is said that the heroic deed did not translate into success at the polls. The act indicates that there is a difference between reality and elections. As the heroic deeds of Popular mobilization did not result in a successful election. This indicates a defect in these so-called heroic deeds, and they were not true deeds. And if it was a fact, it would have an echo in the elections.

The verb “lose” appears in the article as in “*The initial results of Iraq’s fifth parliamentary election since 2003 show Iran-backed groups, loosely represented by the Fatah Alliance, losing 28 of the 48 seats they previously held*” denotes decline and defeat that contradicts the conquest in the elections. Where he was the victor in the previous elections. This indicates the great discrepancy between previous and current results. This leads to suspicions of fraud and unfairness of the elections. The verb "designated" appears in “*The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had the firm support of the mainly Turkish Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which the United States, the European Union, and Turkey have designated a terrorist group*” where it indicates that the party that supports groups classified as terrorist has lost in the elections. The verb "designated" indicates the existence of these groups in advance and they have the legitimacy to exist, but because of their actions they were classified as terrorist groups. The verb "emerged" indicates the clarity of the process in: “*The PUK’s rival, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), emerged the clear victor in the voting: It won 32*

seats, twice the PUK's 16 seats. In the 2018 elections, the KDP won 25 seats and the PUK won 18 seats". Where it was used to denote the victory of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in the elections, and this indicates that the victory was big, as the verb "to emerge" was used instead of the verb "to show".

B. Semiotic Analysis

B. 1. Representation Aspect

The participants in the image are the Employees of Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission conduct a manual recount of votes with many other secondary participants such as the papers of election. The participants in the image seem very busy in the process of recount of the votes. Some of the them engage in their work and some others speak with each other. The gaze of the participants creates a sort of transactional vector. The participants become a reactor of the vectorial relation with the paper with no phenomenon.

B. 2. Interaction Aspect

The gazes of the participants are "offer" because they don't look to the viewer directly. Many of the participants are seen from the head to the waist, this far personal distance makes the relationship between the Ps and V a sort of personal relation. The image is depicted from an oblique angle creating a sense of detachment. The view is somewhat vertical. The image is depicted from an oblique angle creating a sense of detachment. The view is vertical. The image is of normal modality with these few shades of related colors.

B. 3. Composition Aspect

The prolonged table creates a dividing frame secluding participants from each other. The papers with their edges form another frame making participant lives alone with his own circumstances.

5.4.2. Sample No.2



Figure (3) the Iraqi Parliamentary Members are Voting for Early Election

Text Analysis

A. Text analysis (quoted verbs)

The essay which is entitled "Elections Without Democracy in Iraq?" clarifies the process of Iraqi parliamentary election by using many verbs to show the run of the process. These verbs are (head, thank, participate, sweep, need, swept.). The verb "to head" appears at the beginning of the article; "*when Iraqis head to the polls for an early election on October 10, they will have the Tishrin protest movement to thank*" to denote a specific pre-planned goal and intended place to achieve something. The verb "to head" is used in place of several other verbs such as: (to walk, go...) to indicate the intention to achieve something or to accomplish something important. The verb "thanks" is used to express gratitude for something important that has been accomplished. Where used in the article "*they will have the Tishrin protest movement to thank*". Negate the verb "

not participate" used "*Unfortunately, large portions of the movement itself will not participate, highlighting the persistent gaps between the country's realities and its democratic processes*" indicates a defect in the democratic process of elections. Where the negation of the act indicates the despair and frustration of the people.

B. Semiotic Analysis

B 1. Representation Aspect

The main participants in the image are the members of Iraqi parliament. There are many other secondary participants such as the bottles on the tables and the lamps hanging in the roof of the hall. The members seem engage in the process of voting. Nobody of them looking to the viewer that indicate no attention has paid to the suffering of Iraq people. There is an electronic o'clock on the wall, the time is (00,00,00) indicates the beginning of new era of changing.

B 2. Interaction Aspect

Their gazes in every case is a kind of 'offer' they offer the viewer a clear image about the situation they are put in. The social distance between the participants and the viewer is close which indicates a kind of involvement. The image's shot is frontal horizontal angle which indicates a kind of involvement with the viewer. The modality of the image is very high, colors are painted in a clear deep depiction, tiny details are shown.

3. Sample No.3

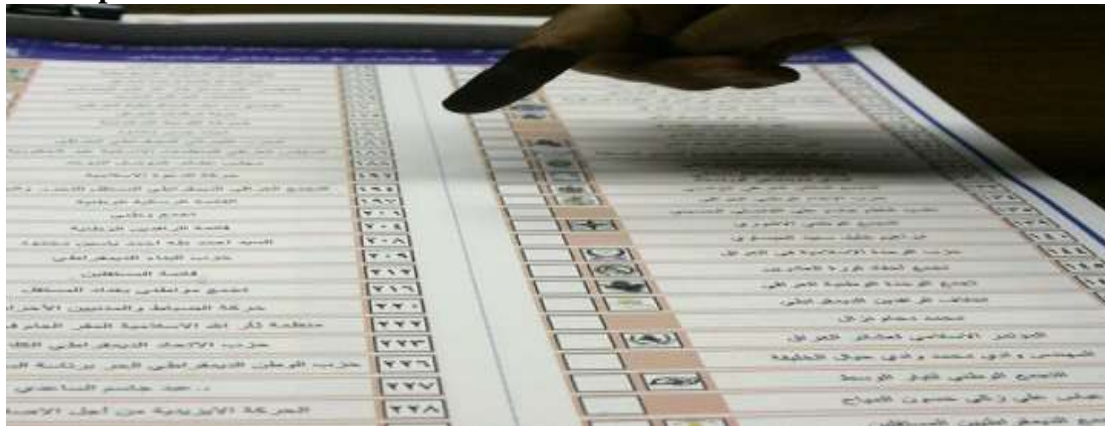


Figure (4) List of Candidates Names

A Text Analysis

The essay which is in titled "Hurdles for the Iraqi Parliamentary Election" shows the barriers in the way of reliable election process. There are many verbs used in this essay such as (control, insist, held, postpone.....).

The verb (reiterated) was used in the article by Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kazemi "*Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has reiterated on multiple occasions that the elections will not be postponed*" to confirm that the elections would be held on their scheduled date after the demonstrations. Where the verb " reiterated " was used to denote the severity of the situation and the severity of the demonstrations. Where the verb " reiterated " is used instead of several other verbs (say, tell...) for emphasis. The verb "imagines" "*It is impossible to imagine fair and transparent elections in the current*" is used in the article to indicate the difficult situation in the electoral process in light of the presence of unarmed weapons.

B Semiotic Analysis

B 1. Representation Aspect

There are many participants in the image, the finger and the names of the candidates in the list. The main participant in the image is the voter who does not appear

completely, but just his finger which appears covered with ink. The finger is directed toward the list of names as an indication that the selection and change is between the voters hands. The image has many indications some of the them that the candidates under the control of the voters. The sign of the finger represents a kind of threat when such sign in Iraqi culture represents a kind of threat.

B 2. Interaction Aspect

There is no gaze appear in the image, but as guessing from the sign of the finger, the participant is looking directly to the names list. The distance is close and that expresses a kind of involvement between the viewer and the participant. The image is seen from a frontal view, the angle is vertical, implying a sense of involvement between the participant and the viewer. Modality is high, many details are depicted with relatively modulated colors.

B 3. Composition Aspect

The informative value in the image could be seen in the finger. The image is divided into two parts upper and lower one. The most salient elements in the image is the finger due its position in the middle of the image.

Sample No. 4



Figure (5)An Iraqi voter shows his inked finger after casting his ballot at a polling station in Baghdad on October 10, 2021

A.Text Analysis

The essay which is intitled “PUK official warns of low Kurdish turnout in Kirkuk” The article describes the low turnout of the Kurds in Kirkuk province in the elections. This is a dangerous indicator that threatens the Kurdish presence in the province. Khaled al-Shawani says "today is a historic day" for the Kurds in the elections. He used this phrase as a catalyst for voter turnout. The verb "turnout" in “low Kurdish turnout in Kirkuk” is used in this article to indicate the people's unwillingness to participate in these elections because of the great frustration they had with the previous elections. The verb "turnout" is used here instead of other verbs to denote encouragement and motivation to participate in elections. The verb "to fight" is used in this article instead of other verbs to denote the danger of not participating in the elections.

B.Semiotic Aspect

B.1- Representation Aspect

There are many participants in the image, the finger of the voter and the stick. Here the stick indicates the participate of old age people in this election. The main participant in the image is the voter who does is not appear completely, but just his finger which appear covered with ink. The finger is directed toward something does not appear in the images which indicts that the voter hopes a better future. The picture has

many indications, some of them that the candidates are under the control of the voters. The finger sign represents a threat when in Iraqi culture this sign represents a kind of threat.

B.2. Interaction Aspect

There is no gaze appear in the image, but as guessing from the sign of the finger, the participant is looking directly to something does not exist in the image. The distance is close and that expresses a kind of involvement between the viewer and the participant. The image is seen from a frontal view, the angle is vertical, implying a sense of involvement between the participant and the viewer. Modality is high, many details are depicted with relatively modulated colors.

B.3. Composition Aspect

The finger is the informative value that could be seen in the image. The image is divided into two parts upper and lower one. The most salient element in the image is the finger due its position in the middle of the image.

5. Sample No.5



Figure (6) Iraqi election officials conduct the electronic count of votes at a polling station in Mosul on October 10, 2021

A Text Analysis

The article which is entitled “Election commission expects to release voter turnout within 2 hours”. The article describes statements made by HEC employees regarding the process of releasing the election results. The verb “release” in “Election commission expects to release voter turnout within 2 hours” is used here to refer to the release of results, which represents the announcement of something important and of great importance to the Iraqi people who are patiently waiting for the change that these results will bring. So, this verb is used instead of other verbs.

B Semiotic Analysis

B 1- Representation Aspect

There are many participants in the image. All of the participants are employees in “High Election Committee”. They seem tired because of the process of votes counting. There are many other secondary participants such as pens papers and counting machines. There are many vectors in the image. There is one vector made from the sitting man to the other employees. The other vector is made from the man behind the first two men which is looking directly to the viewer. The image is highly symbolic.

B.2- Interaction Aspect

From an interactive aspect, there are many gazes in the image. There are offer gazes because some participants don't look directly to the viewer, and also demand gazes due to the directly looking of other participants. The angle of the points of view is oblique creating a sense of detachment between the viewers and the represented participants. The modality of the image is very high, colors are painted in a clear deep depiction, tiny details are shown.

B.3- Composition Aspect

The employees are of high informative value, they are brought to the foreground near the center, with larger size. The count machine is clearly shown. The image is divided into two parts; the employees have the greater part due to their size, they are secluded by a vertical line descending from the highest top to the end of the wall.

6. Conclusions

1. Meaning creators and meaning making are the focus of social semiotics. It investigates how people utilize and build distribution medium and modes of communication to express their perspective of the world and shape power relationships with others.
2. The study of meaning in context is known as social semiotics. If viewed as 'disciplines' or 'perspectives,' they take a functional approach of meaning.
3. Quoted verbs or word choices play an important role in shaping the hidden and unseen beliefs, they describe how someone can speak, or have considerable impact on the way that author can shape perception of events.
4. The image's meaning is not immediately or easily discernible. It is contingent on one's ability to construct interrelationships between literary and visual elements on the one hand, and social reality on the other.
5. Images are a powerful tool of communication; one image can express a lengthy article with multiple occurrences. A single caricature can provide an integrative message by combining several aspects.

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