

Drawing Realities: Caricatures as a Tool for Social Critique in Iraq

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Abstract

This paper delves into the use of caricatures as a powerful tool for social critique in Iraq, shedding light on their role in addressing pressing issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and systemic neglect. Caricatures, widely featured in Iraqi newspapers and on social media platforms, creatively blend satire, humor, and irony to express public dissatisfaction and expose societal flaws. By analyzing 10 selected caricatures through the lens of Grice's theory of conversational implicature, this study uncovers the intricate ways these visual narratives critique Iraq's socio-political landscape. Through their combination of minimal language and impactful visuals, caricatures serve as an essential medium for amplifying public concerns, challenging authority, and calling for meaningful reform.

Keywords: Caricatures, social critique, socio-pragmatics, Iraq, corruption, satire, public accountability.

رسم الواقع: الرسوم الكاريكاتيرية كأداة للنقد الاجتماعي في العراق

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الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة دور الكاريكاتير كأداة فعالة للنقد الاجتماعي في العراق، مع تسليط الضوء على استخدامه في معالجة قضايا ملحة مثل الفساد وسوء الإدارة والإهمال المؤسسي. يظهر الكاريكاتير بشكل واسع في الصحف العراقية ومنصات التواصل الاجتماعي، حيث يجمع بذكاء بين السخرية والفكاهة والتناقض للتعبير عن استياء الجمهور وكشف العيوب المجتمعية. من خلال تحليل 10 رسوم كاريكاتيرية مختارة باستخدام نظرية غرايس للإيحاء الحوارية الاجتماعي-البراغماتي، تكشف الدراسة الطرق الدقيقة التي تعكس بها هذه الرسومات الواقع الاجتماعي والسياسي في العراق وتنتقده. ويفضل توازنها بين النصوص البسيطة والصور المؤثرة، يبرز الكاريكاتير كوسيلة أساسية لتضخيم شكاوى الجمهور، ومساءلة السلطة، والدعوة إلى الإصلاح الجاد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكاريكاتير، النقد الاجتماعي، البراغماتية الاجتماعية، العراق، الفساد، السخرية، المساءلة العامة.

1. Introduction

Caricatures, commonly referred to as comics or cartoons, have developed into a unique and influential sub-genre within media discourse, widely featured in newspapers, periodicals, and select television shows. Media discourse includes the diverse methods of representing reality in both broadcast and print media,

such as articles and television programs. Montgomery (2011) posits that media discourse may be scrutinised via two principal traditions: one that concentrates on the structure of news in written texts, such as newspapers, and another that investigates broadcast interviews as interactive communication modes.

Subsequent to the 2003 invasion, Iraq saw extensive upheaval, a phase colloquially referred to as the "invasion spring," in contrast to the "Arab Spring." This period saw the ascendance of religious extremism, political power struggles among factions allied with foreign occupiers, and the formation of groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, which destabilised one of the wealthiest states in the Middle East. In this atmosphere, caricatures emerged as an essential instrument for conveying intricate concepts via satire, humour, and irony. Their capacity for open critique has rendered them pivotal to democratic discourse across several media platforms, including newspapers, periodicals, and television shows (Ahmed & Younis, 2023).

In Iraq, social media and newspapers have offered a medium for residents to express concerns about corruption, marginalisation, social inequities, and the disregard for intellectuals. Nevertheless, the examination of pragmatics in media speech remains little investigated. This study investigates the socio-pragmatic aspects of newspaper caricatures. The research investigates 10 caricatures, concentrating on socio-pragmatic components, specifically Grice's notion of conversational implicature. Although their linguistic usage is limited, these caricatures possess substantial contextual and pragmatic importance.

2. Theoretical Framework

Pragmatics analyses how environment influences language to generate meaning. The phrase originates from the Greek word *pragma*, signifying "deed." In the 1940s, language theorists such as Morris and Peirce examined the relationship between signals and their users. Levinson (1983: 32) characterises pragmatics as the examination of context-dependent meaning, augmenting semantics, and defines it as "a framework for understanding language that incorporates context."

Kempson (1986) characterises pragmatics as the examination of cognitive mechanisms that allow individuals to derive meaning from language. Fasold (1990: 19) similarly describes it as "the utilisation of context to deduce meaning." Sarangi and Slembrouk (1992: 142) emphasise that a comprehensive theory of meaning must incorporate the social roles of speakers and the wider societal factors that impact the situational setting. Their research underscores institutional discourse, accentuating the connection among participants' identities, expectations, and language conduct.

Osisanwo (2003) emphasises the importance of pragmatics in analysing the interplay of the message, participants, shared knowledge, and environmental signals, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal components. This viewpoint emphasises that comprehending context improves the comprehension of meaning, especially in caricatures where context is essential for deciphering suggested messages.

In pragmatics, context extends beyond the physical surroundings to include language components, current activities, and social norms. Yule (2006) presents the notion of *co-text*, denoting the linguistic context of an utterance. Pragmatics include implicature, the assumed meaning that emerges during speech. Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle (CP) and delineated four maxims that enhance efficient communication: the Maxim of Quantity (give sufficient information), the Maxim of Quality (be truthful), the Maxim of Relevance (be on subject), and the Maxim of Manner (be clear and organised). Grice contended that conversational implicature frequently arises from deliberate breaches of these maxims, as exemplified by metaphorical terms. Such infractions might engender humour, irony, exaggeration, or outright distress. Thomas (1995: 72) observes that violating the Maxim of Quality frequently underlies metaphorical and hilarious discourse, illustrating how pragmatics elucidates intricate language use.

3. Literature Review

To ridicule and drive off bad spirits, the Babylonians produced hideous ceramics and sculptures in ancient Iraq. Comparably, pharaonic painters in Egypt are attributed with some of the first caricatures, meant to mock and criticise oppressive leaders. Through caricature, Francisco Goya's *Los Caprichos*

series exposed socioeconomic shortcomings in Spain, hence pioneering its function as a vehicle of social criticism (Wright, 1980: 35).

Founded in 1841, the satirical publication *Punch* became well-known in England for parodies of the Royal Family and social elite (West, 1988: 10). Through his *Journal Pour Rire* (Hoffman, 1957: 26), Charles Philipon combined caricature into political debate in France.

Many humorous cartoons also sprang from the German Protestant Reformation. George Grosz criticised the Nazi Party by means of caricature by 1925 (West, 1988: 17). During the Civil War, Thomas Nast's caricatures in *Harper's Weekly* were especially important in the United States; they helped to destroy the dishonest "Tweed Ring" in New York and produced lifelong political icons like the elephant and donkey for the Republican and Democratic parties (Keller, 1968: 71). Through common contextual knowledge, caricatures transmit messages. While editorial cartoons address current events, social caricatures examine society problems. For commercial use, gag caricatures provide comedy; for instructional or promotional campaigns, illustrative caricatures promote (ibid: 57). As Osho (2008: 238) points out, these forms question authority, draw attention to corruption, and start conversation about society concerns. While captivating audiences in critical thought, caricatures inform, entertain, and teach.

3.1 Intertextuality and Media

Intertextuality is the link of meaning created by the interactions among books. The idea of "anchorage," first proposed by Barthes (1977: 37ff), was how captions affect the way images—especially in ads, cartoons, and documentaries—were interpreted. Barthes (ibid: 40) contends that by guiding an audience's perspective, anchoring sometimes supports ideological goals. While "intratextuality" concentrates on linkages inside one text, intertextuality links many texts. A newspaper photo and its description, for instance, show intratextual links (Chandler, 2004: 231). Visual imagery rules media nowadays; TV and newspapers have become major subgenres and caricatures abound in other media.

4. Data Analysis

With their messages addressing issues like corruption (both political and economic), insecurity, and the absence of basic amenities, the study centres on a total of 10 caricatures (refer to Appendix). First defining the situational background, the socio-pragmatic analysis of these caricatures then uses Grice's cooperative ideas. Under this perspective, the audience or readers of the caricatures serve as the receivers while the caricaturist plays the speaker. Every caricature reflects how television media presents problems that are common in modern Iraq. As such, the stories inside the caricatures define the main situational setting around them. Once the background is set, every caricature is examined socio-pragmatically using Grice's (1975) cooperative principles and related maxims to expose the underlying meanings.

Caricature 1

Caricature 1 illustrates the pervasive corruption in Iraq, especially its terrible effect on reconstruction money from abroad sources. Labelled "corruption" (الفساد), the hideous creature with a huge gaping mouth represents the unbridled avarice consuming money meant for reconstruction. By comparison, a tiny number marked "Iraq" shows the country's weakness in trying to fight systematic corruption. Shared by both Iraqi people and foreign donors, the caricaturist deftly exposes the clear discrepancy between the intended use of aid and its regular theft.

From a socio-pragmatic standpoint, the caricature uses context to stress the negative consequences of corruption, therefore criticising this abuse of help. It deftly combines Grice's maxims: the Maxim of Quantity guarantees enough information is sent, but the Maxim of Quality is purposefully violated by too dramatic images, therefore stressing the degree of the message. The Maxim of Relevance keeps the emphasis on the sociopolitical concerns of Iraq, while the Maxim of Manner guarantees clarity in the graphic aspects. Together, symbolic signals include the huge mouth (symbolising greed), the money bag (symbolising help), and the little figure (symbolising Iraq's lack of agency) highlight the criticism. The caricature is a strong appeal for government change and systematic responsibility.

Caricature 2

This caricature highlights the repeated pattern of unfulfilled promises by the Iraqi administration. A civilian is shown receiving a syringe marked "Government Promises" (حكومة تخديرات), a symbol for the flimsy policies meant to appease the population. The annoyed remark of the public, "Oh current government, you're injecting me with the same anaesthetic again!" captures general annoyance with the recurrence of hollow promises failing to solve actual social problems. The syringe powerfully represents transient diversions that numbs public complaints without addressing fundamental issues, therefore demoralising people and leaving them helpless.

Socially, the caricature uses few yet effective components to convey its point of view. By exaggerating Grice's Maxim of Quality, one strengthens the satirical criticism of governmental inefficacy. The relevancy of the images and the succinct content guarantees that the viewer will be able to relate to the irritation. Nonverbal signals that highlight the public's tiredness and discouragement include the citizen's dejected look and limp arm. The cartoon shows the rising mistrust between people and their leaders while simply criticises systematic government

Caricature 3

This caricature highlights Iraq's ongoing energy problem and blames graft as the main reason. A worried citizen struggles with a makeshift electrical system called "electricity," symbolising the hardships faced by everyday people because of the government's failure. A fat figure called "corruption" confidently handles the power switch, showing how corruption affects the country's infrastructure. The difference between how much citizens are hurting and how relaxed the crooked official is clearly shows a lack of care from the system and economic unfairness.

Moreover, the caricature highlights people's anger about the government's failure to fix important infrastructure problems. The vivid imagery goes against Grice's Maxim of Quality to highlight the effects of corruption. Meanwhile, the citizen's awkward position and the damaged electricity system show how powerless regular Iraqis feel. The selfish person, shown smoking a cigar and ignoring the pain of others, represents greed and a lack of concern. The caricature clearly shows the audience's anger with Iraq's problems and urges for real changes in how the government works.

Caricature 4

This caricature attacks the ineffectiveness and duplicity of investigative teams handling social problems. It shows three similar figures labelled "committees" (لجان) doing pointless and repetitious chores—tearing, checking, and analysing papers—without generating significant results. With each panel representing several phases—investigate (تحقق), analyse (تدقق), and discard (تمزق)—the sequence gently underlines the superficiality of these bureaucratic procedures. Emphasising the public's annoyance with bureaucratic institutions' lack of responsibility and action, this satirical representation

Socio-pragmatically, the caricature catches the audience's discontent with committees failing to produce answers. It exposes the cyclical character of inactivity by use of repetition and humour. The same numbers highlight the lack of variation in opinion and methodology within bureaucratic organisations. Grice's Maxims are used wisely: quantity guarantees the critique is accurate, but quality is violated by exaggeration to draw attention to inefficiencies. The cartoon finally shows the public's mistrust in institutional procedures, therefore stressing the pressing necessity of reform.

Caricature 5

This caricature draws attention to Iraq's public sector's long-standing inefficiencies and overstaffing, which compromise governance and output. It depicts a nervous individual, labelled "new appointment," (تعيين جديد), approaching with a paper in hand as a sizable group of identical government officials are shown idle at a table. With nine employees per job, the caption cynically notes, "Iraq exceeds global averages in employee numbers," therefore highlighting the ridiculousness of the system. While their inert attitude represents a stationary and useless bureaucratic structure, the repeated figures indicate redundancy

and a lack of specialised abilities. The lone newcomer emphasises how systematic problems are maintained by reflecting the persistence of this inefficiency.

Often motivated by nepotism, political favours, or flimsy efforts to lower unemployment, the caricature questions the larger culture of too generous hiring in Iraq. This approach strains public resources without really helping to improve governance or service performance. The artist emphasises the ridiculousness of overstaffing by exaggerating the circumstances, therefore violating Grice's Maxim of Quality. Iraqi people who know these inefficiencies will find great resonance in the graphic repetition and scathing commentary, which also subtly urge legislators to solve the problem. By use of comedy and sarcasm, the caricature emphasises the necessity of efficient government and merit-based employment in Iraq.

Caricature 6

This cartoon jokes about how there is no one taking responsibility in Iraq's healthcare system. It shows a doctor leaving with a mask on, while two guys talk about why he is wearing it. Someone jokingly remarks, "So nobody knows who to blame if the operation doesn't work." The funny conversation highlights people's anger about the healthcare system, where workers and organisations seem to dodge blame for problems. This shows bigger problems with waste and a lack of openness in healthcare. The caricature successfully critiques by following Grice's verbal maxims. The Maxim of Quantity helps keep conversations clear and to the point. In contrast, snark and excess violate the Maxim of Quality, as the mask represents avoiding the truth instead of its real health purpose. The Maxim of Relevance makes sure that the images focus on responsibility, while the Maxim of Manner uses humour to keep things clear and easy to understand. The surgical mask, often seen as a sign of expertise, is now being looked at in a new way that shows how it can represent secrecy and a lack of accountability in healthcare. The cartoon connects with people who understand the problems in public health services, urging for openness and responsibility.

Caricature 7

Using the words "Salary = No Life" (المعاش = الما عاش) to show the pittance of pay, this caricature criticises the severe financial hardships Iraq's workers experience. The picture shows a disgruntled worker covering his face in hopelessness while kneeling in front of a big stack of money. The employee's forlorn stance emphasises how inadequate salaries are to cover basic living expenses even with their overwhelming stack of money. The contrast of the symbolic portrayal of pay with the person's despair clearly shows the difference between theoretical income and actual reality.

From a socio-pragmatic standpoint, the caricature tackles the low salaries, corruption, and inflation-induced financial difficulties. While the play on words ("المعاش = الما عاش") offers a devastating criticism of the incapacity of salaries to finance a significant life, the employee's stance and tears show the emotional and psychological toll of financial instability. Grice's Maxim of Quantity offers just enough visual and linguistic information to portray the problem; the Maxim of Quality is violated through exaggeration as the enormous stack of money contrasts humorously with its paucity. Audiences aware of Iraq's economic difficulties and demand quick changes to raise living conditions will find great resonance in the caricature.

Caricature 8

This cartoon attacks the systematic corruption and incompetence in Iraq's infrastructure and building projects. It shows two rather different characters: one is a well-dressed person gathering money while posing as a bricklayer, and another is trying to finish a building project among damaged tools and dispersed money. While the sign "مقاوله عراقية" (Iraqi Contract) links the critique to public-sector initiatives, the phrase "واقع الحال" (the reality of the situation) sums the mismanagement of public resources. The unfinished wall represents inadequate and poor infrastructure, therefore highlighting the results of corruption.

Socially, the caricature tackles popular anger over Iraq's public works' inefficiencies and theft. The difference between the two numbers draws attention to the misery of common workers and the

exploitation by dishonest leaders. Grice's Maxims help the artist to strengthen the criticism: While the Maxim of Quality is flouted through overblown images to underline the degree of corruption, quantity guarantees the scenario offers enough details without overloading the spectator. Relevance guarantees the clear delivery of the message and retains the attention on the sociopolitical reality of Iraq. By means of its sarcastic prism, the caricature demands public infrastructure project openness and responsibility.

Caricature 9

Caricature 9 gently criticises the way Iraq's cultural legacy is handled. While another monument, symbolising a cultural artefact, is dangerously raised into position, iconic Mesopotamian figures like Hammurabi and Ashurbanipal securely occupy their respective pedestals. The raised monument groans, "Be careful, your turn will come!" (!ديروا بالكّم.. ترى جايمك السرّه). This implies that the same negligent treatment might shortly befall the other sculptures. Emphasising the fragility of Iraq's legacy, the empty pedestal awaiting the raised monument highlights a vacuum in the appreciation and defence of its cultural past.

With Hammurabi standing for government and law and Ashurbanipal for wisdom and leadership, the monuments honour Iraq's rich cultural past. The nervous, humanistic presentation of the raised monument emphasises the fragility of historical objects against human care. Socially, the caricature questions the lack of responsibility for cultural preservation and advocates improved care of Iraq's legacy. Grice's Maxims are used very well: quantity guarantees enough visual and textual elements; quality is flouted through humour; and relevance retains the emphasis on cultural preservation. Those who understand the cultural difficulties facing Iraq will find resonance in the cartoon, which exhorts people and legislators to give historical artefacts top priority.

Caricature 10

This caricature attacks public healthcare systems' negligence and inefficiency. The scene has a tall building marked "ستشّي حكومي M" (Government Hospital) with a tiny, useless centre part preventing access to treatment. Two people are shown carrying a dead body on a stretcher, representing a patient who passed away from the hospital's neglect to give quick and sufficient medical treatment. On either side, the signs "دخول" (Entrance) and "خروج" (Exit) draw attention to the irony that people arrive seeking treatment but often exit in tragedy.

The caricature underlines the life-and-death consequences of a flawed healthcare system by use of strong symbolism. While the weight on the people carrying the body shows how families are left to deal with avoidable losses, the dead patient depicts the terrible results of systematic inefficacy. The badly planned hospital architecture questions the situation of public health infrastructure, which seems to exist but does not serve its intended use. The powerless onlooker on the side fuels the general irritation. Audiences that are aware of the shortcomings of public healthcare will find great resonance in this satirical depiction, which demands immediate changes to increase availability and quality of medical treatments.

5. Conclusion

The study have revealed the importance of caricature in negotiating important social and political issues in Iraq. By depending on Grice's Cooperative Principle, the study shows how caricature effectively underscore social issues, revealing problems like corruption, inefficiency, and failures in the system. These caricature employ humour, irony, and symbols to capture how people feel and raise knowledge about important issues like government, economic problems, and preserving culture. The study shows how important it is to understand the background and hidden messages in caricatures. Moreover, it reveal how images and words can go beyond language barriers to create powerful messages delivered to the public. Caricatures not only entertain the public but also highlight society's complaints. They encourage people to think critically and demand change and responsibility. All in all, caricatures are a strong medium to communicate complicated social issues and spread awareness about the most fundamental problems in

a certain society. This study encourages more investigation into their practical aspects, highlighting how they can impact discussions in a democracy and bring about social change.

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Appendix

Caricature 1



Caricature 2



Caricature 3



Caricature 4



Caricature 5



Caricature 6



Caricature 7



Caricature 8



Caricature 9



Caricature 10

