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## A Semiotic Study of the Importance of some Selected Images of the Iraqi English Curricula

### A B S T R A C T

This study is dealt with a semiotic analysis of some selected images of the Iraqi English curriculum. The study adopts Barthes (1977) Visual Rhetoric and Eco (2003) Decoding and Encoding theory. The Semiotic Study presents the analysis of both verbal and nonverbal messages. The major aims of this study; is to clarify the importance of the signs, symbols and hints in images and text of iraqi English curriculum and how can they serve teaching and educational operation. As well, the reason behind choosing the images of curriculum, is that because of having a great effect in teaching operation that can attract student's attention by many things such as; colors, signs and symbols. Consequently, the topic of this study can get the attention and interest of students and the result not only having new vocabularies but having moral lessons and forming sentences. Semiotic study is chosen because it is the science that the studies signs and its functions.

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دراسة سيميائية لأهمية الصور في منهج تدريس اللغة الانكليزية في العراق

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وزارة التربية / كلية التربية المفتوحة

### المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليل سيميائي للصور المختارة من منهج الدراسة المتوسطة / الصف الأول / اللغة الانكليزية اعتمدت الدراسة على نظرية البلاغة البصرية لبارت (1977) ونظرية فك التشفير والترميز لإيكو (2003). تقدم دراسة السيميائية تحليل كل من الرسائل اللفظية وغير اللفظية. الأهداف الرئيسية لهذه الدراسة؛ هو توضيح أهمية العلامات، الرموز والتلميحات في الصور والنصوص في منهج تعلم اللغة الانكليزية وكيف ممكن ان تخدم العملية التعليمية والتربوية. كما أن سبب اختيار صور المنهج هو أنه بسبب تأثيرها الفعال في العملية التعليمية حيث ممكن ان تجذب اهتمام الطالب من خلال الألوان، العلامات والرموز. وبالتالي، فإن موضوع هذه الدراسة يمكن أن يحظى باهتمام الطلاب وبالنتيجة سيتعلم ليس فقط كلمات وإنما تطوير النحو ودروس تربوية واخلاقية. يتم اختيار الدراسة السيميائية لأنه العلم الذي يهتم

بدراسة الرموز ووظائفها .

الكلمات المفتاحية : السيميائية ، الاهمية ، الصور، الانكليزي ، العراق ، المنهج

## 1. Introduction

The study illustrates the semiotics strategies employed by the images which are added in Iraqi English curricula. As well as, it shows the importance of images in teaching operation especially in teaching foreign language.

Images consist of some paralinguistic features which can convey additional meanings and their presence can make a type of ambiguity in which it cannot be perceived by public matters, audience, or any other people. The purpose of this study is to recognize the purpose of addition images within curricula and analysis some of phrases which are accompanied images semiotically. People tend to trust that images which reflect truth better than words (Thorson & Mendelson, 2001).

### 1.1 Questions of the Article

1. How can images reflect meanings rather than words?
2. What is the effect of images in teaching English language of iraqi curriculum?

## 2. Semiotics and Linguistics

There are many different views about the relationship between semiotics and linguistics. One view, is that semiotics and linguistics are two mutually exclusive disciplines. This view is termed by Guiraud (1971: 1; cited in Nöth, 1990: 229) as following:

Semiology is the science which studies sign systems: language, codes, sets of signals, etc. According to this definition, language is part of semiology. However, it is generally accepted that language has a privileged and autonomous status, and this allows semiology to be defined as the study of non-linguistics sign systems.

De Saussure (1959) has another point of view in which linguistics is only a field of the general science of semiology. Many other semioticians and linguists have the same view of Saussure. Carnap (1942:13) defines linguistics as “the descriptive, empirical part of semiotic (of spoken or written languages...)”. Furthermore, the principles and rules of semiotics employ to the study of normal languages and to other sign systems. Therefore, linguistics must be regarded as a part of semiotics (Shaumyan, 1987).

On the other hand, The French semiotician Barthes assume a different point of view in which semiology is just a field of linguistics. He points that language is the truth on which the semiologist always relies not only the main instance of a semiological method so that semiology is actually a branch of an inclusive linguistics (Culler,1983). As well as, Barthes explains that the linguistic model is the most inclusive and appropriate model for explaining the meaning of signs and how they function, so semiology cannot avoid it (Allen, 2003).

### 2.1 The Importance of Semiotics

Allen (2000) explains that one of semiotic contributions has been to focus attention upon and develop a vocabulary to describe the operation of symbol systems, their interrelationships, and their effects on the way we understand the physical and social worlds we inhabit. Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) states that semiotics assists in considering how meanings are made and transferred. It has the potential to serve a significant support role in the study of communication.

## **2.2 The Concept of Image**

Mitchell (1986) suggests many kinds of images. They are classified into five various categories: *Graphics* (images, statues, designs); *visual* (mirrors, projections); *Perceptual* (sense data, appearances of species); *Mental* (dreams, memories, thoughts, phantasms); *Verbal* (metaphor, description). He claims that the first two categories are a specific, suitable, or literal context named by the word and the last two types involve some broad, symbolic, or unsuitable usage of the term.

## **3. The Model of the Study**

This study is based on specific framework in which Barthes's interpretation of semiotics and Eco theory that can be explained.

### **3.1 Barthes' approach (1977)**

Barthes (1977) argues that with the use of both words and images, ideological messages are often communicated. In this situation, it is the image which retains communicative priority. The image no more demonstrates the words but the words structurally are parasitic on the image. Then, any linguistic text that goes together with an image or images can not be read in its own way. Hence, it obtains its meanings from the image itself, they inevitably must be decoded regarding the image or images.

Barthes (1977) considers that the function of semiotics as one that reveals the hidden ideological constituents in the scope of the production of signs. In order to do such thing, Barthes figures out certain aspects in which the analyst must concentrate on: the denotative and connotative stages of the image or text as seen below:

#### **1. The Denotative Meaning**

Barthes (1977) explains denotation as the exact and literal meaning of a word or an image.

#### **2. The Connotative Meaning**

Connotation is considered as the tone of the text according to Barthes in the manner which is decorated. The '*fragment of an ideology*', and a '*rhetoric*' are the essence of a '*connotative sign*'. A linguistic text's connotative meaning is correlated with the corresponding image(s), in the way which the sign is encoded with ideological content; and the way which the message is likely to be understood or interpreted by the readers/viewers due to their cultural knowledge. (Krampen, 1987).

To the extent that the current study is concerned, according to the model that has been used in this study, Barthes explains that the language and the image, have a relationship which is a complementary relation. Complementary relationship between text and image means that what are expressed in images and what are represented in terms or words is different but has a complementary relationship between them. Images complement the interpretations of the words, or the words enlarge on the images therefore each one of the two modes contains additional information that the other mode may lack. The rhetoric viewpoint on images is interested in the responses of the viewers to the images. The colours, lines, texture, and angles, are all contribute to a mental experience of the image. Visual rhetoric is an inventive branch of knowledge; it is only till 1970 in which the genre of visual rhetoric has been used to be portion of the study of rhetoric (Sloan et al., 1971).

### 3.2 Eco's Approach (2003)

Eco (2003) mentions that the image or the text is needed to dismantle into its component elements by the analyst with counting the denotative and the connotative elements. So that, the image or the text must be broken down into macro and micro propositions by the analyst, as seen below:

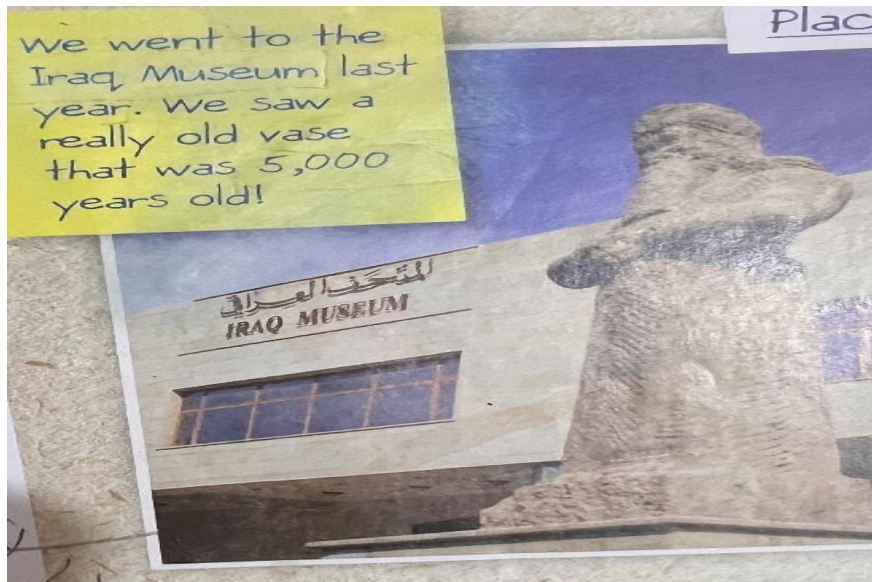
**a. Macro-Propositions:** Macro-Propositions indicate the dominant issues of the image or the text. What the writer intends to clarify is these macro-propositions and to specify the complete meaning of the image or the text.

**b. Micro-Propositions:** Micro-propositions include the sentences that preserve a particular meaning or values, units of the image and with each other they make up the detailed contents. They also refer to elements of the image that together shape the macro-propositions.

Furthermore, the association of the viewer to the scene in the image can be decreased by the angle at which it is captured. So, from an oblique angle, all activities are viewed. Any image captured at a specific angle separates the viewer from the action that is being viewed. The subject is related to the camera location. Hence, the subject which is chosen from a low angle looks as possessing more power whereas those which are taken from a high angle seem to be observed as powerless (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1999).

### 4. Semiotic Analysis of the Image Number (1)

The visual semiotic analysis of the text of image number1 according to Barthes (1977) and Eco (2003). The image is selected from the curriculum of first class of intermediate study.



### Project 3 : My experience. page 52

#### A. Identifying the Macro Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meanings of the Text;

**The author:** *' We went to the Iraq Museum last year. We saw a really old vase that was 5.000 years old!*

On the denotative level of analysis text, it is said by the author to Iraqi students. He starts by saying "We ", the explicit meaning, it is a subject pronoun which means more than one. Speaking about " Went to Iraq Museum", it means that the sentence is in the past simple tense. Literally speaking of the word "Museum" is a building in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are stored and exhibited. These objects have been known since a long time in past. Then, he adds the phrase" A really old vase" which means that they saw a very ancient object like a "Vase". The literal meaning of the word "Vase" is a decorative container, typically made of glass or metal and used as an ornament or for displaying cut flowers. Moreover, he adds," 5.000 years old", the explicit meaning is that it is a number. The number points to the ancient times.

On the connotative level of analysis, first the text is started by "We", the implicit meaning is that they are more than one in which they visited a very importance place. This place reflects the civilization of Iraq. The past tense is used to confirm that the museum contains a very ancient objects. Second, the connotative meaning of the sentence; "A really old vase " is that to get students' attention to the new vocabularies, tense, opposites, phrases and irregular verbs. So, the students can learn something of language during reading such text. In addition, the purpose of this text, is to learn language by drawing the student's attention to things that he likes or enjoys.

## **B. Identifying the Macro Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meanings of the Image;**

Analyzing the denotative meaning, the image is captured horizontally representing the main act exactly. The lighting is very perfect reflecting that it is in the daytime because of the sunshine. The fronting angle of the image expresses the power of the men in it to get the viewer's attention. As well as, the time of the image is at daytime so, sunlight is very bright. Generally speaking, the place is at the gate of Iraq Museum and the statue reflects the place itself.

Pinpointing the connotative message, this image has some implied meanings can be interpreted. It seems that the statue belongs to one of Iraqi ancient civils and as if he was a king. Standing in such a way gives the observers many signs such as praying, controlling situation, pride or prestige.

Regarding the relationship between the text and the image, there is a complementary relationship between them because the text clarifies the act of the image.

**Table 4.1**

*The Micro Analysis of the Identification, Meanings, and Types of the Signs;*

<b>No.</b>	<b>The Identification of the Signs</b>	<b>The Denotative Meanings and the Types of the Signs</b>	<b>The Connotative Meanings and the Types of the Signs</b>
1	Location	Iraq Museum	Country
2	Vase	Status	Civil -Symbolic
3	Place	Building in Baghdad	City –Symbolic
4	Brown and off white	Colors	Ancient- Symbolic
5	Lights	Sun Shining - Iconic	Daytime - Symbolic
6	Text	Visiting – Iconic	Joy – Symbolic

### **4.1. Semiotic Analysis of the Image Number (2)**

The visual semiotic analysis of the text of image number2 according to Barthes (1977) and Eco (2003). The image is selected from the curriculum of first class of intermediate study.



### Lesson 8 : Road safety. Page 71

#### A. Identifying the Macro Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meanings of the Text.

##### *Pavement*

##### *zebra crossing*

On the denotative level of analysis, the literal meaning of these captions; first, the noun "pavement" means any paved area or surface. Second, the phrase "zebra crossing", its meaning is a road for people to cross.

On the connotative level of analysis, he presents his knowledge in which the implicit meaning of these captions is that: first, 'pavement' the implication is that the sidewalk is intended for pedestrians of people and things to do shopping or walking. Second, 'zebra crossing' the implication that is necessary to cross to the other side of this road which is intended for crossing people and things. Where we all know that it is a safe road, with clear lines to show people that they can cross safely.

#### B. Identifying the Macro Analysis of the Denotative and Connotative Meanings of the Image;

While viewing this image, the denotative meaning is there is a woman with a child, carrying things, and crossing from the road designated for crossing. Also, there is a man crossing from the outside the area of the road designated for crossing, as this act has confused the driver of the white car. In addition, there are two women who crossed far from the safety road. Moreover, there are two children playing football, and the ball went towards the main street.

On the connotative level of analysis, as the researcher interprets the signs of the image and finds out the explicit messages according to denotative level of analysis, the signs according to connotative level of analysis should be interpreted and reveal the implicit messages in the image. So the author shows some implicit signs. These signs indicate that the

necessity of crossing the road to the other side must be on the zebra crossing and he shows the danger of playing in such street. He wants to give advice to students to be careful in such situation. He gives them a lesson not only educational but a moral lesson also. Each one should be aware of the rules of safety and teach them to his family. Playing football in a public street is not something convenient, it can cause accident. Crossing street must be subject to traffic laws, as well as driving is an art and respect. In addition to the moral lesson that the writer wanted to give, there is an educational lesson. Teaching language would be more easy by using images with captions. So the student will benefit and learn more vocabularies.

Regarding the relationship between the text and the image, it is a complementary relationship because of the place and the consistency between them are the same.

**Table 4.2**

*The Micro Analysis of the Identification, Meanings, and Types of the Signs;*

No.	The Identification of the Signs	The Denotative Meanings and the Types of the Signs	The Connotative Meanings and the Types of the Signs
1	Location	Street	City
2	Children	Unknown	Innocence -Symbolic
3	Men	Crossing	Careless –Symbolic
4	Woman	Crossing	Careful
5	Football	Playing - Iconic	Sport - Symbolic
6	Lights	Sun Shining - Iconic	Daytime - Symbolic
7	Zebra crossing	Public Street – Iconic	Safety – Symbolic
8	Traffic light	Red and green – Iconic	Guidance sign -Symbolic
9	Cars	Transport	Danger- Symbolic

### **5. Findings of Research Question 1**

According to the first question of this research in which it aims to answer first:

How can images reflect meanings rather than words?

First it is important to mention that the author tries to show that images are important just as words. As seen, he adds images that can be interpreted. The first image shows the importance of Iraqi ancient civilizations and get students' attentions to such thing. His purpose is to make students learn language and to have knowledge about their country indirectly. As well as, he may encourage them to visit such important places. The second image has a lot of thing that can be interpreted. It gives instructions, moral and social lesson. As if it gives advice or request such as :1- Don't play football in public streets. 2- Cross on

the zebra crossing. Students can make many new useful sentences by looking at this image. Looking and Thinking in this way can increase the student's vocabularies, enhance their abilities to conclude, developing their grammar, encourage them to be imaginative and form new sentences.

### **5. 1 Finding of Research Qusetion2**

What is the effect of images in teaching English language of Iraqi curriculum?

According to the second question of the study that concerns with learning language. By looking at image, student can conclude something about the topic and then check his conclusion. In truth, images can enhance students' background knowledge and comprehension. So, students can learn more vocabularies and would be interested in learning foreign language. As a result, different colors may attract students' attentions, they would be interested and enjoyed.

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