RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN SYRIAN POLITICAL TURMOIL: MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POLITICAL CARTOONS PUBLISHED ON AMERICAN AND ARAB DIGITAL MEDIA

Dr. Sara Khan
Assistant Professor, FAST NUCES, Lahore Campus
Email: sara.khan1@nu.edu.pk; sara.ghazanfar.khan@gmail.com
Nokhaiz Zahra
Lecturer, FAST NUCES, Lahore Campus,
Email: nokhaiz.zahra@nu.edu.pk

Abstract
During the past few years, the caricatures genre has gained substantial research interest across disciplines such as communication media studies and health sciences. The reason for this preference can be attributed to the quality of cartoons to serve as a forceful source of data used in the study of social phenomena. This paper aims to illustrate how political cartoons in American and Arab-Muslim Digital Media are used as a vehicle for promoting a political agenda regarding Russian involvement in Syrian political choices, and to reorient and shape public opinion through recurrent depictions that mirror current socio-political issues at a given period. The study aims to scrutinise political cartoons in the light of the research question: how are the political cartoons presented in American media used to set the socio-political agenda regarding Russian intervention in the current Syrian political turmoil? For this purpose, five cartoons each were selected from the websites www.usnews.com and www.aljazeera.com, based on purposive sampling. Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Analysis is a functional theoretical approach as it provides elements for analysing both text and images. Moreover, discursive strategies were revealed at both macro (constructive, perpetuating, transformational, and destructive) and micro (referential, predicational, argumentation, perspectivation, and framing) levels, along with their linguistic realisations. The study's findings present and expose the underlying assumptions and ideological foundations of the caricatures developed.
Keywords: Discourse Historical Approach, Multimodal, Political Cartoons, Syria, Russia

1. Introduction

The current study aims to investigate the current Syrian political situation represented through caricatures on the US News and Al Jazeera News websites. On the one hand, the incidents of violation of human rights, mass homicides and chemical bombing have made the world question the usefulness of the so-called peace strategies developed by the peace-making organisations (Itani & Abouzahr, 2016; Abdullah & Zabin, 2021; Zahra, 2021). On the other hand, the strategic affiliations and formation of political coteries have disturbed the level of world politics. The Russian intervention on the Syrian issue, because of the above-mentioned dubious nature, has grabbed the attention of the world political forum. Moreover, the long-lost growing power of Russia in the Eastern region is a treacherous threat to the World superpower presiding in the West. The current study, therefore, attempts to expose the various dimensions of the Western view of Russian interests in Syria, i.e. in American Media (US News) and the view of the directly affected of the War and intervention, the Arab World (Al Jazeera). The current study employs the Discourse Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis for scrutinising interdiscursive and intertextual patterns, discursive strategies at both macro and micro levels, and the linguistic devices that constitute these strategies (Discursive Strategies). Moreover, the study also tends to highlight the implicit discourse themes within the visual representation of the Russian-Syrian political scenario.

The display of digital media has transformed our mindsets and thinking patterns. Press and print media have specifically transformed to meet the needs of the hour, correlating with technological advancements. The advancement of print and press media has also altered the way political events are communicated, with words being significantly replaced by visuals. More specifically, pictures have been transformed into caricatures (Darmawan & Piling, 2015; Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2020; Pacheco, 2021). From this perspective, political representation

through cartoons combines both visual and linguistic components. Such multimodal communication is on the rise due to the rapid globalisation and digitisation of texts and images. Hence, political caricatures may relate to globally recognised subjects or issues that can be readily understood by a wider audience worldwide.

The analysis of visual discourse dates back to the studies of semiotic modes in the meaning-making process conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The use of visual communication by writers has established that visual images are gaining critical significance compared to historical times (Natharius, 2004, p. 2, as cited in Ademilokun & Olateju, 2016). The reliance on a combination of visual and verbal elements has impacted human communication, as individuals increasingly combine semiotic modes with textual language in various contexts. The use of multimodal text is critical in today's world, as the use of cartoons is increasing in multiple contexts, including advertising, political presentations, classroom discourse, and other significant forms, such as print media (Ademilokun & Olateju, 2016).

Consequently, the current study focuses on the significance of political ideological representation through visual caricatures depicting the political upheavals in Syria. It exposes the discursive strategies visually inculcated to create and transfer a set of political norms. Moreover, the context of the presented caricatures is elucidated to establish a link between the discursive and linguistic strategies. Therefore, it falls under the category of social discourse cartoons.

Research on the multimodal aspects of cartoons, in both print and online media, has provided several analytical means to highlight socio-cultural and political norms in society. The primary focus has been on political and gender- based issues. These studies have been interpreted through varied perspectives such as, tools of communication (Cahn, 1984 as cited in Anglin, 1995), influence of cartoons on democratic process (Morris, 1992), and use of cartoons for face saving or face spoiling of political characters in Pakistani newspapers (Tehseem & Bokhari, 2014). The following section highlights some of the studies done in the area of political representation through cartoons.

2.   Literature Review

A plethora of research on interdisciplinary political cartoons has gained prominence during the last decade (Stavroudis, 2014; Lawate, 2012; Sani, 2012, 2000). This emphasis has been incorporated into political cartoons through cross-disciplinary research, such as in "education, sociology sciences, psychology, health research, pragmatics and communication" (Sani et al., 2012, p. 53). The increasing interest in research in the area has transformed it into a potent field for establishing genre (politics) and news within print media discourse. The goal of the genre is to conceptualise concrete denunciations and provide dogmatic interpretations aimed at recreating public ideology (Sani et al., 2012, p. 53). Benjamin Franklin set the trend by publishing an editorial cartoon depicting an image of a dissected snake representing various colonies in America with caption of "join or die" i.e. either become a part of the current political reform or bear the consequences (Burns, 2007 as cited in Sani et al., 2012, p. 53).

The cartoonists employ both verbal and non-verbal (visual) semiotic modes to communicate meaning through humour. Barthes (1977) points out the interrelationship of linguistic message to the images that are "polysemous" (p. 39). Taking this point further, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) propose that language and non-verbal graphics are 'visual participants' in any multimodal discourse that may seem logical but sometimes left incomplete intentionally. Moreover, the message conveyed is interpreted by the reader due to shared (cultural) knowledge and by being part of a specific social group. Furthermore, the cartoonists purposefully exploit these verbal and non-verbal elements to persuasively direct the readers' attention towards various issues, thus forming their opinion and bringing about change in societal mindsets and norms. The researchers have conducted studies by analysing inter-semiotic choices by cartoonists (to project humour through interplay of visual details supported by verbal features (Lemke, 1998; Baldry & Thibault, 2006; Tsakona, 2009 as cited in Abdullah et al, 2014). Usually, the language used and the image projected is a deliberately constructed point of view by the cartoonist/caricaturist to influence readers' interpretation of a specific matter or event (Mattews, 2011 as cited in Abdullah et al, 2014).

Apart from the above-mentioned studies, the research done in the area of visual politics mainly employs critical discourse analysis as a theoretical perspective to scrutinise implicit ideologies. Critical discourse analysis enables researchers to engage in analysis based on the interpretation, criticism, and evaluation of socio-cultural and ideological systems (Abdullah et al., 2014). For instance, Tahir (2013) uses Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model to investigate underlying ideologies incorporated in the publication of blasphemous cartoons in the context of Islam. He exposes 'us' and 'them' ideological constructions. Similarly, Detinko et al (2014) employ Kress and Leeuwen's Social Semiotics Model to investigate the construction of political 'others' in the British Press. The study's outcome revealed the construction of "others" created through interdiscursiveness, metaphors, and other linguistic features (p. 1381). Ogbo and Nuhu (2016) employed Fairclough's CDA to analyse satire in the political caricatures presented in the Nigerian national newspapers. The political cartoons revealed the representation of corrupt politicians by underscoring the negative impact they can have on the recipients. In a similar context, Tehseem et al. (2015), using Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Social Semiotics, examined the dynamics of face-saving and face-losing acts by Pakistani Politicians as portrayed by the Pakistani print Media.

Cui (2010) applied Ruth Vodak's CDA to investigate historical media representations of Chinese immigration. In a similar vein, Hou (2015) employs a discourse-historical Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to conduct a comparative analysis of cartoons featured in news articles about the Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). The research employs analytical devices such as concordance to elucidate themes and discursive patterns. Keeping in view the significance of Critical Discourse Analysis in investigating and exposing implicit and embedded ideological structures within a discourse body, this study attempts to scrutinise the impact and implications of the Russian political intervention, as represented in the caricatures published by US News and Al Jazeera News.

3.　　Research Question
The current study attempts to answer the following research question:
• How are political cartoons used as a vehicle to promote a specific political agenda of Russian involvement in Syrian political choices in American Media (The US News) and the Muslim-Arab World (Al Jazeera)?

4.　　Methodology
This section provides a brief overview of the methodological procedures, including the nature of the data, ethical considerations for the study, the theoretical framework employed, and the research design used to address the research question of the survey.

Keeping in view the purpose of the study, five caricatures each were purposively selected from the official websites of The US News and Al Jazeera News, i.e. *www.usnews.com* and *www.aljazeera.com*. The five pictures were sorted into two datasets (see Appendices A and B) and were subjected to scrutiny, taking into account the domains of the analytical theory applied.

All researchers need to consider and reflect on ethical issues. However, the current research incorporates public data, i.e., the political caricatures published on the official websites of US News and Al Jazeera; thus, obtaining ethical consent is not pertinent. Although such a typology of data provides relief in terms of a consent form, the reporting and interpretation of these data forms are critical. Keeping in view the significant concern, we interpreted the data carefully, adhering to the tenets of the theoretical perspective and avoiding false representation of discourses. Lastly, the organisation and interpretation of data into themes was accomplished objectively, i.e., developed based on an interpretative and analytical framework provided by the theoretical perspective applied outlined below.

4.1　　Theoretical Perspective
The current study employed Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach to develop an interpretative framework that makes the meaning-making process in understanding and perceptions of images more comprehensible. The theory presented by Wodak aligns with Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis due to its tri-dimensional

parameters. Therefore, this study adapts (or adopts) the following theoretical steps for the in-depth interpretation of the caricatures:

• **Identification of Contents/Topics/Themes:**

In the first step, the researcher identifies the themes from the discourse (Abdullah, 2014). The current study also aims to identify themes that may reflect Russia's political situation in Syria, to highlight the implicit ideology underlying the two sets of caricatures.

• **Discursive Strategies (Macro/Micro Level):**

The second step of the theory aims to explore and identify the discursive strategies employed at both macro and micro levels. The researcher also aspires to expose and reveal macro (constructive, perpetuating, transformational, and destructive) and micro (referential, predicational, argumentative, perspectival, and framing) discursive strategies in the visual and linguistic discourse presented through the caricatures.

• **Linguistic Devices:**

Lastly, at the textual level, linguistic devices that may constitute the employment of topoi, narration, quotation, utterances, etc., would be revealed to identify the various language variations employed in the construction of a particular discursive strategy. The study also inculcates the exploration of linguistic devices to determine the construction pattern of discourse.

In addition to the aforementioned steps, the study aims to highlight the socio-political and cultural context of the two sets of caricatures, providing a critical approach to the investigation of the Russian-Syrian caricatures.

4.2   Discourse Historical Approach to Multimodal Content Analysis:

The current study employs the Discourse Historical Approach for the in-depth analysis of the political caricatures published on the US News official website and the Al Jazeera News website. For this purpose, a multimodal content analysis presented by Luc Pauwels (2011) was modified to incorporate provenance and inference of contextual information, an inventory of topics, and content analysis, thereby enhancing the analytical procedure. The aim of employing the Discourse Historical Approach to multimodal content analysis is to form and generate a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the theoretical and conceptual manifestation by constructing interpretations (LucPauwels, 2011). The analytical procedure adapted by the study helped in answering the research question of how political caricatures are used to develop a view on the Russian involvement in Syrian political choices in American Media (The US News) and the Muslim-Arab World (Al Jazeera), and follows the subsequent methodological phases:

• **Contextual Analysis, Provenance and Inference:**

The first phase of the analytical procedure involves examining the context and background of the verbal and visual content presented in the images. In this regard, considering the tenets of the theoretical perspective of DHA, the current study examines the socio-political historical context of the caricatures under scrutiny. Thus, it attempts to provide the basis of a 'solid insight into the origin and circumstances of the different constituting elements'; in this case, the Russian intervention in the Syrian political realm (LusPauwels, 2011, p. 582).

• **Inventory of Topics:**

In this phase, emerging topics and prominent features in the chosen sample of images are identified. In the current study, the tenet of interdiscursivity induces the researcher to explore the emerging discourse topics in the images under study. These topics were further divided into focal and overlapping discourse topics (see Figures 1 and 2) to present "significant theoretical insights" (LusPauwels, 2011, p. 576).

• **In-depth analysis of Content:**

Although the previous phases connect and relate contextual knowledge to the emergent topoi in the datasets, the last phase is central and critical to the analytical procedure. It proposes to develop elucidations residing in the implicit and explicit content of the dataset, specifically the textual and visual representations presented in the caricatures (LusPauwels, 2011). In this regard, the theoretical tenet of intertextuality aids in the explanation of the selection of

words and the representation of political characters in two sets of caricatures. Moreover, the current phase also aims at exploring the socio-cultural and political meanings that "[reside] in the visual properties of the texts" (LusPauwels, 2011, p. 578). In this perspective, discursive strategies both at Macro and Micro levels help in scrutinising the structures of textual and visual representations in the two data sets and how the employment of the above mentioned strategies is inculcated to develop themes for example national identities, restoration, production and destruction of status quo (Abdullah, 2014, p. 6). Discursive and linguistic strategies at the micro level tend to explore the "stylistic features of the written language parts and their possible meaning/effect" in terms of referencing, characteristic features and attributions of political characters in the Russian–Syrian caricatures (Abdullah, 2014, p. 6).

The caricatures tend to illustrate the Russian political intervention in the current socio-political situation prevalent in Syria. The subsection that follows provides an analysis of cartoons in terms of identifying implicit themes, the varied Macro and Micro Discursive strategies involved in the construction of political viewpoints, and finally, the linguistic devices employed to construct the particular set of discursive strategies.

4.3 DHA to Multimodal Content Analysis of Political Caricatures in US News

This subsection provides an analysis of political cartoons presented in US News, representing Russia's political involvement in the Syrian crisis. The section inclines to reveal the implicit contents, discursive strategies woven around the topics and finally, the linguistic devices used to achieve the communicative goal. For analysis, five cartoons were selected based on purposive sampling. The five political caricatures were numbered from Image 1A to Image 5A (see below) for the convenience of analysis.

• **Socio-Political Context of the Caricatures:**

The images were taken from the US News website. These images were conceptualised to create a global view of Russia's involvement in the current Syrian civil war. The images coincide with the massacres happening in Syria and illustrate the maltreatment and cruelty prevalent in the Syrian environment. In addition to this, the caricatures also tend to depict the Russian logic such as protection of confederate; distracting global attention from its intention to increase political power over the Ukrainian peninsula; defending naval ports in the Mediterranean; intention to pursue long lost tag of one of the super powers of the World; fighting fundamentalists; and attempting to break the Western regime in Europe and the Arab World specifically (Itani & Abouzahr, 2016). Therefore, Assad and his regime, having common goals with Russian political policy, tend to be protected and helped out. Moreover, the Russian political intervention in Syria has compelled American policies to consider it a profound member of the Global political realm (Itani & Abouzahr, 2016). The current set of caricatures taken from the US news website, therefore, tends to reveal the atrocities the Syrian nation is facing due to the ferocious power show by the Russian government and its allies, i.e., Assad and his regime.

• **Interdiscursivity**

As discussed earlier, interdiscursivity exposes the link between discourses through topics on other discourses (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 90; Richardson and Wodak, 2009b, p. 46 as cited in Naggar, 2012, p. 8). The caricatures, presented on the US News website, expose an amalgamation of visual discourses, including the representation of causes of death in Syria and the Assad-Putin Alliance. The discourse representing causes of death in Syria contains an illustration expressing Putin and Assad as angels of death, i.e. expressing that both the leaders are guilty of violating human rights and mass killing (see, below, Image 1A).

Figure 1: Image 1A (US News)

The pictorial representation of both being accompanied by an angel of death expresses their brutality towards the Syrian nation. On the contrary, the visual discourse on Assad-Putin Alliance is constructed through illustrations expressing Putin protecting Assad similar to the protection of a baby done by a mother (see, below Image 2A) and Assad representing his faithfulness through the change of ties in the literal and symbolical sense (see, below, Image 5A).

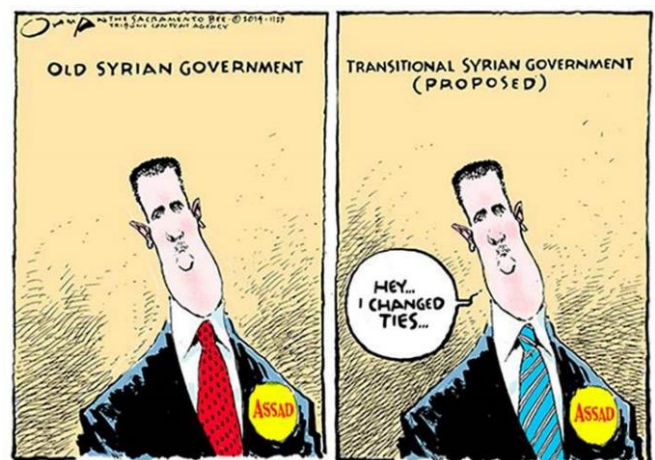Figure 2: Image 2A/5A-US News

Figure 3: Image 3A/4A-US News

The change in colour of the tie from red to blue depicts his shift in attitude at the World Political Forum. Besides the clear indication of mass killing and shift of international interests by the Syrian government, Image 3A depicts Putin protecting his ally by helping him in armour supply and that consequently aids the Syrian Chief to have mass homicide of the innocent public of Syria. Image 4A takes the political bond to the next level. It illustrates them as blood brothers, i.e. partners (allies) in the homicides of innocent Syrians in the recent passing year, i.e. 2016.

Therefore, the editorials of US News attempt to convey to the World the brutalities caused in Syria and eventually depict a negative image of Russia.
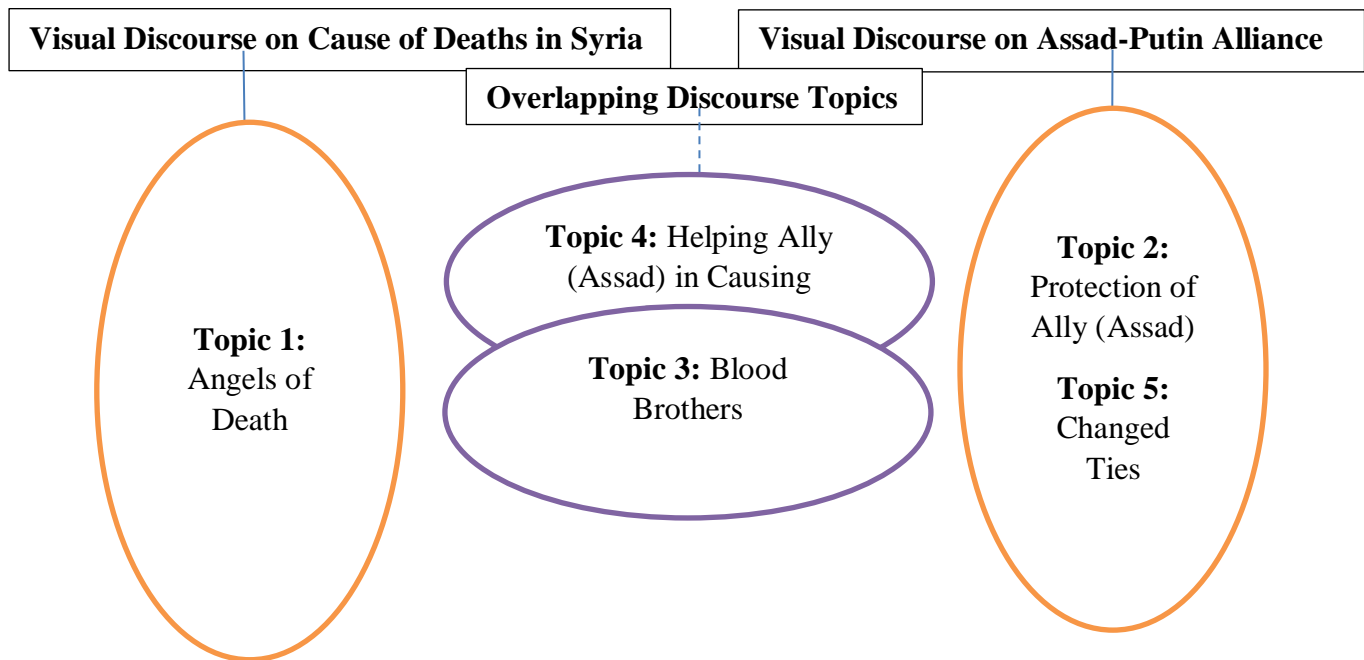

Figure 4: Adjacent and Overlapping Discourse topics on the Cause of deaths in Syria and the Assad-Putin Alliance in US News

• **Intertextuality**
Intertextuality in the caricatures presented in the US news was primarily related to the names of characters/nations illustrated in the picture. Referentials such as Assad, Putin, Syria and Russia were used intertextually. In a similar way, the phrase Blood Brothers seems to be developed from the two Hollywood movies Blood Diamond and Two Brothers (Zwick, E., et al, 2007; BOUSÉÉ, 2006) (see Image 3A). The movie Blood Diamond depicts violence and bloodshed in the search for diamonds, while Two Brothers is a film based on two tiger brothers who are separated from each other soon after they are born. The relationship developed in the title Blood Brothers seems to identify with the bloodshed in Blood Diamond and the 'brotherly' association or ties, as seen in Two Brothers.

• **Thematic Content**
The data sets of caricatures from the US News website also expose themes such as politics and mass killings (see Image 1A); Russian-Syrian Alliance (see Image 2A, 4A, 5A); Racism (see Image 4A) and change of Political policy (see Image 5A).

- **Discursive Strategies**

Discursive strategies employed in the images at both the macro- and micro-levels underscore the gravity of the macro and micro levels. The strategy at these levels is discussed below.

Macro-level

The data sets reveal discursive strategies of perpetuating, as seen in Image 1A, 2A, and 4A, where the visual and linguistic discourse employed expresses and reveals the prevailing status quo of the relationship between the Russian and Syrian governments. Apart from this, the term Blood in Image 3A refers to the bloodshed in the Syrian premises, thus also indicating perpetuating discursive strategies. In addition to this, Image 5A reveals the employment of a transformational strategy to highlight the shift in national interests of the Syrian government, particularly under Assad and his regime. The image tends to reveal the shift in Syria's political alliance from the United States to Russia; thus, it also implicitly employs a constructive strategy to build Russia's national strength in comparison with that of the United States.

- **Micro-Level**

At the micro level, the discursive strategy of referential nomination was constructed through the use of names of persons (e.g., Putin, Assad) and places (e.g., Russia, Syria) involved in the development of the discourse (see Appendix A). Additionally, a predictive strategy of portraying a negative image of both leaders, namely, Putin and Assad, has been employed. The use of words such as "Blood Brothers" (see Image 3A) and their portrayal as angels of death (see Image 1A) highlights their deleterious role in the region. Moreover, the strategy of suppression and exploitation of innocent Syrians is also represented in Image 4A, where the 'brotherly' relationship seems to reflect the use of words such as help. Finally, the discursive strategy of perspectivization and framing also reveals the perception that the news makers of US news want the World to have of the other dominating political power. The artists of caricatures attempt to picture the involvement of political powers in the casualties and brutalities caused in Syria. Moreover, the political illustrations presented in the cartoons tend to portray a particular political power in a favourable light and attempt to discredit the others' image in the Global political forum, associating the 'other' and its allies as a threat to regional and global peace.

- **Linguistic Devices**

The linguistic devices employed to construct discursive strategies varied, including deictics that depict references to nations and persons, as well as tropes such as metaphors (e.g., Blood Brothers, Help, I changed ties). Apart from this, as the current study scrutinises critically the discursive strategy employed visually, much of the discourse examined is conveyed and represented through visual graphics.

4.4 DHA to Multimodal Content Analysis of Political Caricatures in Al Jazeera News

This subsection presents an analysis of political cartoons featured in Al Jazeera News, which represent Russian political intervention in Syria. Likewise, in the US News, the section tends to reveal the implicit contents, discursive strategies (macro/micro) woven around the topics and finally, the linguistic devices used to achieve the communicative goal. For scrutiny purposes, as mentioned in Section 3.1, five cartoons were selected based on purposive sampling. The five political caricatures were numbered from Image 1B to Image 5B for the suitability of analysis.

- **Socio-political Context of the Caricatures**

The images were taken from the Al Jazeera News website. The photos were formulated to gain insight into the political scenario in the Syrian situation. Similarly, the images presented by the American news network and the Arab news website also tend to reveal the pseudo-invasion of Russian political policies in Syria. Abboud (2016) stated that the Russian intervention was one of the worst choices ever made by Syrian ruler Assad. Moreover, the news maker also viewed the invasion of the political regime of Syria by the Russian troops, resulting in massacres of the innocent Syrians. The images subjected to scrutiny tend to identify the so-called peace and development Russia wants to achieve in the region, which is ironic in that an attempt is made to gain peace with the aid of armour and

destruction. Furthermore, the images also seem to depict Russia as one of the significant threats to amity in the region in comparison with other rebel forces, such as ISIS and the CIA. The Russian intrusion aims to abolish the terrestrial and political space between ISIL and the Syrian regime. It focuses on providing the international political community with a choice none other than the most repulsive of choices for Syria, i.e., the Russian-directed Syrian Regime (Abboud, 2016). The current analysis, working within the above-discussed contextual background, tends to highlight the implicit themes and discursive strategies employed, taking into account the context.

• **Interdiscursivity**

Figure 5: Image 1B/5B-Al Jazeera News

As in US News, the caricatures presented on the Al Jazeera News website expose various discourse topics that amalgamate and fuse. The two distinctive discourse topics that tend to highlight are Russian intervention for peace and the Syrian-Russian Alliance, as seen in Figure 2 below. The discourse representing Russian intervention in Syria shows illustrations that represent Russian forces as the giant ferocious bear (the national animal of Russia), the biggest threat in the region (see Image 1B). Besides the animated representation of the Russian prevalence in the region, the cartoon also reflects the representation of the CIA, ISIS and Syrian Regime. The expression depicted in these figures in the cartoon represents an emotion of fear and terror towards the Russian Bear in the region. The artist, through such representation, tends to reflect Russia itself as the leading cause of turbulence in the Syrian Environment. Moreover, the cartoon also tends to reflect Russia as the bigger threat as compared to the rebels, American forces and the Syrian regime itself. Furthermore, the caricature depicting the CIA, the US intelligence agency, as a minor threat reveals the tentative opinion of the Arab world regarding its inclination towards developing an alliance with America, a conventional rival of Russia. On the other hand, the discourse of Syrian-Russian Two caricatures represent Alliance (see Image 1B and 5B, below). The first image conveys the intensity of ties between Russia and the Syrian Regime by depicting a change in identity by Syrian leader Assad, specifically his adoption of a Russian-sounding name – Bashaarnisky Assadov (Varshalomidze, 2015). Therefore, the image expresses Assad's loyalty to Russia. Similarly, Image 5B illustrates the readiness of Russian forces to support their loyal ally at any hour of need. Moreover, the cartoon also inclined towards the thought that to Syrians, Russia and its government are the only sources to rejuvenate peace in the region, implicitly expressing the Syrian/Russian perception of the US as dormant and unreliable in terms of peace construction (Varshalomidze, 2015). Apart from this, overlapping discourses were also constituted through the illustration of images 2B and 3 B.

Image 2 reflects Russian military disposition in Syria as a Russian saviour who steps in at the last moment to save his baby Assad, which corresponds to both Russian armed interventions in the region to inculcate the so-called peace and to support their ally, Assad, yet again. Image 3 also reflects a somewhat similar perception, where the caricature of Putin is depicted as holding a press conference and shouting to the world about the Russian-Syrian partnership. Finally, the armour, presented in the picture, also shows the consequences the Syrian nation is facing due to the alliance.
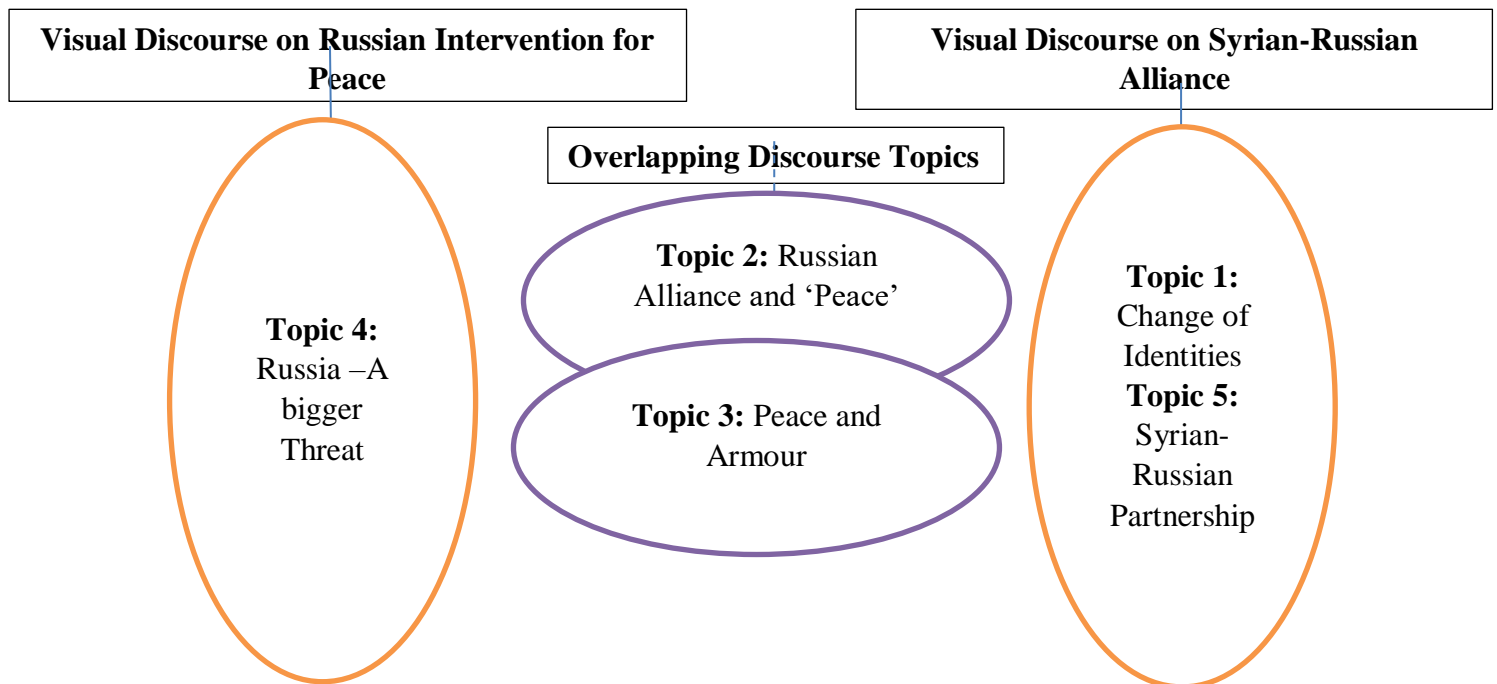

Figure 6: Image 2B/3B- Al Jazeera News

Figure 7: Adjacent and Overlapping Discourse topics on Russian Intervention and Syrian-Russian Alliance in Al Jazeera News

• **Intertextuality**

As in the case of US News, intertextuality in the caricatures presented at Al Jazeera news was primarily related to the names of characters/nations illustrated in the picture. Names such as Assad, Putin, Syria and Russia were used

intertextually (See above). Apart from presenting names, the artists at the website tend to visually create intertextuality. This was evident in the case of the representation of the Russian Bear, Russia's national emblem, which was used to amplify the effect of the conveyed discourse (Varshalomidze, 2015). Finally, in Image 5B, the lines "in case of emergency…" have been intertextually used to express the emergency situation Assad might face in Syria and therefore, with a click of a button, the Russian forces would be there for his rescue.

• **Thematic Content**

The data sets of caricatures from the Al Jazeera website also expose certain themes. These themes or topics covered dimensions such as politics and Russian Intervention (see, Image 3); Russian-Syrian Alliance (see, Image 2B, 3B, 5B); Russian Threat (see Image 4B) and change of national Identity (see, Image 1B).

Figure 8: Image 4B- Al Jazeera News

• **Discursive Strategies**

Discursive strategies employed in the images of caricatures were highlighted at both the macro- and micro-levels.

• **Macro-level**

Image 1B in the Al Jazeera News dataset reveals the transformational and constructive discursive strategies, depicting the change in identities that Assad opts for. The image clearly indicates the change of names from Arabic to Russian. Here, the artist tends to imply that Assad shows faithfulness as a Russian ally, rather than keeping it for his own nation. Therefore, Al Jazeera, being an Arab based news website, tends to mock the nationalism of Assad and his regime. A similar effect is depicted in Image 5B, where, in addition to transformational strategies, the visual discourse presented in the images also portrays perpetuating and destructive strategies by illustrating pictorial comments on the current situation of Syria (see Image 2B, 3B, 4B). The prevalent war situation and its devastation are well conceptualised in the pictorial form. Moreover, the picture also provides a dialogue provided by Putin in Arabic in words such as "تدخلنالحمائة المدنيين"<we intervene for peace in the city> to represent satirical views on having peace with armour and air attacks. Likewise, in Image 5B, the transformational strategy was employed to express and represent the status quo, i.e., Assad and his regime can press the 'help' button to have Russian help at their doorsteps.

• **Micro-Level**

At the micro level, the discursive strategy of referential/nomination was constructed through the use of names of persons (Syria, Russia, CIA, ISIS) and places (Russia, Syria) involved in the development of the discourse (see image 4B above). Additionally, a predictive strategy of portraying a negative image of both leaders, namely, Putin and Assad, has been employed. The use of pictorial representation of armour in Images 2B and 3B illustrates Russian

intervention in the region. In addition to this, Image 1B reflect the quisling quality of Assad concerning his nation. Moreover, the strategy of suppression and exploitation of innocent Syrians is also represented in Image 2B, where the peace construction seems to reflect destruction. Finally, the discursive strategy of perspectivization and framing also reveals the perception that the news makers of Al Jazeera News want the World to have of Russia. The artists of caricatures depict the involvement of Russia in the fatalities and brutalities caused in Syria. Moreover, the political illustration presented in the cartoons tends to employ Russia as a bigger threat to the region and the Arab World at large as compared to the CIA, ISIS and the Syrian Regime itself. The artists of the caricatures tend to highlight the Russian interest vested in the current geo-political situation of the Syrian borders. Therefore, exposing the Russian intervention as not for the cause of peace, but nonetheless to gain political, economic, and social power (Pacheco, 2021).

• **Linguistic Devices**

The linguistic devices employed to construct discursive strategies varied, including deictics used to provide references to nations and persons, as well as tropes such as metaphors (Bashaarnisky Assadov, trading Partner) (Zahra, 2021).

5.   Discussion

The findings of the Discourse-Historical analysis of the two sets of caricatures reveal the ideological viewpoint created by the two news-making organisations. The findings also reveal the underlying assumptions of both news organisations. It is evident that both organisations have condemned the Russian policies in Syria and have condemned the massacre of Syrians. Although the American media has played the blame game, nevertheless, the political conflict between the two nations, i.e. America and Russia, seem to have created chaos in the Arab region (Radina, 2024). The disposition of Syrian massacres on the Russian government by the Arab News channel also reveals wishful thinking of creating an alliance with the superpower, i.e. America; thus indicating a positive perspective for the American government to increase its global alliance in the Arab World.

6.   Conclusion

CDA is not just one theory, but an analytical tool that encompasses multiple dimensions, numerous viewpoints, and various outlets for data interpretation (Wodak, 1999, as cited in Jehadi et al., 2014; Al-Dala'ien et al., 2022). Therefore, the current study aims to unravel the embedded political ideological structure woven into the discourse. It has exposed the perception being built through media discourse. In addition to this, the study provides elements for future research, perhaps from the perspective of Russian political caricatures, which present a view of America and the rest of the World.

7.   References

1.   Abboud, S. (2016, February 10). Retrieved from Al Jazeera: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/02/syria-future-shaped-russian-designs-160210062221442.html
2.   Abdullah, S., & Zibin, A. (2021). Monomodal and multimodal metaphors and metonymies depicting the Syrian conflict: evidence from pro-opposition cartoons. *The International Journal of Communication and Linguistic Studies*, *19*(2), 61.
3.   Abdullah, S., & Zibin, A. (2021). Monomodal and multimodal metaphors and metonymies depicting the Syrian conflict: evidence from pro-opposition cartoons. *The International Journal of Communication and Linguistic Studies*, *19*(2), 61.
4.   Ademilokun, M., &Olateju, M. (2016). A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Some Visual Images in the Political Rally Discourse of 2011 Electioneering Campaigns in Southwestern Nigeria. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 4(1), 1-19.
5.   Al-Dala'ien, O. A., Al-Shboul, Y., Aldowkat, I. M., & Al-Takhayinh, A. (2022). Visualising the Russia-Ukraine War: A Semiotic Analysis of Arab Social Media Cartoons. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *12*(12), 2712-2722.
6.   Anglin, G. J. (1995). Instructional technology. Past, present, and future, 4.
7.   Barthes, R. (1977). Roland Barthes (pp. 1–186). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

8. Crilley, R., & Chatterje-Doody, P. N. (2020). Emotions and war on YouTube: Affective investments in RT's visual narratives of the conflict in Syria. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *33*(5), 713-733.

9. Cui, D. (2010). Challenging the biased perceptions of "others": A critical discourse analysis approach to global citizenship education. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, 4(1), 16–28.

10. Darmawan, F., &Piliang, Y. A. (2016). Cartoonist Visual Communication through Online Political Cartoons in the Era of the Government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. SOSIOHUMANIKA, 8(2).

11. Faysal Itani, H. A. (2016, November 1). Syria Deeply. Retrieved from News Deeply: https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/community/2016/11/01/lessons-from-russias-intervention-in-syria

12. Hou, Z. (2015). A Critical Analysis of Media Reports on China's Air Defence Identification Zone. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 198, 194-201.

13. Jahedi, M., Abdullah, F. S., &Mukundan, J. (2014). An overview of focal approaches of critical discourse analysis. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 2(4), 28.

14. Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). 2006. *Reading Images: The grammar of Visual Design*.

15. Krstić, A., Aiello, G., & Vladisavljević, N. (2020). Visual metaphor and authoritarianism in Serbian political cartoons. *Media, War & Conflict*, *13*(1), 27-49.

16. Kulikova, L. V., Detinko, I. I., Куликова, Л. В., &Детинко, Ю. И. (2014). Construction of political "others" through multimodal texts (cartoons) in British press.

17. Machin, D., &Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do Critical Discourse Analysis: A multimodal introduction.* Sage.

18. Morris, A. D. (1992). *Frontiers in social movement theory*. Yale University Press.

19. Ogbo, U. S., &Nuhu, M. (2016). Satire as Tool of Political Cartoons in the Nigerian National Dailies: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *European Scientific Journal, ESJ*, 12(29).

20. Özdemir, Ö., & Özdemir, E. (2017). Whose problem is it anyway? The depiction of Syrian refugee influx in political cartoons. *Syria Studies*.

21. Pacheco, A. L. (2021). *A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis of Cartoons on the US and Russian Relations under the Barack Obama and Donald Trump Administrations* (Doctoral dissertation).

22. Radina, N. K. (2024). Multimodal Media Tools of Popular Geopolitics: Russian Politics in Foreign Media Cartoons. *Russian Journal of World Politics and Law of Nations*, *2*(2), 92-109.

23. Sani, I., Abdullah, M. H., Ali, A. M., & Abdullah, F. S. (2012). Linguistic analysis on the construction of satire in Nigerian political cartoons: The example of newspaper cartoons. *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*, 4(3), 52.

24. Tehseem, T., &Bokhari, Z. (2015). Spoiling or the saving faces in Pakistani newspapers: A multimodal discourse perspective on analysing political cartoons. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 4(2), 1-14.

25. Tsakona, V. (2009). Language and image interaction in cartoons: Towards a multimodal theory of humor. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(6), 1171-1188.

26. Varshalomidze, T. (2015, October 7). Retrieved from Al Jazeera: http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/10/cartoon-conflict-russia-role-syria-151007102725482.html

27. Zahra, M. A. L. M. (2021). *The Representation of Syrian Refugees from the Perspective of the Western Communities on Facebook: Corpus-based Multimodal Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis* (Doctoral dissertation, Ain Shams University).