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A Semiotic Approach to the Analysis of Jordanian Cartoons and Memes on COVID-19

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of COVID-19 on Jordanians' beliefs, perceptions, and practices. The selected 26 caricatures and memes were analyzed in terms of their denotative, connotative, and semiotic resources and discussed in light of Barthes' semiotic theory. The analysis reveals that such cartoonic representations constitute a type of social discourse that reveals several social, health, economic, and political issues on digital platforms and warns people about the negative consequences of this pandemic and how to cope with it. These issues are life and economic disruption, people's bad psychological state, the unfair hold of the COVID-19 vaccine diffusion, and the world's fiasco in handling the pandemic. The cartoons and memes also represent effectively, with the help of particular linguistic techniques (i.e., metaphors, intertextuality, and ironic, sarcastic expressions), people's thoughts and beliefs, real situations, events, personalities, and identities, as well as the whole world, by humorously demonstrating critically shared global issues.

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 is one of the vilest plagues to strike countries worldwide lately, changing their life domains (i.e., educational, political, industrial, economic, hygienic, and even psychological) (Alabi, 2020; Nouraey et al., 2023; Salah & Al-Doghmi, 2023). It has put the whole universe in a state of fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and depression. These conditions have succeeded in changing the long-held pattern of life regularly (Hussein & Aljamili, 2020; Lailiyah et al., 2023). They have created a new reality for humans worldwide and reconfigured identities, behaviors, and concerns. This negative impact has attracted the attention and interest of researchers (Abdalhadi et al., 2023; Olimat, 2020a). It calls for impressive representations for effective communication on social media. Given the vital role that the media plays in representing realities and solving their related problems, all social media platforms worldwide have described the pandemic incident in various versions, including signs and images. These signs and images are found to be more efficient in getting the attention of the audience than the traditional known way (i.e., writing) and in easing their acceptance of strict procedures such as lockdowns.

Such cartoons and memes generally depict the whole course of change, ranging from the very nature of change to people's reactions to the newly reconfigured events and identities in a humorous way. They pave the way to reflect what is happening around people (Tashkandi, 2020). It is thus considered a form of scrutiny of its impact internationally in order to reach an effective resolution. The results of this scrutiny provide the essence of what people need to concentrate on during such critical times. They constitute various sources of information useful for people to raise their awareness of what is occurring around them. They have conveyed many messages regarding the preventative measures that should be taken to fight this deadly virus, including the vaccine and its necessity for stopping the quick spread of this disease.

Reviewing the related studies reveals that even though this pandemic was studied from linguistic and translation lenses (Abdalhadi et al., 2023; Alfallaj, 2020; Alkhawaldeh, 2021; AlTameemy & Alrefae, 2021; Aromaih, 2021;

Ginting & Situmorang, 2020; Kitishat et al., 2020; Olimat, 2020a, 2020b), very little research was conducted on the semiotic presentations of COVID-19 worldwide. An insight into the new digital cartoons reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has grievously affected the world from different perspectives. Consequently, the issue concerning the semiotic depiction of the unprecedented, devastating change and negative impact of COVID-19 on Jordanians remains unaddressed, which the present study aims to contribute to. The cartoons and memes were analyzed in terms of the connotative and denotative aspects of semiotics to represent the way their main themes are perceived by society. On this premise, this study attempts to demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative consequences are represented in Jordanian caricatures and memes. The analysis of such caricatures is beneficial in highlighting how they present interactive issues and transmit ideas to facilitate understanding them as well as proposing solutions to them. In a way, they also represent the whole world by demonstrating how the pandemic has become a shared experience among humans and how international joint efforts have been exerted to solve it.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts a semiotic approach, which was first proposed by Peirce (1958) and De Saussure (1983). This approach is considered philosophical in the sense that it endeavors to represent issues by transmitting messages using signs and patterns of symbolism (Eco, 1986). Semiotics offers a lens to interpret the meanings provided as visual signs and theorize the context as related to the interpretation (Hodge & Kress, 1988). It helps to examine cartoons both as social discourse and social semiotics to understand the pandemic-related matters and concerns underlined by digital cartoons.

The study adopts Barthes' (1968) model. It uses a descriptive-qualitative approach using a semiotic analysis framework. This method helps to explore the humor used on both Twitter and Facebook as a means to present the irony in memes about the COVID-19 pandemic. Verbal elements are realized through directive speech to facilitate understanding of the intended message as well as an indirective way of speaking to consider the irony of delivering the

message. Besides icons, indexes, and symbols, visual elements reinforce the meaning of the icon's theme and make it understandable. The images were analyzed in terms of Barthes' three types of messages: linguistic messages (text), literal messages (denoted image), and symbolic messages (connoted meaning). The linguistic message includes the explanation of the verbal captions in terms of lexical and structural choices; the literal denoted message covers the description of the images, including non-linguistic features such as drawings, colors, facial expressions, gestures, and physical exaggerations; and the symbolic connoted message provides a clarification of the inter-semiotic relationship between the linguistic and the non-linguistic elements that exist correspondingly to enhance the depiction.

Numerous studies were conducted to contribute to the existing semiotic literature. They reflect on the importance of how the use of cartoons and memes through social media can influence audiences' perceptions and awareness of the important matters caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hameed and Afzal (2021) analyzed the way Arab media (newspapers) has presented the pandemic issues in the form of cartoons under the semiotic theory lens, in which many important issues were covered, such as visualizing everyday life activities, the tragedies of the working class, the vaccine's dissemination, life's closure, and the economy's destabilization. What is interesting about the findings of this study is that the analysis provides a gist of how cartoonists use caricature as a social discourse that can interpret the pandemic's harsh realities. Lulu et al. (2021) examined on how cartoonists' representations of the pandemic in Arabic socio-political discourse analysis have reflected the attitudes and values of society during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. The findings of such a study have delivered themes that are similar to the first study in the forms of economic devastation, political discourse, social relationship discourse, work, education, health awareness, and dissatisfied citizens. Although it is analyzed through a multi-modal lens, it shares the same major themes as semiotics, which mostly focuses on the significant messages that an image and, most importantly, a cartoon can convey and be an important source of data to interpret the social meaning behind cartoons; it also analyses both

the linguistic and visual content of images to interpret the meaning.

Other semiotic studies have used cartoons or caricatures as a means of communication from other perspectives, and to cite some, Tyumbu (2018) has shown how semiotics employed in cartoons are utilized to analyze the meaning of verbal and non-verbal signs as means of communication and decoding messages. Another study by Al-Momani et al. (2017) organizes an analysis of political cartoons in Jordan under the semiotic lens; these cartoons are selected from the parliamentary election campaigns in the years 2007, 2010, and 2013. Using Barter's perception, humorous cartoons bear serious messages with social insinuations that require investigation. Sattar et al. (2020) have also added semiotics to analyze editorial cartoons on COVID-19. In the analysis, they explain how semiotic discourses play an active role in understanding ideologies and aspects related to COVID-19, such as SOPs, the economy, etc. Hussein and Aljamali (2020) emphasize how social media in Jordan has helped people get through rough times and anxiety caused by the virus. They examine semiotic patterns in COVID-19 cartoons and memes on social media and the way humor can ease the pandemic's grim mood. In a study by Al-Ghamdi and Albawardi (2020) on the Saudi Arabian context, the researchers adopted the socio-semiotic method (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020) in analyzing the COVID-19 discourse in social media posts. They argue that COVID-19 discourse in Saudi Arabia carries various thematic discourses and ideologies that apply to cultural semiotics, national identity, and social norms.

Semino (2021) investigates "different metaphors for the pandemic and explains why they are used and why they matter. War metaphors are considered first, as they were specifically repeated and controversial at the beginning of the pandemic" (p. 50). Afterward, these metaphors were critiqued by many critics, and they were re-framed by fire metaphors as the latter is more versatile and appropriate in communicating about different aspects of the pandemic. However, according to Semino (2021), "some metaphors are more competent than others, depending on the topic and context. She has demonstrated that fire metaphors can be specifically appropriate and versatile in

communication about the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as compared with war metaphors" (p. 56). She adds that "no metaphor can cater to all aspects of something as complex and long-term as a global pandemic" (p. 56). The researcher describes why fire metaphors, for example, could not be applicable to highlight the virus's danger simply because they can be less effective for people who have no concern for fires. The researcher determines that "a well-informed and context-sensitive approach to metaphor collection can be an important part of public health messaging" (p. 56). The review of the literature shows a lack of research on the semiotic presentations of COVID-19 in Jordanian caricatures and memes, which this study aims to bridge.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

This is a corpus-driven study. The cartoons and memes about the COVID-19 pandemic were selected from different social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) from March 2020 until September 2021. Out of a total of 600, only 26 were selected (4 memes and 22 caricatures). The selected visuals were taken from the renowned Facebook accounts of two outstanding Jordanian political cartoonists: Amjad Rasmi, Imad, and Osama Hajjaj. Emad Hajjaj and Osama Hajjaj, both have portrayed different themes concerning the major ongoing issues that Jordanians faced through the pandemic in their cartoons. Their cartoons have affected millions of people throughout the Arab world since they were not only intended to entertain the readers but also to convey important messages. In addition to expressing their personal views, they were sarcastic and provided a daring reflection of the Jordanians' feelings during the pandemic. The selected memes also presented the personal perspective of Jordanians themselves.

3.2. Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using Barthes' descriptive-qualitative and semiotic framework. The images were analyzed in terms of Barthes' three types of messages: linguistic messages (text), literal messages (denoted image), and symbolic messages (connoted meaning). The linguistic message includes the explanation of the verbal captions in terms of


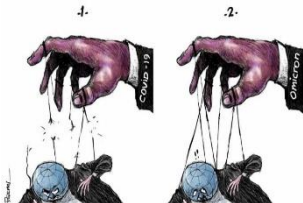

lexical and structural choices; the literal denoted message covers the description of the images, including non-linguistic features such as drawings, colors, facial expressions, gestures, and physical exaggerations; and the symbolic connoted message provides a clarification of the inter-semiotic relationship between the linguistic and the non-linguistic elements that exist correspondingly to enhance the depiction. Using the semiotic theory, the data collection was based on both the metaphors and themes they served to denote in their message. Each metaphor had a great impact on how Jordanians could perceive and adapt to the pandemic, although it was presented humorously.

4. Results

The surge of COVID-19 and its negative consequences is considered a good occasion for cartoonists to nurture and unleash their creativity in depicting various walks of real life and representing their connectedness with reality to create a social impact. The analysis reveals that the cartoonists touched upon crucial issues and sensitive chronic problems caused by this devastating virus in Jordanian society. The analysis of the following cartoons and memes reveals the following themes.

4.1. The Overpowering COVID-19 Virus

The analysis of the following two cartoons shows that the virus takes full control of the world. First, it is depicted as a toy being controlled by COVID-19's strings, and then as a ferocious animal threatening and causing crucial loss of life and great disruption of livelihoods. The virus here is the enemy of the progress witnessed over the earlier period, in which people lived longer and healthier. The virus has decreased the rate of longevity and overburdened health systems, including health resource management, accessibility to and utilization of facilities, and medical supply management. Similar findings are represented by Hussein and Aljamili (2020) in Jordanian social media, as they state that the coronavirus has altered the course of life. They also add that people cannot hope for a routine social life as death is taking over the streets. Also, another important issue presented by the recent cartoons is the new variant of COVID-19, which has led the world to be in constant panic and worry.

Figures	The linguistic message:	The literal message (denoted message):	The symbolic message (connotated message):
 <p>Figure 1 https://t.co/ajNHBkdv1F</p>	<p>Two linguistic captions are identified in this cartoon: the mother bat with the “coronavirus” caption on it and the newborn bat with the caption “Omicron”.</p>	<p>The visual caption consists of a man representing the world as the nutrition source being thrown by the mother bat to feed her newborn baby and then flying away.</p>	<p>The verbal captions found on both bats present the relations between COVID-19 and Omicron as one being the bat as the mother, which refers to China, where the disease reportedly originated, and the other being its descendent, which is the hatching bird, and then there is the person being thrown by the mother, which refers to the world being thrown from one fatal disease to another with distress on its face that resembles how concerned and uneasy he felt getting from one pandemic to the other.</p>
 <p>Figure 2 https://twitter.com/aawsat_eng/status/1466135016296042506</p>	<p>Two linguistic captions are identified in this cartoon: the “COVID-19” caption on it and the “Omicron”.</p>	<p>A man is getting free from COVID-19 strings to fall into the strings of Omicron.</p>	<p>The man represents the world after finally being COVID-19-free and happy to be over COVID-19 with a smile on his face; then there are the two hands: one representing COVID-19 control over the world and the one with broken strings representing getting free from its chains of death and its control and the other omicron hand having its string tight and strong to control the world and be it under its Mersey, which is represented by the man who was smiling being free then being concerned and in fear one more time. The hand-wearing tuxedo represents how both COVID-19 and omicron are being manipulated and held in the hands of the higher officials.</p>
 <p>Figure 3 https://t.co/uQbduGecFL</p>	<p>One linguistic caption is identified in this cartoon, which is “War in Corona times.”</p>	<p>A Jordanian soldier is holding his rifle and fighting the virus while wearing his helmet as a mask.</p>	<p>This illustration represents how the soldier is trying to nervously fight this microscopic virus without being able to detect it by trying to shoot it but not being able to. He is trying to protect himself by wearing his helmet as a mask, which resembles how hard soldiers try to protect their people.</p>




4.2. COVID-19 and Health Systems and Security


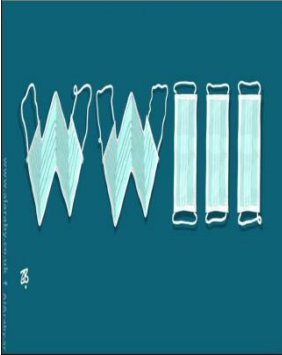

The analysis of the following cartoons accentuates the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic orients people’s attention to the

urgent need for collaborative efforts exerted across all countries worldwide to invest in strong health systems so as to fight the virus, which is the best defense against outbreaks of many other health threats that people around the

world face every day. Being healthy and secure necessitates strengthening primary health care by taking serious steps such as wearing masks and taking the vaccine. Hameed and Afzal

(2021) present similar issues regarding the health system during the pandemic and the upsetting shortage of vaccine supply.

Figures	The linguistic message:	The literal message (denoted message):	The symbolic message (connotated message):
 <p>Figure 4 https://twitter.com/aawsat_eng/status/1415023222622466058</p>	<p>One linguistic caption is identified in this cartoon: the “corona” caption.</p>	<p>A man with wounds holding a mask looking like a cover and holding a needle is fighting a bull with several needles inserted in it.</p>	<p>The man represents the world holding the needle (vaccine) with several wounds on his body, indicating that he has taken the vaccine after being hit multiple times by the virus (bull) and holding the mask as precautions against the bull, which by its color, spike glycoprotein trimers on its head and caption indicates that it is the coronavirus, and although it has been hit by three needles of the vaccination, it is still fighting and is not weakened by the vaccine.</p>
 <p>Figure 5 https://t.co/557mcgM3pg</p>	<p>Two linguistic captions are identified here: vaccine requests and the UN.</p>	<p>A man standing and staring in distress inside a room filled with vaccine requests.</p>	<p>The United Nations suffers from a shortage of vaccines and has small quantities of the vaccine. It is struggling to decide which application should get its request answered and which countries should be protected and have the vaccine doses.</p>
 <p>Figure 6 https://t.co/VfBMQjMZYF</p>	<p>Two linguistic captions are identified here: the vaccine and Corona.</p>	<p>A turtle wearing a mask and gloves and being cautious, and a cheetah smiling.</p>	<p>The cheetah indicates how fast the spread of the coronavirus is while smiling, as it is the winner in this illustration. The turtle resembles the vaccine, which is cautious and protected yet slow and late to arrive at people who need it to survive the fast spread of the Coronavirus. They wear sports shoes as evidence that they are in a race</p>

<p>حرارة الصيف ستقضي على كوفيد-19 كوفيد-19: مطب!</p>  <p>Figure 7 https://www.facebook.com/Bump.jo.1/photos/3804391326271888</p>	<p>“The heat of summer will end COVID-19”.</p>	<p>A character from Game of Thrones, The Night King, is standing in the middle of flames.</p>	<p>This humorous meme reflects how people react to the saying, “In a hot summer, the COVID virus will dry out.” This meme presents the way the Coronavirus will stand strong against the flames of summer and that no matter what happens, the virus will outcome it.</p>
<p>صراع دولي على الكمامات والمعدات الطبية</p>  <p>Figure 8 https://t.co/9RFaktZV5V / Twitter</p>	<p>The international conflict over masks and medical supplies and WW111</p>	<p>Masks are drawn to present the World War III (WWIII) symbol.</p>	<p>The conflict and struggle to have medical supplies and masks can lead to World War Three, which would not be a war by gun but a biochemical war, and this type of war is far more dangerous.</p>
<p>الطغاة في زمن كورونا!</p>  <p>Figure 9 https://t.co/WnEtSpz1jm / Twitter</p>	<p>The dictator in Corona Times</p>	<p>A man wearing all the protective precautions gear and standing on top of a building as the Statue of Liberty while holding a corona-shaped object with smoke spreading out on people while they are running.</p>	<p>The man represents dictators who are responsible for withholding every medical supply to protect themselves from the virus; They are also responsible for the spread of the virus and how poor people get infected with it. This indicates how people with power are always protected and responsible for major issues and how poor and helpless people don't get a chance against them.</p>



4.3. COVID-19 and the Economy

The pandemic triggered the greatest international economic crisis in more than a century. The income losses and the associated financial risks have repercussions for the wider economy, connecting the health sector, families,

institutions, and governments. The financial status of the public sector has deteriorated sharply, and its progress has become progressively worse. COVID-19 poses certain challenges for Jordanians, particularly smaller firms and enterprises with restricted access to credit, as well as vulnerable poor people who

feel disempowered by the pandemic. The lack of employment prospects has exacerbated the problem and made the households fall into poverty due to a drop in their monthly income and their limited resources to cope with their financial needs. Sattar et al. (2020) also had similar findings on economy-related issues




illustrated in the national newspapers of Pakistan. Alkhresheh (2020), in his study of Pakistani and British media, highlighted the economy-related issues that are significantly presented in the selected cartoons. Thus, it can be deduced that the economy was one of the most severely hit areas during the pandemic.

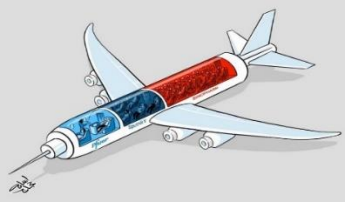


Figures	The linguistic message:	The literal message (denoted message):	The symbolic message (connotated message):
 <p>Figure 10 https://twitter.com/aawsat_eng/status/1410969007419691011</p>	<p>One linguistic caption is identified in this cartoon, which is global economic growth.</p>	<p>A snail is moving slowly while carrying the virus on its back.</p>	<p>This illustration represents how global economic growth has been affected by the virus and is moving slowly, which has led to devastating losses in many countries around the world, including Jordan. It has led to the closure of many institutions and low income during such a gloomy time.</p>
 <p>Figure 11 https://t.co/k0hY2igKvy/Twitter</p>	<p>The linguistic captions are corona and day laborer.</p>	<p>A man is trapped inside a house with a bird's nest in his lab. The birds are shouting while the man is crying, putting his hand on his forehead. The Coronavirus is spreading outside the house.</p>	<p>This illustration represents labor workers and how their lives have been affected by the Coronavirus. While they are in lockdown, the man is unable to provide food for his children and is putting his hand on his forehead, presenting incapability, despair from his side, and sadness while he cries for not being able to provide food for his crying and hungry kids (presented as the shouting birds).</p>

4.4. COVID-19 and The Social Life

The pandemic crisis has also greatly affected the quality of social life. It has caused unprecedented changes in people's lifestyles, the nature of work, and social interactions. The implementation of certain policies to maintain physical social distancing, travel restrictions, and the closure of gatherings and public areas such as parks, schools, universities, etc., has had numerous social consequences. This, in turn, has led to a state of dissatisfaction, disturbance, and agitation, which culminates in widespread unrest in societies. The negative impact on individuals' mental well-being and

mutual trust, besides the increasing social distance, has severely affected human relations. This result is consistent with Malkawi et al.'s (2021) findings and discussion, in which they provide a thorough analysis of life during and after the coronavirus, which has two sides: a negative and a positive one. The negative sides comply with the analysis of this research, in which many perspectives were discussed, such as routine change, the daily siren, coping strategies, and missing pre-lockdown life. Other findings are observed by Hussein and Aljamili (2020) in Jordanian social media, as they state that coronavirus has altered the course of life.

Figures	The linguistic message:	The literal message (denoted message):	The symbolic message (connotated message):
 <p>Figure 12 https://www.facebook.com/Bump.jo.1/photos/3769005036477184</p>	<p>Three captions: “accounts in Switzerland,” “middle class,” and “wanted for judicial execution.”</p>	<p>This meme presents three types of masks: one with great quality, one with good quality, and one with poor quality.</p>	<p>This is a hilarious meme that shows how the quality of masks people wear can reflect their hierarchy and social status and how much money they own; it shows how the lives of people matter based on the money they own, and it reflects how medication companies price masks and how they sell them based on money to increase their profits from the coronavirus. The phrase “accounts in Switzerland” symbolizes the extremely wealthy class, while the phrase “wanted for judicial execution” symbolizes the poor, toiling class.</p>
 <p>Figure 13 https://www.facebook.com/Bump.jo.1/photos/3810268955684125</p>	<p>There are two captions in the meme: the first, “Oh, my God, I hope that the second half of 2020 makes us forget what happened at the beginning of it,” and the second man, “Dear God, I hope there is a second half.”</p>	<p>Two men are supplicating to God.</p>	<p>This meme reflects how people at the beginning of the pandemic were trying to make it easier on themselves by making a meme with two Egyptian comedians from a comedy movie. In the meme, one is praying to God for things to get better in the second half of the year, and the other is praying to God that there will be a second half of the year (i.e., to survive during the second half of the year). The comedy here is used sarcastically to ease the bitter reality of how horrible and fearful 2020 is.</p>
 <p>Figure 14 https://twitter.com/osamacartoons/status/1317492149177507842</p>	<p>Figure 14 has four captions “daily life cycle”, using a phone application (safety), Hand sanitizer, safety, and urgent.</p>	<p>Figure 14 shows a man walking in a circle protection against the corona.</p>	<p>Figure 14 reflects how Jordanians lived through the pandemic and how their lives and daily routines consist of wearing masks and gloves, using hand sanitizer, and getting tested before entering any place.</p>

 <p>Figure 18 https://twitter.com/osamacartoons/status/1396381031285002241</p>	<p>“Pfizer,” “Sputnik V,” and “Sinopharm.”</p>	<p>A plane shaped like a needle with different types of vaccinations inside it.</p>	<p>This caricature presents how unfair and limited the resources of vaccines are and how the type of vaccine is provided based on its efficiency; the more effective it is, the more limited it is, and the more problematic and untested it is, the more quantity it has. The spread of these vaccinations would be based on the hierarchy of status, where the ones who are powerful would get the Pfizer vaccine, and the more powerless the people are, the more they would get the Sinopharm vaccine.</p>
 <p>Figure 19 https://t.co/HGiRa6DXRU</p>	<p>One linguistic caption is identified, which is “coexistence with corona.”</p>	<p>A man holding an umbrella while it is raining the virus.</p>	<p>Due to life going back to its normal life, the need to coexist with the COVID-19 virus has become a necessity, as illustrated in this caricature where a man is heading to work while holding an umbrella that looks like the mask cover with COVID-19 written on it while it is pouring Coronavirus around him, which means that the pandemic is not over but the citizen must coexist with to carry out his everyday needs.</p>
 <p>Figure 20 https://www.facebook.com/Bump.jo.1/photos/3786580141386340</p>	<p>“Manikin is the only one who wears a mask.”</p>	<p>Manikin and people in a crowded market</p>	<p>This humorous meme presents how life after the lockdown and the pandemic changed. How people became careless after COVID-19 and are moving around in crowds, careless of getting the disease, and how the manikins are the only ones aware enough to use masks.</p>




4.5. COVID-19 and the Educational System

The educational system has been one of the most severely affected areas by the pandemic. The closure of schools, universities, and colleges has denied students their social and educational pursuits, which have an essential role in the development of their psychological

and mental states. The turn to online teaching and learning has a negative effect on teachers and students. It has denied teachers close contact with their students to explain difficult educational materials, motivate students to learn, strengthen their social skills, and boost self-esteem. The shortage of online educational

tools (e.g., phones, laptops, the lack of Internet access, etc.) in less sophisticated educational institutions has led students to spend less time learning and obstructed their educational process. In their research, Lulu et al. (2021)

discuss similar issues and problems faced by students during the pandemic, in which students are incapable of understanding via online classes and prefer to sleep instead of attending virtual classes.

Figures	The linguistic message:	The literal message (denoted message):	The symbolic message (connotated message):
 <p>Figure 21 https://twitter.com/osamacrtoons/status/1452259476145311746</p>	<p>There are three captions for the three figures: “Corona and schools,” “The student and the pandemic”, and “Online teaching.”</p>	<p>The three figures present the student in three states: the first is in school doing the morning assembly while Corona is playing a game from the series “Squid Game,” the second is a student swinging on a rope between online teaching and face-to-face teaching, and the last one is a student having an online class while his brain is playing an online game.</p>	<p>All three figures connote the same message, which is how major and crucial the effect of Corona is on teaching and how many struggles the students face. Students were put under the pressure of studying by themselves while listening to the voice of their teacher over an online class, and they were not capable of focusing and fully understanding the lesson while having many things around them to get distracted by. When the school opened its doors, the fear and struggle of getting the virus were hanging by a thread. The students who got the virus were forced to stay home and take the class online without being able to ask questions, interact with the teacher, or experience the learning process fully.</p>
 <p>Figure 22 https://twitter.com/osamacrtoons/status/1450759152352075779</p>			
 <p>Figure 23 https://twitter.com/osamacrtoons/status/1402863408064733186</p>			



4.6. COVID-19 and Politics

The COVID-19 pandemic has had crucial national and international political consequences and is an unprecedented major challenge for policymakers. It has resulted in disruption in international politics and created and exacerbated inflaming tensions and ongoing political conflicts between countries. They

were under pressure and faced difficulties taking thoroughly planned steps to curb its spread, leaving countries scrambling to secure adequate supplies of resources to efficiently fight the virus. They mismanaged lots of time when dealing with the pandemic. The acceleration of the infections, the economic damage, and other aspects were due to the

absence of rigorous countermeasures. It was due to the trade-off between "health versus the economy," according to Rebelo et al. (2020). The discord over new policies applied by governments has faced a huge wave of disapproval and criticism. Much like Aazam et al. (2020), the analysis also established that

cartoonists use cartoons to criticize government officials who do not make wise decisions to control the spread of the virus. In the research, it is explained how COVID-19 has invaded the political realm and the way politicians have control over major decisions and life-threatening resolutions.

Figures	The linguistic message:	The literal message (denoted message):	The symbolic message (connotated message):
 <p>Figure 24 https://twitter.com/osamacartoons/status/1503716510912720901</p>	<p>Two captions are in the same figure: one reads “corona tickets” and the other reads “The Russian-Ukrainian War tickets”</p>	<p>In the theatre, people are lining up in huge numbers to buy tickets to watch a show about the Russian-Ukrainian war and on the Corona side, there is no one to buy tickets.</p>	<p>People forgot about the Corona virus and started to care for other matters. In the figure, people are lining up to watch the war between Russia and Ukraine presented by President Putin and a bear wearing a Ukrainian hat, while no one is lining up or caring for the Corona virus. The man who sells tickets for Corona is sleeping because there is no demand for tickets, meaning that he does not care. The perception of this figure is that life goes on and what used to be life-changing and tackle important issues of everyday life does not matter anymore, and it presents how politicians and politics can play an important role in directing people’s attention to what they want.</p>
 <p>Figure 25 https://twitter.com/osamacartoons/status/1350500218157092866</p>	<p>The main caption is “vaccines that the government should give the Jordanian citizen before Corona vaccines.” The others are: “Trust,” “Not a conspiracy,” “Not a slice,” and “Corona.”</p>	<p>A Jordanian citizen sits on a chair while thinking of the different types of vaccines the government must provide to him before taking the COVID-19 vaccine, while a man who looks like a politician stands and holds the Corona vaccine and three needles on the floor.</p>	<p>The figure reflects how Jordanians feel about their government and politicians and that politicians must provide much more acts of trust and care for their people to start accepting their resolutions in return. The different aspects that the Jordanian needs reassurance in are “trust,” “not a conspiracy,” and “not a slice,” in which the citizen is feeling neglected. On the other hand, the man wearing a suit and holding the vaccine as if he wants to try it on the citizen to see if it works or not.</p>

	<p>No caption is provided.</p>	<p>A man wearing a suit is announcing governmental declarations on needle mics and standing on a person's-upper arm.</p>	<p>This figure represents a man wearing a suit and angrily announcing important declarations regarding vaccination and going-outside-permits, which are very restricting. The man is standing on someone's upper arm, which represents Jordanian people who must comply with these declarations, as represented by putting his hand on his shoulder, exposing his upper arm to receive the vaccine</p>
<p>Figure 26 https://twitter.com/EmadHajja/status/137467914137149440 1</p>			

5. Discussion

As shown in the analysis, the cartoonists have successfully depicted the negative consequences of COVID-19 on all aspects of life, including the social, educational, economic, and health systems. It is also apparent that matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic were mostly presented in visualized forms with less focus on language. Through their drawings, the cartoonists have tackled significant turning points in people's lives. The first issue that can be observed is related to life closure. Safety measures and isolation have forced Jordanians to stop many of their activities, including celebrations and social gatherings. The cartoons demonstrate how Jordan has shut the door on several life activities to reduce the threat. They also illustrate the many new concerns triggered by the virus, including the new strains. The next important issue represented in the cartoons is related to the economy. The images illustrate how the Jordanian economy is badly damaged due to the pandemic. More importantly, in this situation, the working class has agonized the most. Another interesting issue emphasized by the recent cartoons was related to the availability of vaccines and their distribution to people. The images show that powerful countries like European countries have complete control and authority over the vaccine process. On the other hand, rich countries also have prompt access to the vaccine as compared to poor countries.

The above-mentioned analysis shows that all cartoons analyzed consist of two levels of meaning introduced by Barthes (1977): denotative and connotative meanings. Chandler

(2002) argues that to analytically distinguish between expressions and visuals, both the surface literal meaning and the implied cultural and social meaning must be clarified. This implies that cartoons are function-based; in other words, they are created to serve a specific purpose. In the case of this study, the cartoons provide a good source of information for sharing with others and revealing their experiences, as well as raising their awareness towards certain issues. According to Barthes (1977, p. 18), "the code of the connoted system is very likely constituted either by a universal symbolic order or by a stock of stereotypes (schemes, colors, graphics, gestures, expressions, arrangements of elements)". As argued by Barthes (1968, p. 91), "the role of the denoted images... is one of naturalizing the symbolic message—supporting and contextualizing the connoted elements, making them innocent." For the above-mentioned functions, the analyzed cartoons have touched upon several critical issues that have been affected by the COVID-19 virus in people's lives. This has been referred to by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) (as representational meta function, which signifies that "any semiotic mode has to be able to represent aspects of the world as it is experienced by humans" (p. 42).

Most caricatures were infused with a sense of humor and criticism. They present yet another complete satire of what the world calls "progress." Cartoons and humor are inseparable; most cartoons project different forms of irony, satire, sarcasm, or ridicule in a humorous way. Cartoonists use such visuals as a way to make people laugh and release mental energy by

ridiculing negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and frustration into positive ones projected in a funny context such as jokes and cartoons. The spread of humorous messages through cartoons and memes on social media platforms during the Corona pandemic was vast and quick for communicating social and political aspects. This finding supports Davies et al.'s (2008) depiction of humor in caricatures as an effective camouflage of actual beliefs and emotions. The use of cartoon discourse is for humorous aspects to creatively and critically express current situations. The language used in cartoons is filled with satirical humor that expresses critical ideas in distinctive ways to allow readers to interpret the message the cartoonists are trying to convey. Caricatures represent culture, politics, health, etc. in a smart, satirical, and entertaining way. By using caricatures to express criticism, communication between cartoonists and readers is established, in which the reader is provoked to think about and criticize issues that tackle his or her daily life activities on mass media platforms by leading and responding to public opinions. The caricatures presented in this study tackle important issues that Jordanians and the whole world had to go through during the pandemic, from health protocols, maintaining distance, maintaining health, washing hands with soap and running water, advice to stay at home, to wearing masks. This indicates that people could relate to caricatures expressing these themes and criticizing and giving comments on how they feel about such matters and how affected they are by them.

The main themes and objectives of the humorous cartoons worldwide are similar, for they aim to project the main struggles people faced during quarantine and the frustrating anxieties the virus has caused. The humor projected in most cartoons tends to be cheerful and soothing. Olah and Ford (2021), who have analyzed the relationship between humor and people's reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic, have found that a positive sense of humor reduces the levels of negative feelings and eases adaptation to tough situations. Humor and cartoons are embellished when rules are broken and elements of surprise have taken place. According to Davies et al. (2008, p. 28), humor in cartoons is a reflection of people's feelings and attitudes, and it allows them to openly express their thoughts on certain matters

without being judged for it. However, Lewis (2008) claims that "cartoons are satire, not humor" (p. 40). He believes that both terms are different. "First, cartoonists must respond to a topic, and in many cases, they can marshal very little humor into it." "Second, it is not self-explanatory: one must have read the study or heard the news to understand what it is about" (Lewis, 2008, p. 40). This implies that the cartoonist presents real critical issues that occur in the world in their caricatures in a way that either evokes people's reactions to them or makes it easy for other people to understand them. In the case of newspaper cartoons, most of the figures that are elaborated can be of certain themes and occasions. To analyze such theme-oriented data, one must understand the intended message behind the cartoonist, on which occasion such a cartoon has been made, and what important matters it tackles. An example of such cartoons is political cartoons presented under specifically oriented captions, such as "The Elections in Jordan" in *Al-Ghad Newspaper*. This outcome meshes well with Olimat's (2020a) finding that the use of certain expressions and metaphors leads to a reduction of the negative effects caused by COVID-19.

The COVID-19 virus had a major impact on the linguistic world; new jargon and expressions have been added and expressed through cartoon discourse. In the modern interpretation of metaphors, caricature can be identified as any type of communication, whether it is multimodal (two or more modes; the target and source domains) or monomodal (the source and target domains are pictorial or visual) (Forceville, 2016). Due to the pandemic, many new vocabularies and, more importantly, metaphorical expressions have entered the language realm and are used in everyday conversations (such as working from home, social distancing, self-isolation, and lockdown). This finding supports other researchers' (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023) finding that COVID-19 has created a linguistic revolution that enriches learners' vocabulary repertoire with a new lexicon.

Cartoonists use metaphors to bring identification to certain aspects of the message they are trying to interpret. For example, the famous Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj uses the word war in his caricatures when referring to the coronavirus. To be more precise, he animated President Joe Biden (aka America) wearing a

mask with the words The Two States Solution (which refer to both Israel and Palestine) while facing Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu (aka Israel), who is also wearing a mask that looks like a peace dove that is shoved in his mouth (which is an indication of being forced to make peace with Arabs). This picture was released on the Tomato Cartoon website on February 3, 2021. To have a full grasp of the picture and the intended message, the reader needs to have semiotic, political, and socio-cultural knowledge. Another example to elucidate this matter is a COVID-19 caricature by a Libyan cartoonist, Ahmad Alshukri (reference in Libyan Cartoons, February 19, 2020). In his caricature, the Libyan war and the Chinese virus are placed side by side to find similarities between them (COVID-19 is portrayed as a bullet for war in Libya). The caption underneath the bullet states, "The coronavirus in Libya". The caption underneath the coron-avirus states, "The coronavirus in China." Metonymy plays a major role in identifying the references.

This study provides a semiotic analysis of certain cartoonish representations of the critical issues resulting from COVID-19 and their proposed solutions. Since COVID-19 is a global event that has made the whole world vulnerable to the pandemic, the findings of the study could in a way not only depict Jordan but also provide valuable insights into a state of crisis people all over the world experience. The findings represent the whole world by demonstrating how pandemics become shared human issues to be solved. They also accentuate the significance of such visual representations for expressing oneself in both connotative and denotative ways as well as developing readers' cognitive faculties in interpreting others' visual works. It is found a good way, especially for those who are by their nature conservative and tend to convey their intended messages to officials considering sociocultural restrictions. Such visuals could serve as a good way for people to vent their emotions to avoid psychological stress imposed on them by comparable events. In addition, the findings emphasize the crucial role social media plays in skillfully illustrating the issues faced by people during critical periods and contributing to overcoming pandemic anxiety burdens and offering relief. They demonstrate how humor can be used as a means of softening the grim mood created by the pandemic by

examining an indirect way of communicating between people. They suggest that there is much more beyond cartoons than simple caricature drawings, and the semiotics theory can effectively help identify and examine the realities presented by people. Overall, the present study would be of great importance to linguists, sociologists, and politicians and contribute to the growing studies in the linguistics field about COVID-19.

It is hoped that the present study could be the basis for further research evaluating euphemistic and dysphemistic strategies used by individuals and societies during critical periods. It can also be interesting to analyze the results of the study considering digital semiotics and to compare the selected data using digital theories. This study could be replicated in the realm of computational linguistics.

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