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## A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Iraqi 2021 Parliamentary Election on the BBC Internet Platform

### A B S T R A C T

One of the most significant shifts in Iraq's political regime was the parliamentary elections in 2021 with the election of a new prime minister. Massive demonstrations over government corruption and political parties' failure to enact measures to rein such corruption through legislative elections. It was possible that a new poll law might help the independent candidates in their efforts to secure a seat in the parliament. To explore this issue, the current study has employed two models: visual social semiotics of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) and Bednarek (2006) to analyze the visuals of Election Day and the evaluations of news values. The visuals convey representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings, while the verbal texts are analyzed according to their evaluation characteristics. To demonstrate the different facets of election day that can be captured in the images chosen for the study on the BBC, the vocal text strives to explain how it relates to the visual style. Attempts have also been made to determine how the election day would be portrayed in the writer's news report for BBC. The results have demonstrated that the most significant aspects of election day could be reflected in the visual and spoken modes of BBC's less upbeat portrayal of Iraqi conditions which has been clear from this report.

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## تحليل خطاب متعدد النماذج للانتخابات البرلمانية العراقية لعام 2021 على المنصة الإلكترونية لأذاعه البي بي سي

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### المستخلص

تمثل الانتخابات البرلمانية العراقية لعام 2021 احدى نقاط التحول في الحياة السياسية حيث يتم فيها انتخاب حكومة جديدة تقود البلاد بعد موجات عارمة من المظاهرات احتجاجا على الفساد الإداري ونقص الخدمات الذي كان يشوب الحكومة السابقة ، فضلا عن فشل الأحزاب السياسية باتخاذ اجراءات من شأنها كبح جماح ذلك الفساد . كان هدف ذلك المظاهرات هو تخليص البلاد من الفساد وتوفير الخدمات وذلك من خلال الانتخابات المبكرة التي تتيح لمرشحين مستقلين الحصول على مقاعد في البرلمان قد تمكنهم من تعديل بعض القوانين وبالتالي تشريع قوانين انتخابية جديدة . تحاول الدراسة الحالية تسليط الضوء على ذلك الموضوع من خلال توظيف اثنين من نماذج التحليل وهي : النموذج السيميائي البصري - الاجتماعي لـ (كريس وفان لوين، 2006) ونموذج بدنارك ، (2006) لتحليل بعض من صور يوم الاقتراع ، فضلا عن تقييم الأخبار المتناقلة عبر منصة اذاعة البي بي سي الإلكترونية . أظهرت النتائج التي توصلت اليها الدراسة الحالية الى امكانية أن تنعكس الجوانب ليوم الاقتراع في الأنماط البصرية (المنظورة) فضلا عن تلك المرتبطة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اذاعة البي بي سي ، الانتخابات البرلمانية العراقية ، معايير التقييم ، السيميائية البصرية - الاجتماعية

### 1. Introduction

Electoral processes like those used in representative regimes are crucial in determining the composition of parliaments. Each four-year term, candidates for the Iraqi parliament vie for a position in the 329 available parliamentary seats. An important topic for the Iraqi people is the upcoming election of Iraq's representatives, which takes place on October 10. In April 2003, the ex- regime was toppled, resulting in the lowest voter participation since that time. In the year 2021, supporters of independent candidates hope to drive away the ruling parties. overcome societal division, public disillusion and cronyism as well as state incompetence that resulted from the struggle against ISIS (Henningsen, 2019).

The deprived areas in the south and middle of Iraq, where ruling parties' adherents and voters congregate, have been rocked by massive protests, and this election has been seen as a turning point in Iraqi politics. Many of the protesters who took to the streets in 2019 were killed and injured. According to UN statistics, more than 500 hundred activists have been slain as a result of cruel methods, and the offender is still at large.. Iraq's economy is another motivator, and the voters hope that new laws will be put in place to deal with Iraq's faltering industrial and agricultural sectors. (British Broadcasting Corporation, henceforth, BBC 2021).

The BBC's website is one of the most trustworthy sources of news around the world. As a result, it has a long history on the Internet, dating back to at least 1994. According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2018, p. 130), the BBC's reputation for impartiality and fairness in its reporting has always been a significant influence in attracting the public's attention. The BBC provides its multilingual services via television and the internet, as well as via radio stations.

Negative feelings have not always been associated with BBC. One of the most prominent journalists in Britain, Jermeý Paxman, attacked it for its "fawning tone of voice" in its coverage of royal events, including Princess Diana's death in 2002. A (Dowell, 2008). The death of Princess Dian is a constant reference point for those who believe the BBC and the British royal family are in cahoots. This decision was made in accordance with Queen Elizabeth II's icy demeanor toward the Princess's death, which the BBC chose to ignore in its broadcast of the incident. The next year, (King & Beveridge, 2009). BBC has also been attacked for its coverage of international events, which has led to allegations of distortion and misrepresentation. A reporter named Andrew Gilligan falsely reported in 2003 during the Iraq War that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction as part of the Blair administration's media war practice (Briggs & Burke, 2010).

Visual grammar of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) and a parameter-based framework for evaluation of Bednarek (2006) can be used to incorporate the newspaper environment into the study (2006). Semiotically, news photographs can be understood as visual images that can convey representational, interpersonal, and compositional meanings. Using the paradigm of visual grammar, the contexts, the direction, the condition of the events, the surrounded situations, and other premises of the visual images may be evaluated qualitatively. A quantitative approach was offered by Bednarek (2006) in order to cope with journalistic viewpoints. Based on how the news article's author employed sets of values expressed in language to evaluate the world, Bednarek devised evaluative parameters. The study will take the form of a multimodal discourse analysis. To convey a variety of meanings and messages, news organizations use a variety of functional modes. It is possible to build a composite interaction in a society by incorporating the meanings of multiple semiotic modes (Prior, 2014).

## **2. The Problem**

As a social field, news is part of the larger transdisciplinary discourse framework. In the social realm, Van Dijk develops a transdisciplinary discourse. Text and speaking are examined in terms of their social, political and cultural contexts in multidisciplinary discourse, which is a field in the humanities as well as in the social sciences" ( Van Dijk , 2018, p. 12 ). Broadcast platforms' discursive operations are referred to as news in media discourse. Written and spoken media discourse are the two most common forms in the media (Machin & Van Leeuwen, 2007). Scholars like Jasim (2020), Anitasari (2018), and Waqas, Muneer, and Iqbal (2018, 2019) study media discourse (2021). They all ignored the visual meaning of media pictures and relied only on critical discourse theory. Stylistic and practice-focused approaches to media discourse are also available. An integrated contextual interaction between visual semiotics and parameters-based approaches to language is the focus of current research. The current research aims to highlight how the photographs selected can represent a wide range of perspectives on the election day. It also aims to clarify how the BBC's vocal text might match with the visual mannerisms, as well. It also tries to figure out how the BBC's news writer sees the day of the polls in relation to their own. The following questions are examined in this research:

1. How can the photographs be used to show all sides of the election?
2. How do the BBC's verbal and visual modes interact?
3. What does the election day signify in the writer's opinion of BBC news?

The method of analysis relies on a hybrid research technique that employs qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate the meaning of images and written words.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The analysis is limited to the BBC's coverage of Iraq's parliamentary election day in 2021, as broadcast on <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-58826391> on October 10, 2021. The quantitative observation shows the following numbers of the data of analysis:

1. The total number of photos is four
2. The word count of the news manuscript is 576
3. The primary headline's word count is ten
4. The total number of words in the secondary headline is twenty -
- 5- The total amount of words in the captions for the photos is 53.

In this study, economic, social, and political signals and meanings are examined because they form the foundation of the news story. "Economic variables, like cultural and political issues, also impact foreign news choices", states Graber and Dunaway (2021, P. 317). "societal constraints induce common patterns in news selection, while media selectivity along ideological lines is on the rise", they write in the latter sections (P. 356).

### **4- Parameters-Based Approach Theory**

The BBC's coverage of the news both domestically and internationally is an example of how the parameters-based approach philosophy of evaluation can be applied. As Bednarek (2006) stated on page (5), "Such research would assist to question traditional beliefs about the objectivity of news discourse, which is one of the most common misconceptions about journalism". The proponents of the concept that the BBC reflects the non-bias values of the media may be frustrated by numerous evidences and notes. The BBC's coverage of the situation in Iraq before to 2003 presupposes a monocular perspective. "The BBC only broadcasts negative news about Iraq, and never positive news." This is a quote from a 2005 review by members of the British House of Lords of the Corporation of the House of Lords. Bednarek (2006) chose an approach to analysis based on evaluation parameters because of the assumption of non-objectivity, the assessment of language as a rich new source for analysis, and the evaluation of speech values that can be translated into elements of the personal characters. Using evaluative parameters is a way for speakers to convey along their opinions about people, circumstances, and objects. As a part of speech evaluation, it is possible to find the speakers' beliefs through their own spoken or written words. It is possible to apply Bednarek's (2006) definition of "assessment" to analyze the ideological orientation of the

speaker or writer by examining their attitudes, stances, perspectives, and sentiments. (2006, p. 3). According to Francis (1995), speakers and writers can investigate features of the world as a viewpoint through the practice of values and opinions of the language they employ. Variations in evaluative parameters and sub-values are possible, according to Bednarek (2010, p. 35-37).

**Table 1**

*Bednarek's evaluative parameters (Bednarek, 2010:35-37)*

<b>Evaluative Parameter</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Sub-values</b>
Comprehensibility	How comprehensible, or easy, or How incomprehensible or difficult, Does this appear?	Plain, clear, mysterious, unclear
Emotivity	How positive or how negative does this appear?	Positive, negative
Expectedness	How expected or unexpected does this appear?	Expected, unexpected, contrast comparison
Importance	How important or how unimportant Does this appear?	Key, major, minor, slightly
Genuineness	How real, true, and authentic, or how fake, false, and artificial, does this appear?	True, false, real
Possibility	How possible or how impossible Does this appear?	Possible, not possible
Necessity	How necessary or how unnecessary does this appear?	Necessary, not necessary
Reliability	How likely or how unlikely does it appear ?	Genuine, fake
Causality	What are the reasons and what are The consequences ?	Because, consequently
Source (Evidentiality)	How do we Know?	Know, feel
Sourcing (Style )	How was it said by sources ?	
Mental state	What mental state is attributed to news actors ?	Believe, think, convinced, assume, accept, know, fear, yearn, love, hope, anxiety, concerns for, appalled, furious, troubled, cheered, happy, pleasure, enraged, panic, force, willing to, intend to, want to, refuse to

## 5- Visual Social Semiotics

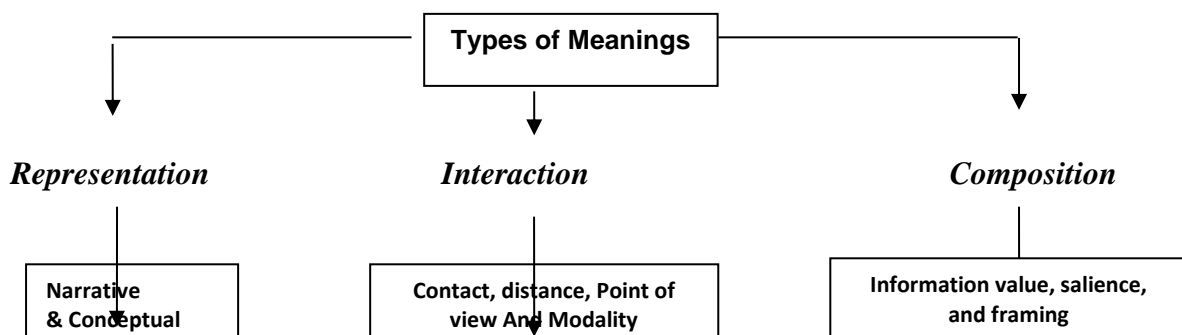
The authenticity of the visual representations is questioned because of the technical advancement that defined the years after 1990, particularly in the digital sphere, such as the mass development in the shape and uses of portable computers and cellular phones. It is the usage of several visual modalities that lends authenticity to the visuals. " The rise of multimodality by the ease of using more than one mode, like colors, written language, layouts, the states of the depicted things, different style fonts, and other modes, make the visual image as a standpoint for consensus knowledge and social interaction," wrote Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006, p. 23).

Visual images and their discursive properties have been utilized by many scholars to allude to their ability to build consensus knowledge and social interaction as orientated instruments that are directed to the audience (Shei, 2019, p.66, and (Berger, 2019, p.198), and (Ibiley, 2018, p. 242). Visual social semiotics, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), is the interpretation and study of the content within an image and the audience. – It provides a slew of new methods for discerning the messages hidden in visual information. The selected photos' socio-cultural environment influences the interpretive process.

Representational, interactive, and compositional meanings are the three main categories into which the visual material with can be categorized, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). These three meanings are broken down into subcategories that allow for a more in-depth examination of each of the three categories. In either an abstract or concrete way, "representational" refers to reality. The narrative and conceptual subcategories can then be split down further. Narrative is a term that refers to the events that take place within an image, whether they are active or passive. The classification, definition, and analysis of concepts are provided by conceptual. Interactive Four dimensions of visual material; contact, distance, point of view, and modality, all contribute to the meaning of the visual material. An image's "offer" or "demand" is defined as a special relationship between the spectator and the performers. There are three different types of distances: close up, medium and long. The angle of the horizontal and vertical axes, as well as the attitude and amount of involvement of the actor, are all reflected in the Point of View. The image's modality tells us something about its truth. Information value, framing, and salience are all examples of compositional features. As a starting point for organizing information, information value provides a framework. The ideal information is located at the top of the image, while the actual information is located at the bottom of the image. Right-hand side holds new information, whereas left-hand side holds information that is already known. The centre of the image is typically used to display information that helps to bind the rest of the image. These three aspects of a picture are all related: framing, salience, and modality, or how an image appears to the viewer. It can be broken down like this:

**Figure 1**

*The meanings of visual images ( Adapted from Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006)*



## 6 - Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis based on the evaluation parameters demonstrates that the following methodological decisions were made. : The BBC

webpage is an example of this type

The outlet: The BBC's Internet home page .

The output: The BBC homepage's top stories on the internet on 10/10/2021 .

Language study reveals the following inquiries into the language of the headlines, image captions, and political, social, and economic experiences:

<i>Evaluative Parameter</i>	<i>Occurrences of Evaluative Words</i>	<i>The Used Words</i>
Comprehensibility	4	Killed <sup>2</sup> , estimated, , poor
Emotivity	3	corrupted, killed, hoped
Expectedness	5	predicated, but <sup>3</sup> , expected
Importance	4	Voted, independent, dominated, subsided
Genuineness	-	-
Possibility	2	allowed, easier
Necessity	1	safest
Reliability	-	-
Causality	2	Because <sup>2</sup>
Source (Evidentiality)		
Sourcing (Style )	2	told, urged
Mental state	2	hoped, wanted

Election day's circumstances are reflected in the following evaluation categories:

"The poll had been scheduled for next year, but it was pushed forward six months in response to the political turbulence, which resulted in hundreds of deaths", provides an overview of the election's social, political, and economic contexts

A political system that did not reflect the positive tenacity of the new political blood has been replaced with one that supports independent candidates and encourages them to run for office. Iraqi lawmakers' opinions on legislative authority and the BBC's classification of all powerful parties as improper and detrimental were viewed as a forceful denunciation by the BBC. However, it is projected that the big ruling blocs would win the majority of seats. When Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown and replaced by an ethnic and religious power-sharing system in 2003, a small elite remained in charge and encouraged corruption "Since then, they have dominated parliament.

It's also worth noting that "Demonstrators continued to demonstrate after the resignation of then-Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi's administration within weeks.

The United Nations and the United States have a positive obligation to work with Iraq's supreme religious leadership in their international duties. "The safest road" to a "future that is, to be better than the past," Grand Ayatollah Ali as-Sistani told Iraq's 25 million eligible voters to cast their ballots. His opinions have been mirrored by the United Nations, the United States, and Europe. Analysis of visual social semiotics of the images employed demonstrates that the editor of news about Iraq on the day of parliamentary elections relies on narrative visuals in the level of representative meaning. In visual social semiotics, *transitus* refers to the collecting of more than one image of the same kind, the type that allows for the creation of a tale (the narrative images) about the same instance. As a result, this technique relies on the idea that using images of the same type might change the manner in which a story is told. Mediological and ideological issues must be taken into account when using this technique. Cultural and social contexts are taken into account while creating narrative images in "the field of mediology," which deals with "cultural transmission." The ideology of the selected photographs is influenced by the BBC's unified approach to reporting on the political news in the Middle East and Iraq in particular. Politics and other behaviours are constantly scrutinized by the public and foreign watchdogs. Using arrows in the photographs emphasizes the importance of the foreground and the salience of the visual. Images 1 and 2 reflect a non-transactional reaction of action in the narrative image. The elements of the foreground mirror a general view about the Iraqi electoral circumstances. Image 1 is the "event photo" and is used to create the event, so it is placed in the first place in the sequence of the story as the image of the main headlines. It is the resulting image as the second image which constitutes the image of reason. The images create a story to correspond the way of the sequence of the verbal text. The interpersonal meaning of image 1 shows an offer meaning. It offers the election occasion in a plain clear way, the people and the political candidates, although the single human element in the foreground does not seem as a part of the election. There is a separation that can be recognized by the horizontal angle of the camera between the moved element "the woman" and the political process "The images of the candidates" and here, the separation does not weaken the aim of the selected images. The compositional meaning does not distract attention and the close shot for the woman and the background are constructed well to mirror the occasion visually.

The representational meaning of image 2 is heightened to reflect the manner and atmosphere of the 2021 election. As a non-transactional reaction to action, this non-transactional view creates an event-based narrative by bringing all of the pieces of the images together. The role of the Iraqi people was limited to that of a voter because of the context. The demonstrators are attended to on an emotional level by the interpersonal level. Demonstrators are kept at a safe distance from the public. Compositionally, the photographs of murdered activists take up the most prominent place.

Image 1

Image 2



Reactor  
(Epicenter of Salience )



Reactor  
(Epicenter of Salience )



Goal

Reactor

Image 3 (Epicenter of Salience )

Images 1 and 2 were created as a tribute to the Iraqi people and to demonstrate the link between the early holding of the legislative elections and the subsequent wave of anti-corruption and anti-living-conditions demonstrations. A different role is played by Image 3 on Election Day. It depicts how the election is being monitored throughout the world. The visuals are meant to elicit a transactional reaction from the viewer on a representational level. View and concept are generalized by actor and goal. Poll day's digital tools are observed by the international community, which is represented by the blonde woman in the foreground of the photo. There are elements in each image that fulfill this purpose, which is why they are presented as informational objects that can be scrutinized objectively by the spectator. Using simple visual approaches like the horizontal angle and close shots, the practical reasons for the inclusion of elements in photos can be discovered. The compositional meaning places the international community woman in the centre of attention because of the information value and relevance of the subject matter.

## 7 - Conclusions

This section presents the answers to the research questions. The findings to the first question, which reads:

- *How can the selected images represent sides of the electoral day?*

show that the selection of the images has depended on adopting the narrative meaning. The narrative images have the ability to recognize on large parts of the intended event because the narrative motivates the receivers to realize the visual modes with a fictional mentality. The second approach of the selected images takes the Election Day and its background (the mass protests of 2019) as a unified block on the level of the aims of event and the messages. The reason for bringing the election six months before its original fixed date and the event present general feelings and messages depending on the same reaction process the (non-transactional). The third image visualizes another different meaning and it was aimed to show the reliant responsible (the international community) and the responsibility which is the digital tool for the reading of the poll paper to be a proper metaphor. The relief message can be transmitted to the people indoor and to the international community.

The findings concerning the second question, which reads:

-*How do the verbal texts on BBC correspond to the visual modes?*

illustrate that, the intentions of the visual modes relied on recognizing the most important circumstances of the electoral practice. The substantial sides are the elections itself (the result), the mass protests of 2019 (the reason) and the law that protects the election (the international community). The connotations of the visual images correspond to the language of the text and each image was verbalized by the selected written language. The cold, directed message of the election image correspond to the language that is used to express about the election itself as in this part "Iraqis have voted in the first parliamentary election since mass protests over **corruption**, **unemployment** and **poor services** erupted in 2019". on the other side the, image of the protest was dramatized verbally as in

"Mustafa al-Kadhimi promised to find solutions to Iraq's **crises** when he became prime minister in May 2020, but he has failed to address the protesters' main **grievances**". The meanings of the third image which refer to the fair competition and the respected observations were verbalized by the written text, " European Union and United Nations observers are monitoring the election ".

The findings to the third question, which reads:

*How does the poll day represent according to the opinion of the writer of the news of BBC?*

tell us that the evaluative parameters express a less optimistic view about the future of Iraqi people and their political system. The evaluative parameters rail some of the dominating parties and ignoring other parties, although they together constitute the government. The negative findings on the level of evaluation rise in comprehensibility, expectedness and importance. These parameters step down a negative direction about the circumstances of the election and

Iraq. The other parameters like importance and sourcing reflect very little positive visions about the international observation and on a lesser degree about the authority procedures. The social, political and economic situations of Iraq were also reflected in a general manner although the focus must be mainly on the poll day. These sides were also verbalized in a negative way through the categories of evaluation.

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