

## Towards an Ample Comprehension of Creativity in Multimodal Discourse: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Political Caricatures

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### **Abstract:**

Over the last years, creativity has gained great value in all spheres related to language use, in discourse and multimodal discourse studies for example. Therefore, this study examines the close relationship between creativity and multimodal discourse through the analysis of three political caricatures published during 2019's Algerian protests in the Algerian newspaper "El-bilad", following Peirce's triadic model of sign (1903) and multimodal discourse analysis. The results of the analysis reveal that the caricaturist has creatively used various signs to accentuate the meaning of the drawings; thus, it can be observed that any multimodal discourse is contingent upon the notion of creativity.

**Keywords:** Creativity; Multimodal discourse; Multimodal discourse analysis; Caricatures.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Creativity is markedly captivating the attention of scholars in different domains of inquiry. The relationship between creativity and language has gained considerable interest across disciplines, especially in discourse studies, due to the flexible nature of language which enables it to be examined from the lens of creativity. More importantly, the use of language is no longer restricted to the oral and written modes of the language, but has broadened its scope to cover the multimodal discourse, i.e., the discourse constructed through various semiotic resources. The construction of multimodal discourse calls for the innovative employment of semiotic resources, the fact that supported the examination of multimodal discourse along with creativity which will be the core of this endeavour.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Recently, many linguists have shifted their attention to the analysis of multimodal discourses, especially images as a genre of discourse. Multimodal discourse is interwoven into many aspects of human life, a few to mention are creativity, ideology dissemination, social construction and reconstruction, and so on. Thus, examining the relationship between multimodal discourse and creativity has become an overriding concern. Creativity in multimodal discourse can be engendered in the creation of visual works, namely, caricatures, advertisements, paintings, and digital memes. Therefore, it is worth examining how creativity is inculcated in these visuals, especially caricatures which will be the focus of this endeavour. It is worth noting that the caricatures to be analyzed in this study are political ones. They were published in the Algerian newspaper “EL-bilad” in 2019 after the massive protests that took place back then against the government and political system.

### **1.2 Objective and Questions of Research**

The present research examines the interconnectedness between creativity and multimodal discourse, in general, and the interlink between creativity and caricatures, in particular. To achieve this aim, the following research questions require meticulous answers:

- 1) What is the relationship between multimodal discourse and creativity?
- 2) Are caricatures as multimodal discourses contingent upon the notion of creativity?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Creativity**

Creativity is inextricably associated with every sphere of human life. This multi-faceted concept, thus, cannot lend itself to one definition due to its approachability from different perspectives. Creativity in its seminal sense is deemed to be a personality trait possessed by special people who have got some creative abilities in contrast to others (Guilford, 1950, p.444). In more contemporary terms, creativity is defined by Amabile as, “the production of novel, appropriate ideas in any realm of human activity, from science, to the

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arts, to education to everyday life. The ideas must be novel...but they can't be simply bizarre; they must be appropriate to the problem" (1997, p.40).

Moreover, creativity is classified into two main species, namely, psychological and historical creativity. Psychological creativity, or simply P creativity, stands for one's ability to produce a novel idea, for him, even if many have produced it before. Whilst historical creativity, H creativity, refers to the production of an idea that has never been produced by others in the course of history (Boden, 2004, p.2). Historical creativity is deemed to be a creativity of eminent and influential works on human life, scientific innovations for example. Whereas psychological creativity is pertinent to everyday life creativity of finding solutions to problems, for instance (Jones, 2014, p.2).

Creativity is multi-dimensional, it covers the "novelty dimension" and "the usefulness dimension". The ideas categorized under the dimension of "novelty" are regarded as creative and unique compared to already existing ones even if they are not yet practically realised. By contrast, ideas that are classified under the notion of "usefulness" are those that contribute positively to the context they are applied to (Shally et al., 2004, p.934). It is worth noting that creativity does not necessarily mean innovation as the former refers to the production of new ideas while the latter refers to the actual application of those ideas in a given context (p.934).

Creativity is approached from two main standpoints: the product-based and the process-based approaches. The product-based approach to creativity, on the one hand, views creativity as a mere production of different works, for example, art and literary works regardless of the steps taken to achieve the target. This approach is outcome-oriented. The process-based approach to creativity, on the other hand, sees creativity as both a psychological process taking part in the mind of the individual and systematic interaction between that individual and his social and cultural environment (Jones, 2014, p.3). The process-based approach considers creativity as an aspect of the individual's intelligence and a part of his consciousness as he could continually embark on some cognitive processes, namely, perception, conceptual thinking, and reflective self-criticism while performing a task (Boden, 2004, p.1).

The cruciality of creativity lies in its canons. As emphasized by Diliello & Houghton, both notions of "novelty" and "usefulness" gave more weight to creativity in human life; creativity generates scope for finding new ideas to solve convoluted problems and promotes both efficiencies and effectiveness in any domain (as cited in Al-abahneh, 2020, p.246). Moreover, creativity is solely based on two dominant principles which are "the problem-finding principle" and "the problem-solving principle". Kirton (1976) has subdivided the principle of problem-solving into adaptive and innovative principles. Whilst the adaptive principle stands for using the available resources to do things in an ameliorated manner, the innovative one emphasizes doing things distinctly (as cited in Herbig and Jacobs, 1996, p.64).

## **2.2 Discourse and Discourse Analysis**

Before one venture into a thorough discussion of multimodal discourse (MMD) and multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA), it would be better to fully discuss the notion of discourse first. The meaning of the term “discourse” differs from one linguist to another. Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2001) propose a specific definition of discourse, claiming that discourse does not refer only to the structural level of the language, but also refers to the meaning behind what is said or written (p. 1). The term discourse is often considered as the language that interlocutors use and how they use it in various social interactions. (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.1).

The term discourse is not restricted only to the linguistic level of language use, it also refers to the context where the discourse is displayed. For instance, the signs as discourse cannot be understood in isolation; rather they need a context to get their meaning (Keller, 2013, p.6). Interestingly, the word discourse can also be used as “text”. Hasan and Halliday (1976) define the text as any piece of language either spoken or written (p.1). Further, Van Dijk defines the term discourse as follows: “discourse usually refers to a form of language use, public speeches or more generally to spoken language or ways of speaking”. (1997, p.1).

Discourse analysis (DA) is an approach to the analysis of different genres of discourse. DA is the approach that deals with a variety of discourses at different levels of its usage, especially in daily life interactions. It provides a framework for the analysis of data obtained from social interactions, for example, media discourses, people’s talks, literary works, and any linguistic-related content published on the digital platforms (Hodges, Kuper & Reeves, 2008, p.570). The scope of DA is not only limited to the spoken interactions between people; rather it also deals with written and other modes of the language like the discourses in magazines, daily periodicals, and caricatures (McCarthy, 1991, p.12).

### **2.2.1 Multimodality and Multimodal Discourse**

Before defining the multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA), it is necessary to define what multimodality means. Multimodality, generally, refers to the multiple uses of modes of representation to strengthen the meaning, like semiotic signs, visuals, videos, and auditory representations (Paltridge, 2012, p.169).

The approach that studies the use of different modes of representations is multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA). MMDA examines multimodal materials. Thus, it deals with visual representations, gestures, and even auditory representations. Interestingly, it is hard to separate semiotics from MMDA because the modes that MMDA examines are purely semiotical and created through the use of signs (Kress, 2012, p.36).

It is hard to deny the relationship between social semiotics (SS) and MMDA. MMDA has emerged simultaneously with Halliday’s work on SS; MMDA views the different semiotic resources such as images and figures as the language used for communication. Therefore, MMDA attempts to deeply

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examine the various modalities and their communicative functions (Paltridge, 2012, p.170). In other words, MMDA functions as an approach to analysing the semiotic resources that aim at conveying meaning. Paltridge further states that MMDA is about “how multimodal texts are designed and how semiotic tools such as colour, framing, focus and positioning of elements contribute to the making of meaning in these texts” (2012, p.170).

MMDA is an approach to analysing the semiotic resources that are categorized under SS. SS refers to the study of both codes and functions of the resources at the societal level. Moreover, SS does not focus on the producer or the receiver of the semiotic code, but it is concerned with the production itself (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p.1). SS aims at answering questions related to the sort of meaning delivered through the modes, how their meaning is created and delivered, in what context and setting the modes are displayed, and the relationship between the modes and culture (Kress, 2010, p.57).

#### **2.2.2 Caricatures as Multimodal Discourses**

The verbal and nonverbal modes of communication are no longer the core of communication instead some alternatives have emerged as equally important to the traditional ones. Images start to be powerful mediums of delivery as Van Dijk (1995) argues that they are a form of discourse that embodies meaning (as cited in Vahid, 2012, p.38).

The caricature is an integral part of any newspaper or magazine. It provides a great deal of information about different issues. This amount of information is displayed in a humble image that takes small space on the last pages of any newspaper. Caricature, then, is defined as an inexact design that reflects certain matters with a distortion of the real portrayed objects or characters, but the meaning is perfectly conveyed (Perkins, 1975, p.1). Similarly, the caricature is a creative drawing that is used for the sake of criticizing a particular concern funnily. (Nepul & Jayaprekash, 2019, p.6).

#### **2.3 Creativity in Discourse**

Creativity as a focal feature in language use may be tailored into two distinct forms. The first one concerns the construction of discourse at the level of text, i.e., the creative choice of linguistic forms to create the text. The second form is based on the aim behind creating the discourse, i.e., the social function the discourse may perform. Advocates of discourse as an action-based entity view creativity as a variable that exists in the actions realized by the discourse and not in the linguistic level of the discourse itself, i.e., how language is strategically used instead of how language is aesthetically used (Jones, 2010).

The analysis of multimodal discourse from the standpoint of creativity may undertake different perspectives, few to mention are the cognitive and social perspectives. According to Koester (1969), creativity as a cognitive process lies in the act of combining unconnected objectives, signs, and ideas to create novel ones. However, connecting unconnected resources can not be upgraded to the qualities of a creative production unless the goal of creation is reached (as cited in Forceville, 2014, p.113). On the other end of the

continuum, creativity as a social process in MMD is determined by conditions of design, production, and distribution of the discourse. The design stands for the layout where the MMD is manifested in a particular social context. The production phase concerns itself almost exclusively with the embodiment of the semiotic resources in the design, and finally, the distribution phase is directed towards the different modes of distribution (Leeuwen, 2014).

### **3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

For the sake of fulfilling the aim of the research and answering its questions, a qualitative descriptive method is adopted to examine the political caricatures that were published during 2019's Algerian protests. This study relies upon Peirce's triadic model of signs (1903) and the MMDA to analyze the chosen caricatures. Peirce's triadic model identifies any semiotic resource as having both connotative and denotative meanings. The denotative meaning stands for the basic meaning of any resource, i.e., its dictionary meaning; while the connotative meaning concerns itself with the contextualized meaning (Merrell, 2005).

#### **3.1 Description of Data**

For the sake of fulfilling the aim of this research, eight caricatures are collected from which three are selected for analysis. The number of caricatures is selected intentionally to fulfil the criteria of conciseness. The political caricatures were published during 2019's Algerian protests in El-bilad newspaper. The caricaturist has used different semiotic resources to draw the caricatures; in addition to the use of colours, captions, and body language to build the meaning. He also relied on both visual and written modes of language to construct the drawings. The Arabic language is the only written mode used in the drawings. These caricatures are all drawn by the same artist whose name is always shown in the margin of each caricature.

#### **3.2 Procedures of Data Analysis**

For an accurate analysis of caricatures, the three caricatures are analyzed following two separate yet complementary frameworks. The first framework is Peirce's model of sign (1903), and the second is the MMDA. Before applying these frameworks to caricatures, each figure is treated separately by extracting the signs it contains. Secondly, the extracted signs are tabulated in a table where Peirce's model of sign (1903) is adopted through which each sign is first identified by its number and name. Then, the denotative and connotative meanings of the sign are sorted out. Afterwards, MMDA is adopted to analyze the overall caricature. By adopting these frameworks, the modality of each caricature drawing is analyzed to examine the relationship between creativity and MMDA.

### 3.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### 3.3.1 The Analysis of the Caricatures

**Figure 1:** “El-bilad Newspaper”. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, 2019



**Table 1:** Analysis of Figure 1

Sign number	Identification of the sign	The denotative meaning of the sign	The connotative meaning of the sign
1	The flag.	“a piece of cloth with a special coloured design on it that may be the symbol of particular country or organization, may be used to give a signal or may have a particular meaning” (Flag, 2022).	The flag in the drawing is for the people’s democratic republic of Algeria; the flag represents the Algerian patriotism and nationality.
2	The white banner.	“having the colour of fresh snow or of milk” (White, 2022). “a piece of cloth attached by one edge to a staff and used by a leader (such as a monarch or feudal lord) as a standard” (Banner, 2022).	According to the drawing’s context, the white banner stands for the peaceful nature of the Algerian protests.
3	The written word.	“/silmi:jæ/” = “Peaceful”. “untroubled by conflict, agitation, or commotion: QUITE,	The word peaceful is categorized as one of the protests’ slogans. Protesters all over Algeria adopted the

		TRANQUIL” (Peaceful, 2022).	slogan and showed their commitment to it by maintaining peaceful and legal actions.
4	The flag holder.	The holder takes the shape of a black and big Arabic word that means “/Lɑ:/” = “No”.	The flag holder represents the reaction of the protesters who are against the former president’s attempt to run for the fifth presidential term. The size of the word “No” mirrors the seriousness and certainty of their decision.
5	The caption.	“/mæsi:ræt silmi:jæ ɑ:bræ kæmi:l tu:ræb əlwætɑ:nɪ/” == “Massive protests in all the country” == vast protests in Algerian.	The caption informatively shows the unified protests that were organized by citizens in all Algeria.

### Analysis of Figure 1

As exhibited in Figure 1, the caricaturist portrays expressively the major aim behind the Algerian protests. The protests took place when the former president Abdelaziz Bouteflika showed his intention to run for another presidential term. In the drawing, the caricaturist uses some symbols and signs to construct the meaning. Firstly, the use of the expression “No” represents the reaction of the people and significantly confirms the rejection of the fifth presidential term. The big size of the expression indicates the rigid and serious decision of the protesters which is not up to negotiation. Secondly, the use of the flag is symbolic because it represents two things: patriotism and the Algerian nationalism. The use of the white banner depicts the peaceful nature of the protests and the widespread awareness and responsibility among the protesters. Finally, the caption clarifies the message behind this caricature drawing.





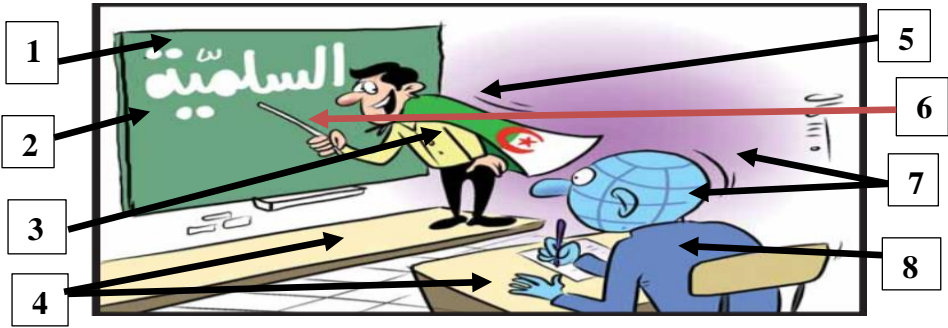
Table 2: Analysis of Figure 2

Sign number	Identification of the sign	The denotative meaning of the sign	The connotative meaning of the sign
1	The body signs of the character.	His eyes opened at maximum, having wrinkles on his forehead, raised eyebrows, and his mouth stretched to smile happily. He is showing something with his hand.	The happiness of the character is noticed through his smile and raised eyebrows; the man is showing his joy by pointing to its source, the heart rate monitor, and its result.
2	The clothes.	A white doctor apron, a necktie, medical glasses, a yellow shirt, and black pants.	The physical appearance of the character indicates that he is a man of knowledge and a noble profession; this is inferred through his clothes.
3	The character.	A man wears an apron, directing his hand to the heart rate monitor, and trying to read the heartbeats.	Based on the used semiotic resources, the character is a doctor who is trying to read the satisfactory rate of the heartbeats.
4	The heartbeats.	“the movement or sound of the heart as it sends blood around the body” (Heartbeats, 2022).	The exhibited heartbeats indicate the rise and fall of given numbers, and dates, and not a normal human’s heartbeats.

5	The heart rate monitor.	“a screen that shows information from a computer; a television screen used to show particular kinds of information” (Monitor, 2022).	The heart rate monitor in this drawing proffers the rate of the numbers exhibited in the drawing that was low but it increases through time; this shows its back to life.
6	The four numbers 22/2- 1/3.	“a word or symbol that represents an amount or a quantity” (Number, 2022).	According to the context of the drawing, the four numbers refer back to two important dates in the Algerian protests. The first date, 22/2, refers to the beginning of the protests, while 1/3 refers to the explosion of the number of protesters and protests.
7	The speech balloon “intrapersonal dialogue”.	“/nəkedelku:m əfæb hæðæ məzɑ:lʊ: hi: wæ fih əmɑ:l /”= “I confirm that the public is still alive and hopeful” = The Algerian public is still alive due to the increased heartbeats that reflect life.	The doctor saying refers to the hope Algerians renewed to make the change through Friday’s protests; since both dates are on Friday, the day that marked the beginning of the protests.

### **Analysis of Figure 2**

In the light of the used semiotic resources, the caricaturist fuses a range of modes and signs to reflect the meaning expressively and indirectly. The doctor in the drawing plays the role of an evaluator; he is analyzing the heartbeats which symbolize the hope of the Algerians. The heartbeats are increasing each week. More so, the use of the two dates, 22/2 and 1/3, is intentional since they directly target the attention of the viewers to the protests. The first date in the drawing, 22/2, refers to the beginning of the protests. The heartbeat line associated with this date shows a tight increment. The second date in the drawing, 1/3, refers to the real explosion of the number of both protests and protesters. This increment mirrors the Algerian hope and eagerness to make a change. Additionally, the doctor’s body signs reveal the positive and satisfactory results display in the heart rate monitor.

**Figure 3:** “El-bilad Newspaper”. The 12<sup>th</sup> of March, 2019**Table 3:** Analysis of Figure 3

Sign number	Identification of the sign	The denotative meaning of the sign	The connotative meaning of the sign
1	The written word on the board.	“/əlsɪlmjɑː/” = ‘Peaceful’. “untroubled by conflict, agitation, or commotion: QUITE, TRANQUIL” (Peaceful, 2022).	The word in the board refers to the state of the Algerian protests that were characterized by peace, tranquillity and, awareness of the public. It was also adopted as a slogan for the protests.
2	The board.	“a piece of wood, or other strong material, that is used for a special purpose” (Board, 2022).	The board in the context of the drawing is displayed to create a classroom-like atmosphere. This analogy is made to present the peaceful protests as a lesson to be delivered to the world.
3	The first character.	A person holds a stick, explains something on the board, and wears a flag.	The character is playing the role of a teacher who is trying to explain the term to his student happily and proudly. This is revealed through his facial expressions which explain his joy. The standing point of the teacher on a terrace also reveals his superiority.

4	The desk and terrace.	“a table, frame, or case with a sloping or horizontal surface especially for writing and reading and often with drawers, compartments, and pigeonholes” (Desk, 2022). “a raised embankment with the top leveled”(Terrace, 2022).	The use of the desk and the terrace supports the roles of the characters by creating a classroom-like atmosphere. They contributed to showing the differences between the one standing on the terrace and the other who is sitting at the table. Within this respect, it can be said that the terrace gives more value and superiority to the stander.
5	The flag.	“a piece of cloth with a special coloured design on it that may be the symbol of a particular country or organization, may be used to give a signal or may have a particular meaning” (Flag, 2022).	The flag in the drawing is the Algerian flag. The flag represents Algerian nationalism and protesters.
6	The stick.	“a long slender piece of wood or metal” (Stick, 2022).	The stick represents the one teachers usually hold while teaching to grab students’ attention towards things. In this drawing, it is used to highlight the concept being explained “Peace”.

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7	The body signs of the second character	A person holds a pen and writes on paper, making direct eye contact with the teacher. His gaze explains his astonishment. The character is taking a serious sitting position.	The character's posture and gaze represent his interest in what the teacher is explaining, and the big amount of attention he is paying. More to the point, the gaze indicates his amazement about the concept being explained. The seating position also mirrors his concern, interest, focus, and curiosity to learn more about the Algerian peaceful protests.
8	The second character.	A student following the lecture being presented by his teacher.	Throughout the skin colour of the student "Blue" and his head which takes the shape of "the world wide web slogan", it is noticed that the student plays the role of the world and the international media that did not expect such peaceful and well-organized Algerian protests.

### Analysis of Figure 3

Figure 3 demonstrates one of the positive facts about the protests. The caricaturist makes an analogy between a classroom where the teacher stands in front of students and delivers his/her lesson and the Algerian protesters who contribute to changing the world view about Algerians. Noticeably, the caricaturist uses various modes in building up his drawing, namely the use of colours, body language, symbols, and other meaningful signs like the desk, terrace, and stick to lay out the background for a classroom-like atmosphere. In this context, the caricaturist uses two characters: the first one is a man who wears an Algerian flag; the character and the flag symbolize Algeria and the Algerian nationality. Also, the surrounding context reveals that the character is a teacher who is teaching a student. The other side is the second character, who is depicted as a student who has a blue head with the shape of the World Wide Web slogan. The second character in the drawings stands for the world and international media. More to the point, the second character's body signs

show his amazement and interest in the delivered lesson, unexpected peaceful protests, especially from the Algerians.

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

After reviewing thoroughly the literature review on creativity and MMD and analyzing the caricatures, it is possible now to evaluate and discern what kind of relationship bounds both creativity and MMD. It could be, to a great extent, argued that both creativity and MMD are intricately interwoven; hence, constructing a multimodal discourse, especially a caricature drawing, without having the ability to be creative is a far-reaching target. The caricaturist in the drawings has creatively portrayed certain events in small drawings through connecting unconnected signs. The creativity demonstrated in the analyzed caricatures traces back to the seminal definition of creativity which portrays creativity as an ability possessed by gifted people, especially people who generate artistic works.

Although the art of caricature is not in its infancy, it is still a vivid concern to discourse analysts. Caricatures mirror both facets of creativity: the use of creative signs and semiotic resources to transmit meaning and being an action-oriented discourse that has the power to shape and reshape power relationships in society. The analyzed caricatures do perfectly match both facets of creativity grounded in discourse (see section 2.3) as they aesthetically and authentically used signs, and at the same time conveyed a national political issue. It is worth mentioning that creativity and originality are interconnected as any original work is regarded as creative work. Thus, it is nearly impossible to find drawings portraying the events of the protests similarly; the meaning may be identical, but the way of delivering it is never redundant. As a concluding remark, the relationship between creativity and MMD is linear, i.e., any MMD cannot be framed without the existence of creativity as a focal aspect of its construction.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

This research investigated the interconnectedness between multimodal discourse and creativity. Since creativity is gaining much attention nearly in all fields, examining it from the lens of discourse is recommended. The flexibility of language enables it to be examined in company with creativity due to the dynamic nature of both. In the same line of thought, MMD is also taking the lion's share in such endeavours as it is not constructed haphazardly or by anyone; rather it is a systematic process of using already available semiotic resources or creating new ones to produce a novel visual. Therefore, this inquiry has discerned the correlation between both MMD and creativity. It is revealed from the caricature analysis that the relationship between MMD and creativity is linear; hence, caricatures as MMD are also contingent upon the construct of creativity.

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