

## Visual Language as a Source of Creative Cognition

اللغة البصرية باعتبارها مصدرا للادراك الإبداعي

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### Abstract

Creative cognitive is a new research field that examines the cognitive process involved in constructing novel representations. It is further concerned with studying the role of such process in generating new ideas, concepts and representations (Finke et al., 1992; Smith et al., 1995; Ward et al., 1997; cited in Vega-Moreno, Rosa E., 2007, 6). Hilligoss and Howard (2002, 3-5) state that one involves knowing how to read and what to read as readers as usually

selective. On the other hand, Cohn et. al (2012) maintain that visual images represent a universal means of communication, reflecting as a result the cultural symbolisms that might be interpreted. They further state that visual language is the quickest and succinct means of communication. Accordingly, in this paper, the researchers intend to conduct the research from the qualitative and quantitative points of view using a conceptual framework to examine the role a visual caricature image plays in highlighting creative cognition. To achieve the present

objective, the researchers selected an image and copied it to fit the number of the respondents selected to do the test. The respondents were asked to give their descriptions and expressive understandings to it. A specific rubric has been constructed by the researchers to be used in the data analysis. The paper ends with a number of concluding remarks, such as: generally, the respondents managed to access DM; though they failed to give the intended meaning; however, they managed to provide creative expressive meanings that are subjective by nature; and the level of visual literacy of the respondents is acceptable; yet it needs to be enhanced.

**Keywords:** Creativity, Visual Language, Descriptive Meaning, and Expressive Meaning.

#### ملخص الدراسة

الادراك الإبداعي هو حقل بحثي جديد يهتم بدراسة العملية المعرفية المسؤولة عن بناء صور إدراكية ابداعية. كما يهتم هذا الحقل المعرفي أيضا بدراسة الدور الادراكي في توليد أفكار ومفاهيم وصور جديدة (فينك وآخرون، 1992؛ سميث وآخرون، 1995؛ وارد وآخرون، 1997، كما ورد عند فيغا مورينو،

روزا، 2007). ففي هذا الصدد، ذكر هيليجوس وهوارد (2002) بأنه لفهم الصور البصرية يتطلب معرفة ما نقرأ وكيفية قراءته. حيث انه في الغالب يكون القراء انتقائيين يعكسون بذلك غاياتهم وتجاربهم. الا انه من الجهة الاخرى يقول كوهن وآخرون (2012) بان الصورة البصرية هي وسيلة عالمية للاتصال والتعبير. فهي تعكس الرموز الثقافية وتفسح المجال لمستخدم اللغة لتفسيرها بشكل مختلف حيث انها وسيلة موجزة وسريعة للاتصال. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تفحص الدور الذي تلعبه رسوم الكاريكاتير في تحفيز التفكير الادراكي الابداعي ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، ارتأت الباحثتان ان يكون منهج الدراسة تحليليا كميا ونوعيا معا واختارتا عشوائيا احدى رسوم الكاريكاتير، وتوزيعها على الافراد المشاركين الذين تم اختيارهم لإجراء الاختبار. ثم طلب من المشاركين إعطاء وصف معبر لما يشاهدوه في الرسمة وذلك ليعكس طرق التفكير الابداعي الادراكي. وقامت الباحثتان بتصميم جدول يسهم في تصنيف اجابات المشاركين في الاختبار للتمكن من استخدامها في تحليل البيانات بإطار مفاهيمي. وقد توصلت الدراسة الى عدد من الملاحظات الختامية والتي تتمثل بإمكانية المجيبين الى التوصل الى المعنى العام والسطحي للصور بصورة عامة، بالرغم من اخفاق الاغلبية في التوصل الى المعنى التعبيري للصور الا انهم نجحوا في اعطاء تعبيرات ومعاني جديدة ومبدعة واخيرا وليس

اخرا تم التوصل الى ان مستوى فهم المجيبين للصور البصرية مقبول لكنه بحاجة الى التحفيز والتطوير.

## Introduction

Language in all its types, whether verbal or non-verbal, represents a means that reflects and constructs reality (Finch, 2000, p.210). The early form of communication used in the primary societies and by illiterate people was visual as stated by Pettersson (2000; cited in Eilam, 2012, 81-90). To understand a piece of language generally and visual language particularly, Hilligoss and Howard (2002, 3-5) state that one involves knowing how to read and what to read. For usually the readers are selective; they read to achieve their purposes. They further interpret things in accordance with their knowledge and expectations, reflecting as a result new inventions and ethos contributions. Speaking of cartoon, a form of visual language, Cohn et. al (2012) maintain that it represents a universal means of communication and expression. It helps mirrors the cultural symbolisms and gives room for a language user's to interpret it differently as s/he prefers or in a way that reflects one's background knowledge. Visual language is also said to be succinct means of communication with a quick impact. It is emotionally-based as it involves raising sympathy and/or indignation. In the researchers' opinion the first and early form of communication is nowadays trend and fashion. It started to enter into every aspect of humans' modern life.

## The concept of Productivity/Creativity

The terms productivity or creativity have been used interchangeably to denote the ability to generate new linguistic expressions, usages, and understanding. However, Bussmann (1996, 263) maintains that the term creativity is "based on the speaker being able to produce and interpret..an infinite set of utterances". Trask (2007, 197-98) adopts Charles Hockett's term to refer to the same process under, open-endedness. According to him, the term open-endedness refers to "[t]he ability to use language to say things, without limit". Trask emphasizes, in his definition, the fact that such aspects, like using and comprehending new utterances that have never been used or heard before are limitless by nature. Chapman and Routledge (2009, 43-44) further define the term creativity from the behavioristic point of view. They maintain that this term refers to "[t]he ability of the ordinary use of language to be innovative and free from stimulus control". They further maintain that this term has two linguistic senses: The first sense of linguistic creativity refers to human's innovative manipulation with the lexico-semantic domain. Such a usage helps language users to produce jokes and metaphors. The second sense of linguistic creativity that is broader in the sense pin points to Chomsky's view about the use of everyday language by speakers to reflect reality. In this vein, Coussé and

Mengdent (2014, 163) add that it is this linguistic feature, creativity, that plays a role in language change. Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006, 284-85) further maintain that semantic change occurs due to many reasons, like: historical changes; changes in one's experiences, which in return leads to changes in one's understanding of the world; broadening in word senses, such as metonymy; narrowing in word senses; pejoration; amelioration; the creative use of language as metaphor; and ellipsis. Thus, one can conclude that it is the creative use of the conventional arbitrary language coinage and generation that leads to have changes and novelty in language in general and meaning in particular.

### **Types of Meaning**

Generally speaking, Meyer (2009, 151) states that linguistic meaning is of two types: Grammatical and pragmatic. The former is directly derived from the meaning of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences; that is, the denotative meaning. Pragmatic meaning, on the other hand, represents the product of social context, in which language is used; that is, the connotative meaning. In the same vein, Lyons (1977; cited in Meyer, 2009, 152) gives another classification as far as the linguistic meaning is concerned. In his opinion, linguistic meaning is of three types: descriptive, social and expressive. The first type is the semantic, denotational, grammatical, or referential type of meaning. The second and third types of meaning are

pragmatic by nature. However, the social meaning “serves to establish and maintain social relations” whereas the expressive meaning is more individual-oriented; it reflects the meaning added to language when used by participants. As for the present study, the researchers will concentrate on the cognitive meaning, which is defined by Crystal (2008, 84) as a type of meaning which directly refers to “the denotations of lexical items and prepositional content of sentences”, hence, it is objective. In this respect, Crystal (ibid., 136) states that the term denotation has three distinct senses. The first and traditional sense is that it is the literal meaning. The second sense is extensive by nature; it refers to “the set of entities that it properly applies to or identifies”. The third, on the other hand, refers to “the set of properties that something has to have to allow the expression to be applied to it”. In brief, the researchers will adopt the first and third types of meaning by Lyons, descriptive and expressive, respectively as they represent two sources of creative cognition.

### **Literature Review**

Many studies have been conducted to examine the concept of creativity in different domains. Kemp (1973) in his thesis entitled “A Creativity Index as a Measure of Language Ability in an Institution of Higher Education” investigated the importance of certain factors of creativity on the concurrent success in learning Spanish. Results have indicated that highly creative students surpass less creative

ones. Besides, there is a positive correlation between creativity and individual's willingness to do a calculated risk. Moon (2008) examined four types of lexical creativity: figurative meaning, word formation, idioms, and spellings in corpus evidence and three recent monolingual dictionaries of English learners. The study concluded that lexicographers are not unaware of lexical creativity. However, such kinds of creativity can be encountered in corpora but not in dictionaries. This is because the latter are dedicated to provide descriptions and/or explanation of word meanings. They do not show how word meaning changes or can be manipulated. They further do not reflect reality as a result. Yamamoto and Isahara (2008) stated that people become more creative when they deal with words that are thematically related. In their words, expanding one's imagination can be difficult because such a process involves inferences and deduction. Results revealed that the best way to support creativity is to use certain words that spark or motivate one's motivation. Hajilou et.al (2012) studied the relationship between creativity and lexical perception and productive knowledge of Iranian EFL students. Results have shown that there is a weak relation between creativity and lexical perception and production in active and passive tests. Kim and Song (2012) examined the effect of cooperative learning on creative thinking. The study concluded that group work helps enhance the style of thinking more than individual learning. Peelamedu (2012) conducted a study to see the

impact of social intelligence, which includes factors as gender, age, community, education and socio-economic status on the creativity scale of English language teacher. The study revealed that the higher the social intelligence is, the higher is the creativity scale, and vice versa. Babae et.al (2014) maintained that some scholars think that a good translation is the one that directly reflects the style of the original piece. Others, on the other hand, held the view that a piece of a translated work cannot be understood unless it is reproduced. Babae et.al. (ibid.) further maintained that a good translated piece of work is the one that reflects culture differences in a creative way. The study has concluded that culture as a variable is a source of creativity in translation. In what has been surveyed about the studies conducted on the concept of creativity, still much effort needs to be exerted on the impact of creativity from the semantic point of view. Even if there is much work conducted in this regard, much more work needs to be conducted to examine case studies in different fields and aspects.

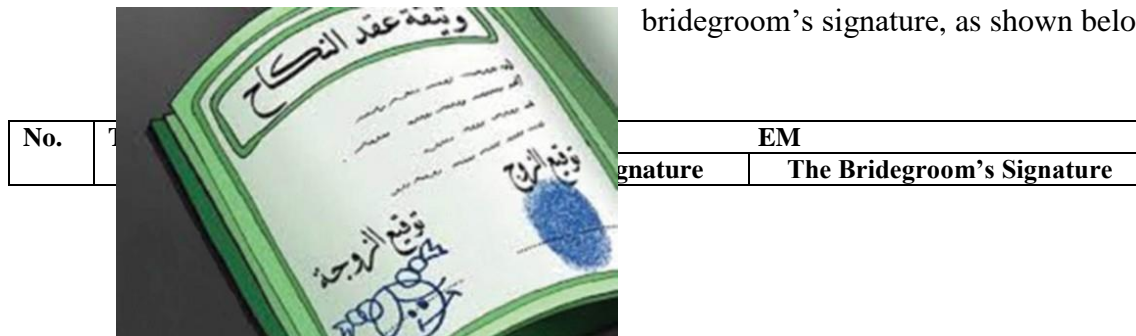
### **Methodology of the Study**

The present study is qualitative and quantitative by nature. It is dedicated to examine a caricature image that has been randomly selected from one of the Google images. The selected caricature image deals with a social problem that has become a phenomenon nowadays in my country, Iraq due to the economical and political disturbances.

Accordingly, the following procedures followed as an initial stage:

- 1) Selecting randomly a caricature image that reflects a social problem;
- 2) Preparing a scoring rubric for data analysis and the question to be submitted to the respondents that helps collect their responses;
- 3) Submitting the image for study to 20 respondents from the second stage, department of English, College of Women’s Education. Such a step was done to check the feasibility of the rubric, the time allotted for the analysis, and the clarity of the test for the respondents. Besides, the respondents were given the freedom to do the test and were maintained anonymous following the ethical consideration;
- 4) Once the pilot study has finished and the results were obtained, the notes obtained were taken into account when conducting the study in its final form.

The caricature image chosen is about a marriage bond between female teenagers and adult males. The respondents were supposed to read the image depending on the available cues, consider the caricature image below:



**Figure (1): Iraqi Female Teenagers: Marriages Scandalizes the Unjust and Double-Policies of Male Characters. Digital image.**

**URI://http://www.alsharq.net.sa/. Digital image. 1<sup>st</sup>. March 2015.**

The data will be conceptually analyzed depending on the two concepts of meaning presented by Lyons (1977), the descriptive and expressive meanings. The question submitted to the respondents as a means of triggering the process of creative interpretation is: “Reflect your understanding to the signatures of both the bride and bridegroom”. The rubric designed for this study consists of three main cells: The respondents, descriptive meaning (hence DM) and the expressive meaning (hence EM). The Abbreviation DM is concerned with the general descriptive interpretation of the image. The EM cell is sub-divided into two other cells: one belongs to the bride’s signature and the other belongs to bridegroom’s signature, as shown below:

**Results and**

**Discussion:**

No.	Respondents	DM	EM	
			The Bride's Signature	The Bridegroom's Signature
1.	(1)	Marriage contract		AIJLLS   JULY 2017   VOL 1 ISSUE 3
2.	(2)	Relation between husband and wife		مجلة اللسان الدولية / العدد الثالث (يوليو 2017م / 1438 هـ)
3.	(3)	A marriage contract and the beginning of new life		
4.	(4)	Marriage of teenagers	Child female	Adult male
5.	(5)	Marriage of teenagers	Child female	Adult male
6.	(6)	The different ways of signing		
7.	(7)	/	Child female	Adult male
8.	(8)	Notebook of a girl and a boy friend		
9.	(9)	The different ways of signing	Weak character	Strong (powerful) character
10.	(10)	The different ways of signing	Beautiful signature	Ugly signature
11.	(11)	The different ways of signing	Beautiful signature	Ugly signature
12.	(12)	Marriage Contract	Child wife/desire to have children	Mature
13.	(13)	Signing a marriage contract		
14.	(14)	Signing a marriage contract		
15.	(15)	Signing a marriage contract		
16.	(16)	The different ways of signing	Being not satisfied	
17.	(17)	/		
18.	(18)	Marriage of teenagers	Child female	Adult male
19.	(19)	Marriage contract		
20.	(20)	Marriage contract	Complaining face	
21.	(21)	Marriage of teenagers		
22.	(22)	Marriage of teenagers		
23.	(23)	End of marriage		
24.	(24)	Marriage of teenagers	Child Female cannot sign	Adult male
25.	(25)	Marriage contract	Thinking of having children	
26.	(26)	Marriage contract	Child female	Uneducated male
27.	(27)	Marriage contract	Happy face indicates happy event for all females	
NO.	Respondents	DM	EM	
			The Bride's Signature	The Bridegroom's Signature
28.	(28)	Marriage of teenagers	Child female	Adult male
29.	(29)	Marriage contract between two lovers		
30.	(30)	Marriage of teenagers		
31.	(31)	A nice a new way of marriage contract		
32.	(32)	A guaranteed paper of marriage contract		
33.	(33)	Marriage contract	Woman wants to attract others even through their signatures	
34.	(34)	Marriage contract	Happy women	
35.	(35)	Marriage contract	Happy	Sad
36.	(36)	Marriage contract		
37.	(37)	Marriage contract		



Results have shown the following:

1. Thirty three (33) of the respondents gave a very general description stating simply that it is a marriage contract without indicating what is there in this contract. That is; they could only access DM;
2. Out of the (32) respondents, there are (16) respondents who attributed the child face signature of the female to different reasons as: having the desire to have babies; a complaint, being child, happy, attractive, a joke, a game, a sense of irresponsibility, a mere talk, and a threat to the male partner. Besides, they attributed the signature of male to different reasons as: being mature, uneducated, adult, sad, serious, doing the right signature, being sad, and being formal.
3. In addition to those (32) respondents, there are other respondents, who add to their identification of DM, other expressive meanings. For instance, (2) respondents state that it represents a new life, (2) other emphasize the idea of being a holy contract; (1) states it is a contract of untrue lovers; (1) adds it is a new version of marriage contract; (1) accentuates the idea that it is an Islamic contract; (1) says it is the right contract; (1) claims it is a guaranteed contract; (1) states it is a nice contract; (1) pinpoints to the idea of an ending marriage contract; and finally (1) mentions it is the way true lovers' marriage contract should be. In other words, the total number of the respondents who agreed that the image is a contract marriage regarding the differences in the expressive meaning is (44) respondents out of (76);
4. There is (1) respondent who states that the image reflects a relation between a man and woman;
5. One of the respondents refers to the idea that the image is about a note book that contains the secrets of a girl about her boy friend or of a boy about his girl friend;
6. There are (19) respondents who highlight meticulously the marriage of a young female child to an adult male;
7. There are (7) respondents who focused on the idea of signature difference between men and women. Their description does not stop at this; some of them attributed the differences to nothing; others to an

- aesthetic reason; being not satisfied; or to having weak or strong character;
8. There are (3) respondents who stated that the image is about signing a marriage contract.

### Conclusions

The study arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Despite the respondents generally managed to access DM; however, only (19) could access the exact meaning;
2. Having majorly failed to grasp the exact meaning does not prevent them from being creative in adding other expressive (subjective) meanings to the same non-linguistic signs of the selected image;
3. Non-linguistic signs work in a similar way as linguistic signs in that they have a direct denotative meaning or an extended denotative one as Crystal maintains in his definition of denotative meaning, and an expressive meaning as well as Lyons states;
4. The same non-linguistic signs are linked, processed and referred to in a variety of ways to reflect the respondent's background knowledge and understanding;
5. The level of visual literacy of the respondents is acceptable; however, it needs to be enhanced; and
6. It is the grammatical meaning (denotative meaning) that gives room and paves the way to develop the expressive meaning, which is one part of the pragmatic meaning.

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