Decrypting of Messages in Sri Lankan Political Cartoons: A Multimodal Approach

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Despite being a gateway for a wealth of knowledge, the attention received by Sri Lankan political cartoons has been scanty. Thus, this qualitative study extends a discursive content analysis, using the theoretical base of multimodal discourse analysis, on a collection of 52 political cartoons published in the English weekly, *Sunday Observer*, from January 2021 to December 2021. The data collected through document analysis were scrutinized using a mixed methodology that encompassed thematic, content, and discourse analysis techniques, within the framework of a semi-historical research design. The exploration sets out to decrypt the messages and to unveil the numerous modes used by those political cartoons, resulting in the discovery of miscellaneous thematic manifestations that could be placed under the three main categories of social, political, and economic. Additionally, the study also revealed the influence of different socio-political and economic contexts on these drawings whilst highlighting the purpose served by political cartoons in educating and spreading awareness to the common populace of their surroundings and their fate created by the incidents that occur and surround them. Further, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of political cartoons as a tool of communication, that could extend its reach to the entirety of the general public without being confined only to literate individuals. Finally, the study recommends further research to be conducted on Sinhala idioms, analogies, and motion-picture references used in Sri Lankan political cartoons.

Keywords: Contexts, Decoding messages, Multimodal discourse analysis, Sri Lankan political cartoons, Themes