



RESEARCH PAPER

The Evolution of Language through Memes: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Study of Pakistani Dramas

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to present an analysis of the memes on Pakistani dramas, highlighting the interplay of language and the transitions from intense to more subdued situations, ultimately resulting in playful humor. It explores how meme creators can alter a scene or situation by exaggerating small details. The study also examines how linguistic variation in memes can dramatically alter the original meaning of a scene. Five memes created from popular Pakistani drama scenes are analyzed, where the original dialogues are replaced, transforming serious or emotional moments into humorous ones. The study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) as proposed by Kress (2009) to investigate these transformations. Findings suggest that language plays a critical role in reshaping viewer perceptions, demonstrating how meme culture can subvert original media narratives and elicit different emotional responses. The study would be done at broader level to investigate how memes that mix languages (e.g., Urdu-English code-switching) influence comprehension, humor, and audience engagement.

KEYWORDS Memes, Instagram, Culture, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistani Dramas

Introduction

A meme is a delightful means of expressing a specific message through humorous images and visualizations in Pakistani society. In today's digital environment, memes represent a captivating phenomenon. With Instagram emerging as one of the most accessible and widely used social media platforms across all age groups, memes have become a powerful medium for expressing opinions, often addressing sensitive or controversial topics—such as political events, social issues, and gender stereotypes—through humor and satire.

Memes are nowadays understood as participatory, multimodal cultural artifacts that users create, remix, and disseminate on digital platforms (Davison, 2012; Milner 2016; Shifman, 2014). This variation of definition has emerged over the last two decades in media studies. However, the term itself has its origins in the 1970s and is associated with the field of memetics. The memes of the dramas are basically to engage the audiences in a large amount with the dramas and Pakistani industry from all over the world. As the audience mostly ignore the minor visual elements of the dramas such as gestures, dress code and background etc. The drama memes are created to highlight every aspect of the drama and increase the viewership of the dramas. Sometimes the audience becomes emotionally attaches to the culture and also these kinds of memes create a relation and interaction between the viewer and the culture. Memes allow audience to showcase the ridiculousness and contradictions within mainstream dramas, making remarks towards overused plotlines, unrealistic character representations, and the perpetuation of outdated stereotypes about women.

The process of interpretation leads to a deeper understanding of the themes and messages within the dramas, to engage audience with the material on a more critical level. In the context of Pakistani dramas, memes act as a captivating multimodal discourse that encapsulates audience perceptions, social commentary, and humor. These memes frequently emphasize heightened emotions, conventional gender roles, melodramatic narratives, and the societal challenges depicted in these series. They serve as a medium of digital communication through which users interpret meanings, critique cultural narratives, and either uphold or contest prevailing ideologies.

Memes

In the French language, "même" translates to "same," whereas the Greek word "mimóumai" means "to imitate." The term "meme" has been featured in the New York Times Crossword puzzle 60 times since its inception in the 1940s. Although identifying the very first meme is difficult, British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins is credited with coining the term in his 1976 book, "The Selfish Gene."

Origin of Pakistani Dramas

Pakistani dramas draw inspiration from Urdu novels, and in the years following 1969, a significant number of authors transitioned into television writing, including notable figures such as Umera Ahmad and Farhat Ishtiaq. Both have contributed to both literary digests and television serials. In recent times, Pakistani dramas have progressively addressed social issues that are often regarded as taboos.

History of Instagram

Instagram is a social media platform created for the purpose of sharing images and videos, launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom. The original iteration of Instagram was a web application called Burbn, which drew inspiration from Systrom's enthusiasm for fine whiskeys and bourbons. The official release of the Instagram application took place on October 6, 2010. Since its launch, the application has primarily focused on the display of photographs, especially those taken with mobile devices.

Literature review

Memes have been examined using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis to highlight their communicative and ideological roles. The subsequent section provides a critical assessment of the current literature regarding the memes on drama that shows social representation, as well as the psychological impacts of memes.

Meme as a Medium of social and political commentary

Javed et al., (2022) aim to highlight the social and political commentary and also reflect the social aspects. Memes are selected from different social media platforms and analyzed through the lens of critical discourse analysis. Discourse is the study of language chose word images, visuals in relation to specific contexts and purposes in which they are used. The theory being applied is multimodal. As defined by Kress (2009), Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis is combining semiotics of language and images to give a contextual meaning which is socially constructed. This also analyzes the roles memes play in shaping someone's perceptions. This study will aid other researchers in studying how memes represent society and how they actively participate in civic discourse.

Linguo-Cultural Analysis of Covid-19 Related Face-book Jokes

Khan et al., (2020) explore 'cultural grammar' of the Pakistani people, as well as their real-life issues and worries, as well as their doubts and belief systems, have been exposed by the hierarchical arrangement of the semantic densities of this funny repertory. Employing content creators to produce humorous yet inventive memes and jokes that nudge people's subconscious to be more mindful of their health is urgently needed. The study's conclusions support Cinelli's assertion that "evaluation of public priorities can lead public health decisions demanding collaborative action" (2020: 165).

Memes and education: opportunities, approaches and perspectives

Dongqiang and Serio (2020) explore the reasons and ways of using Internet memes in education in different language spaces – English, Italian, Russian and Chinese. To achieve this goal, a number of tasks were formulated, including: to study the linguistic factor of the use of memes in the educational process and to classify the ways of using memes depending on the purpose, and also to analyze the content of memes in the liberal, ideological, as well as in the field of exact sciences. Memes are a novel and unconventional approach to fostering students' creativity and helping them understand some challenging concepts in the field of math education. Memes are then regarded as a promising and advanced practical instrument for ideological instruction.

Internet Memes as Form of Cultural Discourse

Akhther (2017) analyzes the nature and functions of internet memes and its contribution to formulate a new cultural discourse. The findings instrument to illustrate how memes operate as rhetoric to explore the intercultural communication and identity construction prevalent in representative cyber-culture. It specially targets to inquire the inter-textual nature of memes which are created and disseminated by the Bangladeshi Facebook producers.

Dark Side of Pakistan showcasing economic crisis through memes

Raza et al., (2023) in their work look at how sarcastic imagery and comedy are used to portray Pakistan's economic difficulties on social media. It highlights two important viewpoints: first, how these memes affect how the general public views Pakistan, and second, how they inspire the next generation to get involved in the nation's economic growth. The study identifies the underlying meanings of these memes and their relevance to Pakistan's economic situation. Additionally, the findings show that a sizable portion of memes are used to criticize governmental actions, even though others are used to amuse audiences. The development of memes that center on economic crises emphasizes how crucial it is to have economic conversations that go beyond scholarly circles and address issues that affect the entire society.

Representations of Women's Role in Pakistani Drama Serials

Fatima (2019) aims to illustrate the representation of women in Pakistani drama serials and to assess the extent to which their on-screen roles align with the dominant honour discourses within society, thereby engaging with the politics of gender in Pakistan. The study indicates that nearly every facet of a woman's existence—personal, social, religious, economic, and political—remains shaped by prevailing honour discourses, which in turn contribute to the portrayal of a particular type of femininity on screen. Achieving greater gender equality necessitates addressing the issue at all levels

prior to implementing practical measures, and popular culture can serve as a crucial platform for initiating new discussions regarding women's roles.

Gendered Display of Culture in Pakistani Drama

Shabbir et al., (2021) study the influence of exposure to television social series on participants is found to contradict their role models and the gender expectations portrayed by mass media students. The findings reveal a relationship between exposure to Pakistani social TV series and specific qualities and roles associated with women, particularly within cultural, technical, and environmental contexts. Furthermore, the research observes that in Pakistani culture, where men focus on their careers, mothers participate in domestic partnerships, child-rearing, shopping, and socializing with same-sex peers, traditional "inherited and customary" roles for both men and women are prevalent in this society.

Gap in literature review and Present study

Despite substantial prior research, a significant gap remains that justifies this study. Previous investigations mainly focused on memes tied to specific socio-cultural elements, often emphasizing their prominence rather than providing an objective analysis of social representation, including both positive and negative aspects. A key limitation of earlier studies is the lack of cross platform analysis, as most memes were sourced from a single platform and did not specifically address Pakistani Drama Memes. Additionally, Pakistani research has often involved small sample sizes, limiting generalizability, and employed random sampling techniques.

To discuss these gaps, the current study examines how memes reference and remix of dialogues to transform intense scenes into humor, focusing on a specific event or individual for a broader analysis of drama memes. The sample size is smaller than in previous studies and is drawn from Instagram, using purposive sampling to ensure organized data analysis aligned with the study's objectives. This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of memes as reflections of language dynamics.

Methodology

Data Collecting Tool

The study used Instagram an electronic platform for the collection of data that is in the form of Memes created on the Pakistani Famous dramas.

Data Collection and Sampling Tool

The data for the present research is collected from Instagram especially the memes based on Pakistani dramas. Five memes from dramas telecasted between the years 2020 to 2024 are collected from different dramas.

Sampling Technique

Instagram memes depicting memorable scenes from Pakistani dramas (2020–2024) are intentionally chosen based on their cultural relevance and viral appeal by adopting purposive sampling approach

Theoretical Framework

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Kress, 2009) is used as theoretical framework and for the analysis of the data. This method uses a variety of media, such as text, pictures, audio recordings, and videos. It is an example of a discourse that can be comprehended and communicated through a variety of channels (Fairclough, 2001; Kress, 2009).

Data Analysis

In this study, the memes of different dramas are analyzed to demonstrate the difference between the original content and also figure out the use of language with the help of Multimodal discourse analysis (Kress, 2009). Although memes predate the internet by a long shot, their widespread popularity has only recently increased. Memes are easy to make and spread in the era of social media, and they frequently go popular in a matter of hours.



Figure 01 (Instagram) *Kabhi mein Kabhi tum*

Context

The meme that is discussed is retrieved from Instagram and the original scene is taken from the drama *Kabhi mein Kabhi tum*. The emotional scene of the drama is compared with the meme. The scene shown above is the moment when the protagonist Mustafa and his wife Sharjeena left the house because their family insulted, accused them of theft and just to make him feel that he is unemployed and idle person. Here, he is thinking about that time and telling his wife that money is the most important component of the present time. If he was also as rich as his elder brother, his parents never declared him thief and kicked them out of the house.

Translation of the statement above:

Mustafa Brother, the design of your vest is nice.

The figure on the right side is compared with the original scene. As in the drama, the scene is intense, in which the protagonist is telling about his feelings or emotions about his present circumstance to the girl named as Sharjeena his wife. On the other hand, in meme by using the linguistics elements the whole situation is converted into a funny statement "*baniyan ki design*" that provides us with a peek of how the public is

thinking about the dress design while turning the entire serious situation into a humorous moment. The statement alludes to a lighthearted remark made regarding Mustafa's vest in the scene, which seems to be from a TV drama. The creator of the meme is jokingly, sarcastically and complimenting the design of his vest, as the laughing emoji suggested. The hashtag #KMKT could be an abbreviation of the drama's title, implying that the meme relates to a specific moment of the show.

The statement of the meme gives a light-hearted, playful impact to the audience as well. As through this, the audience notice the minor things that they have overlooked would make a strong connection with scene. The statement adds a humorous and relaxed touch to the audience's experience, making the show more enjoyable and sparking conversation around the character's look. The researcher compares the meme with the original content the protagonist seems to be grabbed with the hurt caused by the close-ones just because of their wealthy son and his wife. The protagonist appears frustrated and unfairly judged by the close relations that broken him. It also reflects the societal pressure where relationships are sometimes, evaluated based on material wealth. The dialogue mentioned in the original content and also considering the background of the particular dialogue, it seems that the differential behavior or favoritism of parents can cause emotional damage.

A comparison between some memes and the original content reveals how much language and style influence the situation and it can be seen clearly in the above-discussion. By using the language and style the whole scene is changed and emotional moment in the serial is converted into a funny statement by highlighting some small factors like the design of vest has changed the momentum of the person and makes its focus towards that ignored points.



Figure 2 (Instagram) *Ehd e Wafa*

Context:

The meme under discussion is retrieved from Instagram and the original scene is taken from the drama *Ehd-e-Wafa*. *Ehd-e-Wafa* is a drama series focusing on the friendship between four young men, their personal growth and their journeys into adulthood. The series highlights themes such as love, loyalty, military service and the challenges young Pakistanis face as they try to balance personal and national

responsibilities. The real motive behind the story is that if these people are loyal, sincere, and united for their homeland, nothing can defeat Pakistan. The original scene of the drama is compared with the meme. This drama is the story of four back-benchers friends who later deployed at the best position in their preferred fields such as generalist, major in army, AC (Assistant Commissioner) and politician. Here is the moment of marriage ceremony of one of them, but his friend is asking him for the last chance to think before he gets married. The boy in the middle Captain Gulzar is the funny character who belongs to the poor and uneducated family but he has groomed his self after joining the army. General Major Saad in groom's outfit belongs to a well civilized and educated family just like the girl. They both love each other and later convinced their families for marriage after achieving their goals in the life.

The right figure is compared with the left figure that is the original content of the drama. In the "*Kabab Mai haddi*" is the urdu proverb that means an unwelcome intrusion when someone is enjoying their company, here in the figure the boy who is trying to say something to his friend (groom) while he is sitting on the stage with his wife. The drama scene is taken from "*Ehd e Wafa*" that is donated by the #Ehd-e- Wafa in the both the figures explain the actual scene that what the boy is saying to the groom "You still have time.... Change the *Molvi* or your decision" this dialogue gives a glimpse of entertainment and lighthearted moment of two friends in the wedding ceremony as in the Eastern weddings most of the times friends of groom and brides for the sake of fun do such kind of jokes and giggles to make the moment memorable. The scene seems to reflect the lighter, romantic side of the series and shows the relationships between the characters.



Figure 3 (Instagram) *Ehd-e-Wafa*

Context:

The meme under discussion is derived from Instagram, with its original context derived from the drama *Ehd-e-Wafa*. A comparison is made between the original scene from the drama and the meme. In this particular scene, we encounter Rani, a character

from the Chaudhry family, known for their political influence in the village. Rani is portrayed as a below-average student who lacks interest in her studies, a situation that can be attributed to her domestic environment. She has failed her matriculation examinations for the past three years and is currently attempting to persuade her mother that her lack of success is due to the chaotic conditions in the examination hall, which hindered her focus. Her mother, a simple and uneducated woman from the village, fails to recognize her daughter's potential of hiding her lack of concentration in the preparation of the exam because the scene before this, in which she has to prepare her exam instead of doing she was enjoying the music and dance.

The figure 3 portrays the condition of the below average students who don't concentrate in the studies and after giving the exam when the mother asks about the exam, simply say "*Paper achy huy hain, lekin ap zheni tor pay tayar rhen kuch b ho sakta!*". This line is typically used by the Pakistani student who has doubt in passing the exam. The comparison of the meme and the original scene tells us that the family environment also has a deep impact on the children. Mostly we can see the child of the *Goan ka Chaudhry* does not pay attentions in the study because he knows that he has enough wealth and can easily spend his life. In the drama, Rani is the girl who wants to marry the handsome boy instead of preparing the exam and she knows that her family will find a rich spouse for her as she is the only daughter of her parents. Parents play a crucial role in guiding their children towards righteous deeds and education. Rani's mother being uneducated struggles with this responsibility, highlighting the importance of parental awareness and education in raising children properly. However, she should also be wise in identifying her child's weaknesses and encouraging discipline.

As stated in the Hadith:

"Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you is responsible for his flock." (Bukhari & Muslim)

In a pivotal scene, the student sits down with her mother for a serious heart-to-heart. The mother, sensing her daughter's unease, encourages her to share her thoughts. The girl, with a furrowed brow and a hint of frustration in her voice, begins to express her feelings about the exam. She vents about the dishonesty she witnessed among her peers – students who she believes cut corners and cheat their way through the test. "It's just not fair!" she exclaims, her voice rising with passion. "I put in all the hard work, and they just walk in and ruin it for everyone else!" The mother listens attentively, nodding in understanding. She reassures her daughter that integrity and hard work will always pay off in the long run, even if it doesn't seem like it in the moment. The conversation highlights the importance of resilience and staying true to oneself, even in a competitive environment. As the girl continues to express her frustrations, the subtitles capture her every word, emphasizing her determination to rise above the dishonesty around her.

Rani's attempt to avoid accountability and her lack of dedication to her academics demonstrate a lack of accountability that is inconsistent with Islamic values. Fundamental Islamic precepts that promote individual and collective development include the importance placed on education, accountability, and effective time management. The story is a humorous reminder that, despite the fact that tests can be stressful and have unknown results, it is important to uphold one's morals and psychologically prepare for any conclusion. A touching mother-daughter dialogue, comedy, and relatable feelings combine to create an engaging story that appeals to kids worldwide.

The Prophet (PBUH) said:

"Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your busy-ness, and your life before your death."

(Hakim)

The drama imparts an important moral lesson about integrity, fairness, and the struggles faced by hardworking students in an unfair system. The female protagonist expresses frustration with cheating, which echoes larger ethical dilemmas in society. In contrast, the meme humorously captures a common student experience—feeling confident about an exam yet still anxious about an unexpected outcome. While the drama focuses on moral issues, the meme highlights the unpredictability of results rather than academic dishonesty. The dramatic scene presents an ethical dilemma, while the meme playfully reflects students' worries. In reality, both perspectives coexist; some students put in significant effort and are concerned about cheating, while others mainly worry about their grades without contemplating moral implications.

Winter is coming

Me to my sister 🤔🤔🤔



Figure 4 (Instagram) *Hum kahan ke sachay thae*

Context

The meme is taken from Instagram and the original scene is taken from the drama *Hum kahan ke sachay thae*. The story of the drama revolves around triangle love story and about two cousins' hatred for each other because of their family dispute. Here is the scene of the girls Mashal and Mahreen who are cousins and it is not bad to say that they are enemy of each other. Mashal is the girl full of complexity and always compares herself with Mahreen just like her mother. In the present scene, Mashal is hyper on Mahreen because her aunt rejected her proposal for Asfand. The situation of Mashal entrance in Mahreen's room is the surprise for her and she (Mahreen) tells her that "this is my room".

The opening line, "this is my room," is spoken by Mahreen in a cheerful and playful tone, establishing a sense of casual familiarity. However, the meme creator has taken this seemingly harmless remark and completely re-contextualized it, altering meaning and emotional significance. In the original scene, the exchange between the characters conveys camaraderie and a shared space, indicating a friendly relationship. In stark contrast, the meme dramatically depicts the two girls as rivals, introducing a

tension that was absent in the original context. This significant transformation emphasizes the adaptability of the dialogue; although the words remain the same, the implications and the dynamics between the characters are redefined. The meme implies a conflict or rivalry, which marks a notable shift from the original playful tone. This change in context serves as a compelling reminder of how easily audience emotions can be influenced by subtle shifts in interpretation. By keeping the same expressions and backgrounds, the meme creator skillfully alters the emotional atmosphere of the scene, illustrating how context affects perception. The comparison between the original contexts shows interaction and the new adversarial interpretation highlights the creativity inherent in meme culture, where a simple phrase can evoke entirely different emotions and narratives depending on how it is framed and presented. This ability to elicit contrasting feelings from the same material underscores the intricacies of communication and the crucial role of context in shaping our understanding of relationships and interactions.

This image gives the glimpse of the intersection of drama and reality, showcasing how a powerful television moment can be transformed into a lighthearted meme. While the original scene evokes deep compassion and meditation, the meme adds a playful twist that invites broader engagement. The essence of the original moment, the meme entertains and fosters community among viewers who relate to the emotions expressed.

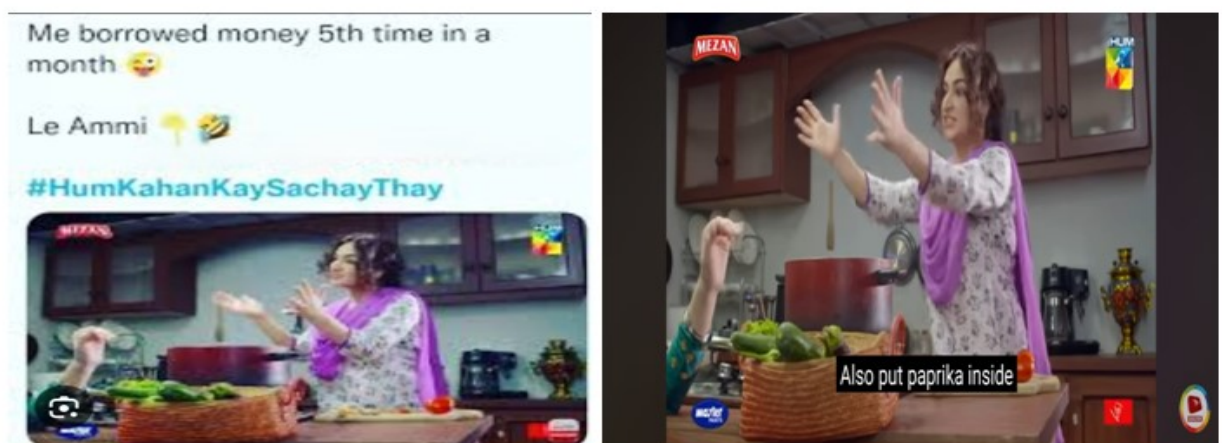


Figure 5 (Instagram) *Hum kahan kay sachay thae*

Context

The meme is retrieved from Instagram and the original scene is taken from the drama *Hum kahan kay sachay thae*. The original scene of the drama is compared with the meme. In this scene, Mashal engages in a conversation with her maid, Shabbo, as she tries to impress her aunt and her son, Asfand, by demonstrating her cooking abilities. However, the truth is that she is simply instructing her maid while following a cooking video on her phone, which annoys Shabbo, who already knows how to make the dish. This interaction effectively highlights Shabbo's frustration and anger.

The text humorously compares repeatedly borrowing money to a mother's exaggerated reactions, relatable to many. The meme caption, "Me borrowed money 5th time in a month 😊," uses casual slang and emojis, appealing to younger social media users.

In the visual representation, we see a woman, who appears to be a maternal figure, dramatically gesturing in a kitchen setting. Her expressive body language suggests that she is either reprimanding someone or emphasizing a point with great fervor. This scene is likely meant to evoke a sense of familiarity and nostalgia, as many viewers can recall similar moments with their own mothers or parental figures, where the reaction seems disproportionate to the situation at hand.

The subtitle, "Also put paprika inside," adds an unexpected twist to the meme. It hints that the original conversation was about cooking, perhaps discussing a recipe or a specific dish. This detail creates a humorous contrast with the financial theme of the meme, as it shifts the focus from the serious implications of borrowing money to a lighthearted and mundane topic like seasoning food. The combination of these elements not only enhances the comedic effect but also highlights the absurdity of the situation – borrowing money repeatedly while simultaneously being scolded about something as trivial as paprika in a dish.

This meme transforms humor, reflecting the evolving attitude of cultural expression today. It highlights the interplay between traditional South Asian parental dynamics and modern communication, resonating with a wide audience to contribute in cyber tradition. The trend illustrates the shift from traditional media to the internet and social media, transforming how cultural narratives are created and shared. Memes serve as powerful tools for multiple expression, allowing individuals to convey humor and self-perspectives that reflect identity and family dynamics.

Mememes help people to better understand about the Pakistani culture as per the mentioned images concerned the glimpse of the typical Pakistani families' scenario. In the drama, a quite different topic is being discussed but the meme creator has converted the whole emotion into a family element and fake presentation of the person.

Conclusion

The memes used in the research are taken from famous Pakistani dramas presented on Instagram. After having a detailed analysis of all the memes in the light of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (Kress, 2009) the study concludes the change of language from a serious to funny tone can change the whole meaning and the context of the drama's scene. It also explores the creative use of language that convert the intense scene into mild scene and also the language variations in memes that shape digital interactions through Pakistani dramas dialogues to create the new linguistics expressions in memes. This brings the advancement in the development of the Pakistani media industry, memes even highlight the minor aspects of the dramas that are ignored by the audience. The findings show a variety of components including textual changes, visual clues, and cultural allusions combine to produce a readily comprehensible viewpoint for viewers. This illustrates how even minor adjustments to the dialogue can have a big impact on the feelings and interpretations of any idea by the viewers.

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