



RESEARCH PAPER**An Exploration of Metafunctions and Binary Oppositions in Pakistani Paintings and Poems**

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ABSTRACT

Art and poetry go hand in hand to appeal to the senses of the creators and art lovers. The objective of this research was to explore the connection of visual art and poetry and how these forms juxtaposed to create meaning. A collection, *Maritime Treasures of Pakistan*, featuring art and poetry was selected to be analyzed using the Visual Grammar framework (2006) and in light of Derrida's (1967/1997) theory of deconstruction, respectively. The analysis showed that Visual Grammar can help us interpret images but using a theoretical perspective for the textual mode can provide us an even better understanding of the connection between the different semiotic modes. As in the analysis we saw that the theory of deconstruction helped us uncover the underlying message behind the poems and together with the analysis of the paintings, the meaning of the multimodal piece as one whole was deduced.

KEYWORDS Binary Opposition, Deconstruction, Multimodality, Visual Grammar

Introduction

Multimodality can be considered a theory, a perspective or a methodology (Jewitt, 2014, p. 128) that can be applied for analysis to different modes of communication that exist all around us. We live in a multimodal world and we constantly experience the world through different modes such as visual, spatial, aural, gestural and linguistic (Lim et al., 2022). Multimodal texts have the capacity to produce and represent a plethora of meanings. A study provides insight into how digital media has changed the way we perceive and understand poetry (Alghadeer, 2014). In order to fully grasp the understanding of the world around us, the knowledge of all the modes of communication that exist around us is necessary. Just as familiarity with languages can provide new possibilities to be explored about one's native language similarly knowledge of other modes can also open up new dimensions of meaning of languages (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). This research looked at the juxtaposition of two modes- the verbal and the visual mode and the aim was to see how the two modes of communication work together in harmony in order to aid the meaning making process of those who experience the two modes. Juxtaposition refers to an instance of placing two or more elements in close proximity in order to compare or contrast and to explore a certain effect that is created through the juxtaposition of those elements (Young, 2003, p. 84). Juxtaposition can appear in many forms of artistic expressions- writers may employ juxtaposition in their art in order to invite the audience to explore the dramatic effect that elements create in conjunction to each other (Admin, 2022).

Literature Review

Literature as defined by an American poet is language simply infused with meaning to the ultimate degree (Pound, 1934, p. 36). Literature alleviates language and deviates from ordinary language (Eagleton, 1983), producing an intensity in the organization of words. Therefore, literature broadens our perspectives and helps us gain a better understanding of the world, the ideas, the language, and the ideologies that surround us.

The verbal language and the visual structures both can be considered literature as literature embodies human experiences and it is something that appeals to the senses. Literature is not only what is written but extends to what is voiced, expressed or invented in any form (Krystal, 2014) thus, in this regard literature extends to art as well- both terms almost being synonymous with each other.

Throughout world history, it has been observed that art and literature both have the ability to evoke and appeal to the senses of the creator as well as the senses of the art lovers who delve into the journey of exploring all forms of literature. We can observe that great works of art have inspired great works of literature and simultaneously great works of literature have inspired art (Art and literature, 2020). In this research, the analysis was focused on poetry and paintings. Aristotle argued that poetry is therapeutic and acts as a medium which allows one to deal with emotions and bring forth intense feelings (Culler et al., 1997). Poetry is emotion put into measure (Hardy, 2011) and the same can be said about art as well. The purpose of the study was to analyse the poetry and paintings of a Pakistani poet who has fused art and poetry together to create multimodal pieces of art.

Javeria Nabahat Amin is a Pakistani artist who exhibited her collection at the Pakistan National Council of Arts, Islamabad in March 2022 and titled her collection as *Maritime Treasures of Pakistan*. Her paintings and her poems have been compiled in the form of a book titled with the same name. The artist also brought in an element of augmented reality to give life to her paintings. Augmented reality is another kind of visual and auditory mode that the poet incorporated into her paintings that enhanced the experience of the spectators when they saw the paintings in motion at the exhibition and were able to hear the sounds of the elements in the paintings like the sounds of waves crashing on the shore.

Kress and Leeuwen (2006) argue that visual communication has grown into a major form of communication along with language. Language- verbal or written has been considered a dominant form of communication but due to the shifts in technology we can see that the information that we receive has become multimodal in nature. The problem that this research aimed to address is our inability to look at the world in a multimodal way. Since we live in a multimodal world, it is important that we have the knowledge and the right tools to understand all the modes that exist around us hence the research explored how different semiotic modes depended on each other for meaning. In the current 21st century, multimodality has become a much sought after research area because we cannot deny the multimodal nature of the world that we live in. Serafini and Reid (2022) conducted an analytical research on contemporary picture books existing as multiple modes. The researchers suggested and found out that only through using a range of analytical frameworks together we can fully understand a multimodal piece of work

Most studies analyse the different modes by combining the visual grammar framework with Halliday's Systemic functional linguistics- the Visual Grammar framework for the images and SFL for the linguistic mode. There are an increasing number

of studies that investigate advertisements from a multimodal perspective. Adrian and Faiza (2022) aimed to analyze the advertisements of Nike that revolved around the notion of women empowerment. Multimodal Discourse analyse was used to examine the moving images in the advertisements. The visual modes were further explored in the light of Kress and van Leeuwen's framework of visual grammar while the verbal analysis was done using Halliday's three layers of metafunctions. The aim of the study was to reveal the interplay of all the different modes working together in order to create a certain effect. Another researcher analysed the posters of a movie combining Halliday's (1997) SFL with the visual grammar framework by Kress and Leuween (Dewi, 2022).

This research intended to test whether a literary theory can be used in conjunction with the Visual Grammar framework and whether the literary theory can enhance the meaning making process or limit it as according to some theorists the framework of visual grammar alone is insufficient for the sociological interpretation of images and needs to be used in cooperation with another (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004, p. 136). Since, Derrida (1967/1997) states that meaning is not fixed and thus, meaning of a visual image may not be fixed either and this is where the theory and the multimodal framework of Visual Grammar coincide.

Dong and Cheng (2022) also state that with the advancement in technology, linguists included multimodality in their domain of research as well, expanding from text to other modalities such as picture, colour and sound. The visual grammar framework provides a basic foundation into the research paradigm of analysing the visuals and imagery. The research conducted by Dong and Cheng revealed that using the visual grammar framework the meaning of the images in the selected documentary could be perceived by the three metafunctions- representation, interaction and composition which more specifically means that the images were assessed according to the action shown, positioning, the eye contact of the participants and the colour and the contrast of the images. The study concluded that the documentary aimed to show a dignified national image of China.

Material and Methods

Derrida identified polarities which he says exist at the base of any text. He terms these polarities as binary oppositions and explains that they function as little hierarchies (Tyson, 2006) with one term being privileged and one term being unprivileged. Derrida identified polarities in a text for example, art versus geniuses or man versus woman (Richter, 2007). Derrida identifies one term as privileged and the other as unprivileged. Derrida aims to remove the privileged term from its superior position to show the instability of language and aims to uncover the illusions on which these polarities exist. Derrida terms these polarities as binary oppositions and explains that they function as little hierarchies (Tyson, 2006) with one term being privileged and one term being unprivileged. Derrida explains that these hierarchies can be reversed and that is how a text deconstructs itself because sometimes the privileged and the unprivileged terms overlap each other, deconstruct each other or they are unable to function without the other thus, they depend on each other for meaning. This is another way that shows that language does not have a fixed meaning.

Similarly, visual elements are also open to many perspectives and may not have a fixed interpretation. Hence in order to analyze the paintings, the framework of Visual Grammar by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) was used keeping in view the three metafunctions which are as follows: the representational metafunction, the interactive meta function and the compositional metafunction. The representational metafunction has been developed

from Halliday's (1997) ideational metafunction. It tends to explore the relationship of the world and the spectators. The interactive metafunction explores the kind of communicative connection that the creator of an image and the audience of an image has. The compositional metafunction is derived from Halliday's textual metafunction which relates to the way how different elements of a painting are placed together in a composition and what does the position of a certain element denote about its importance or impact.

The augmented reality version of the paintings were also analysed through the Visual Grammar framework and in the light of the Deconstruction theory. The augmented reality can be viewed by purchasing the book *Maritime Treasure of Pakistan* and scanning the paintings in the book. The paintings are to be scanned by a mobile phone application which can be downloaded called as *Artivive*. When the paintings are scanned through the *Artivive* App, they come to life. The paintings and the poems were selected purposively.

Results and Discussion

The Fleet

The Fleet- The Painting

The Representational Meta Function

The representational meta function shows the way in which images can create the social structure and signify the world so in the painting in figure 2, we see the ship and the sea as the participants. The ship acts as the vector delineating action which depicts how representative participants (RPs) are engaged in some kind of motion thus it is a narrative process. Thus, the vector, the represented element has directionality to it, with the vector being representative of the dynamic process taking place. Figure 2 is a narrative action representation because it is presenting an unfolding of actions. The image demonstrates the ship as a unidirectional vector as it is connected to the sea. The sea is a passive participant as the sea is moving because of the movement of the ship.

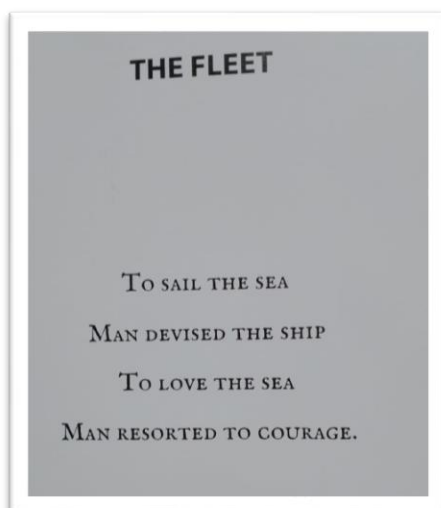


Figure 1: The Poem,
The Fleet, by Amin (2022)



Figure 2: The Painting,
The Fleet, by Amin (2022)

The Interactive Meta Function

According to Kress and Leeuwen (2006), the interactive meta function schemes the relation between the producer of the image and its viewer. Thus, figure 2 is called as a demand image because the central object is directly gazing at the viewers. It is a long shot showing the full vertical perspective thus, the viewer feels at a distance.

The Compositional Meta Function

In figure 2, the ship is placed centrally thus it is the most salient feature and carries the most informational value. The fleet following the ship is the subservient feature. However, the sky and the sea occupy a great space in the painting thus, exemplifying their grandiosity. The colors are evenly distributed in the painting.

The Fleet- The Poem

Binary Oppositions

In the poem, figure 1, there are two binaries that exist- The Ship vs the Sea. The Sea can be denotative of God and the Ship being a man- made creation is denotative of man thus another binary of Man vs God exists. In the painting the ship is the central image thus indicating its superior position and thus, here the ship and man are the privileged terms however, the vastness of the sea cannot be compared to the vertical frontal view of the ship that is displayed. Thus, by reversing the binaries we see that the sea is the dominant, privileged term.

The Fleet- Augmented Reality

Though in the Augmented reality again we see that the ship seems to be the active participant while the sea tends to stay calm and the movement of the sea is being caused due to the movement of the ship. Thus, by deconstructing the poem in figure 1 and analyzing the image in figure 2 and the AR together we have made sense of all the semiotic modes.

Night's Embrace

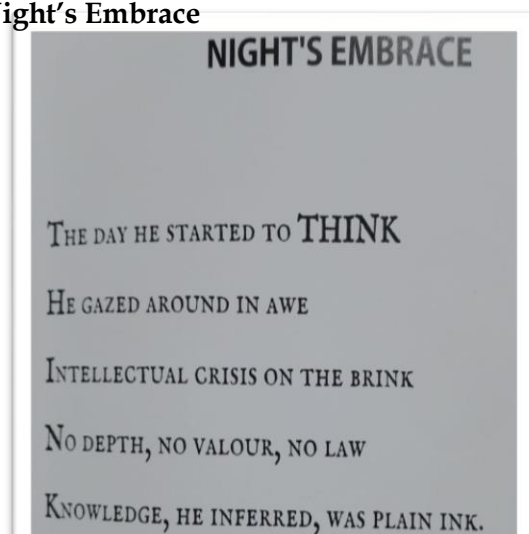


Figure 3: The Poem, Night's Embrace, by Amin (2022)



Figure 4: The Painting, Night's Embrace, by Amin (2022)

Night's Embrace- The Painting

The Representational Meta Function

The painting in figure 4 shows the sea, the shore and the sky- these are the represented participants that represent the process of change in the image. The image may be static, but it is well understood that the participants in the picture are all subject to change in reality. The sky and the sea constantly change colors so they are dynamic. Since the image has the realization of being dynamic thus the painting in figure 4 has a dimension of the narrative process. The horizontal lines of the shore and the horizon act as the vectors as they give directionality to the image.

The Interactive Meta Function

The image in figure 4 is an offer image and the objects in the image are exemplified as objects of contemplation. The image shows the participants in a far social distance thus the relationship between the significant participant and the spectators can be called formal and impersonal. The angle of the image denotes the representation of power between the viewers and the represented participant. The sky is seen from a low angle by the viewer which indicates that the sky holds more power. In comparison to the other participants of the image, the sky has a deeper purple color which further reinforces its power and it also occupies the most space in the painting.

The Compositional Meta Function

The sky in figure 4 has the most salience in the image as it occupies the most space however, the sea can also be the most salient feature because of its vibrant colors due to which it tends to be the most eye-catching element and because it is placed centrally.

Night's Embrace- The Poem

Binary Oppositions

In figure 3, from the title of the poem we can deduce the binaries of day and night. The title mentions the night's embrace that can indicate that the night time is welcoming and accepts questioning which the poem indicates however in the painting in figure 4, we can see the dark colors which do not seem to depict such a welcoming presence thus, here the binaries seem to deconstruct and night now becomes the unprivileged term. Further on in the poem in figure 3, through the phrase *intellectual crisis* we can establish, again, that the night's embrace doesn't seem to be a peaceful event rather it is leading to confusion and chaos.

The Lighthouse

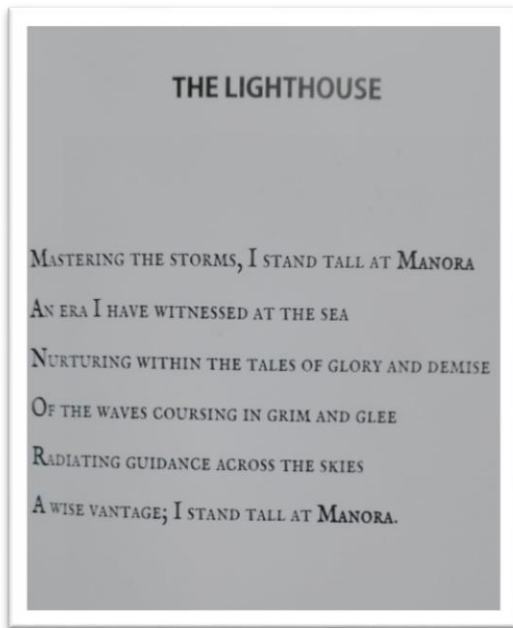


Figure 5: The Poem, The Lighthouse,
by Amin (2022)



Figure 6: The Painting, The Lighthouse,
by Amin (2022)

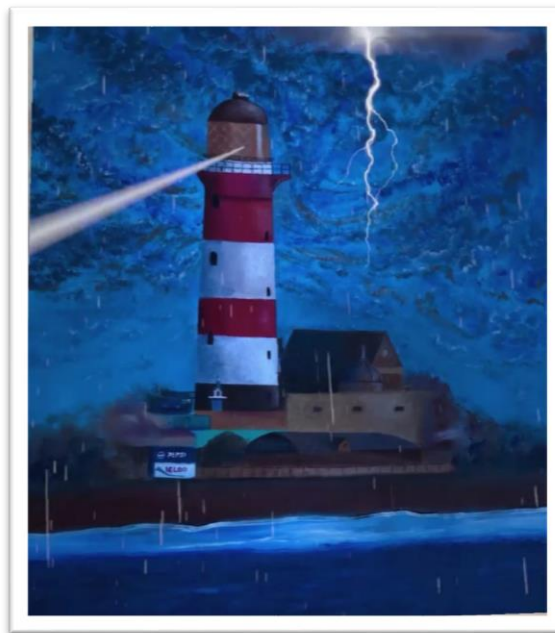


Figure 7: Screen Shot from the Augmented Reality
of the Painting- The Lighthouse,
by Amin (2022)

The Lighthouse- The Painting

The Representational Meta Function

In figure 6, in the painting, we see the lighthouse, the sky and the sea as the participants. The lighthouse standing tall in the vertical direction acts as the vector since it has directionality to it.

Though in the augmented reality, the moving painting shows an unfolding of actions. In the augmented reality the day turns into night and the light from the lighthouse turns on and moves about as shown in figure 7 which is a screen shot taken from a mobile phone while viewing the augmented reality version of the image in figure 6. Hence, the image in figure 6 is a narrative action representation. Since the sky also changes colors hence the image has the realization of being dynamic. The light extended from the lighthouse in figure 7 also acts as the vector, thus the image shows the use of a unidirectional transactional vector in which two major components of the image are connected- the light and the lighthouse.

The Interactive Meta Function

The interactive meta function schemes the relationship between the creator of the image and the viewers of those image. The painting in figure 6 is called as demand because the lighthouse is directly gazing at the viewers. The viewers feel at a distance since it a long shot showing the full vertical perspective of the lighthouse.

The Compositional Meta Function

The lighthouse in figure 6 is centrally placed and holds the most information value and tends to be the most eye catching element. In the augmented reality as well, the light converging from the lighthouse is the brightest and the most salient feature as seen in figure 7.

The Lighthouse- The Poem

Binary Oppositions

The binary oppositions that can be discerned from the poem in figure 5 are *glory* and *demise*, *grim* and *glee*. The binary oppositions show the perspective of the lighthouse as an animate object who has witnessed many grandiosities and atrocities at sea thus, the lighthouse stands tall among darkness and light. Through the augmented reality, we see the binary opposition of day vs night. In the day time, the lighthouse stands tall and static however at night time the lighthouse seems to be in vivid motion by expelling light. Thus at night time, the light becomes the privileged term.

Conclusion

Upon questioning the artist and the poet, Amin (2022) it was found out that in some cases the artist made the paintings first and then coined the poetry. However, in other cases, the poetry was followed by the paintings. The artist believes that visual art and poetry are the same in the realm of the brain and when the brain attempts to translate any idea, it may translate it in various ways be it poetry, prose or art which refers to the multimodality that exists in human nature i.e. our ability to communicate in different semiotic modes. The artist terms this as ekphrastic art where one art form accompanies the other in order to enhance it which is the multimodal perspective as well that different literacies can be used in order to make meaning out of something The analysis of the paintings through the framework of Visual Grammar shows how the different elements in an image can work together to create meaning. The analysis shows how the placement of certain elements curate a link between the participants and the viewers and how different colors used in a painting may create a variety of impact on the viewers. The analysis shows that the Visual Grammar framework can help us interpret images and in this case paintings, but using a theoretical perspective for the textual mode can provide us an even better understanding of the connection between the different semiotic modes. As in the

analysis we saw that the theory of deconstruction helped us uncover the underlying message behind the poems and together with the analysis of the paintings, the meaning of the multimodal resource as one whole was deduced.

Our findings showed that the artist revelled in the elements of *Pakistaniyat* as the title of her collection suggests that she wanted to bring into light the maritime treasures of Pakistan. Thus, our findings were in agreement with Dong and Cheng (2022) who also aimed to show a positive national image of China. Through the findings of this research it was shown how the linguistic and the visual mode came together to create meaning and the meanings were perceived with the help of deducing the binary oppositions in the poems and analysing the paintings through the visual grammar. Hence, similar to the research of Adrian and Faiza (2022) who also revealed that different modes can juxtapose together in order to dispel a specific meaning. This research showed that in order to fully grasp the meaning of a multimodal piece of art, the Visual grammar framework alone is not enough for the best interpretation of the images and text at play thus being in agreement with the opinion of Jewitt and Oyama (2004). Conclusively, this research shows that in the light of multiple linguistic and literary tools we can fully grasp the meaning behind the different modes that have been juxtaposed together in the work of the Pakistani artist and poet, Javeria Nabahat Amin.

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