From Critical Discourse to Semiosic Universe: Semiotic Evidence from SHEEP-Based Discourse

Dr. Naser N. AlBzour[1]
Associate Professor of Linguistics and Translation Studies
English Department
Al Albayt University, (AABU), Mafraq/Jordan

Dr. Baseel A. AlBzour[2]
Associate Professor of Linguistics and Translation Studies
English Department
Al Albayt University, (AABU), Mafraq/Jordan

Abstract

*Drawing upon the dynamic aspects of conceptual dimensions of signs in their sociocultural contexts, this study aims at exploring the manifestations and the interaction of SHEEP in human's cognitive processing in a way that reflects how culture-specific and culture-bound expressions may operate while messages are delivered cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. This paper, therefore, hinges upon the fundamental semiotic assumptions and implications of Sebeok'ssemiosic universe (Sebeok 1979; Sebeok and Danesi, 2000) within the framework of conceptual mapping proposed by Dancygier and Sweetser (2014). Such critical semiotic analyses are closely pertinent to but more comprehensive than critical discourse foundations of language and hyperspace as well as language and media. In order to achieve this goal, the researchers examined seventy quotes and sayings, collected from **Brainyquote.com**, that primarily involve SHEEP as a core sign in delivering, conveying and indoctrinating specific beliefs, attitudes and convictions based on the typical traits and stereotypes that are commonly associated with SHEEP shape-wise, function-wise and behavior-wise; thus the study reveals how a systematic cognitive mapping between the source domains and the target domains show great resilience and universality of such signs unidirectionally, bidirectionally and multidirectionally.*

Keywords: critical discourse, cognitive processing, cross-cultural, cross-linguistic, Sebeok, semiosic universe, source domain, Sweetser, target domain.

1. Introduction

Studies on language processing and language functions have been increasingly expanding in an impressive way in the very recent decades. Such studies have abandoned the traditional foundations of theoretical linguistics such as morphology, syntax and semantics (see Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, a new era of cognitive fields and cognitive research has marked the interests of many scholars whose primary concern is to establish a robust argument that can systematically account for the very fact that humans communicate with every possible tool that constitute the universal domains of signs and sign interaction. Such multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches and endeavors help scholar explore multifaceted aspects of signification and sign manipulation within the scope of semiosic universe that interconnects all the components of that trigger any communicative act linguistically and non-linguistically; verbally and non-verbally (Hymes, 1974).

Danesi and Perron (1999) refer to what they call a semiotic agenda" which is essentially hinges upon "the biological, psychic and social roots of the human need of meaning… As an applied interdisciplinary science, cultural semiotics enlists not only the notions of theoretical semiotics in its investigation of cultural forms of expression, but also the insights coming out of the cognate fields of psychoanalysis" (p. 55). Therefore, the researchers are adopting a long-run module and project that examines a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena that can help future research to set deeper and stronger foundations of semiotic behavior and semiotic mechanisms that may contribute to reducing the gap between theoretic linguistic studies and ethno-communication studies in this digitally-reshaped universe.

Evidently, great efforts have been exerted in this regard, and this research is nothing but a brick in a huge mansion that needs decades to be well-established banking on recent leaps in the field of language processing, cognitive sciences, ethno-cultural studies and the appallingly growing giant of artificial intelligence and robotics. Deepening the foundations of humanities and how such disciplines can work interactive hand in hand may open new horizons for future generations to bridge the gaps that do impede cross-cultural communication and hinder the cycle of progress and human coexistence among peoples of different cultures and different tongues.

Tylor (1871, 1) argues that "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

Therefore, the researchers aim at exploring some aspects of cognitive mapping that takes place systematically among various source domains and target domains that control and regulate our communicative acts semiotically. Such mapping between concrete and concrete; concrete and abstracts; abstract and abstract or abstract and concrete occurs because our cognitive structure and our schematic knowledge do constitute the primary base for any ongoing channel of communication at various levels of processing, from the minimal sound units to the maximal communicative acts themselves beyond the limitations of etymological and philological assumptions and deeper than the generative grammars of any linguistic competence (Sweetser 1990).

2. Methodology and Data

the researchers collected their data from *Brainyquote.com*. The data primarily focus on discourse comprising phrases and expressions that refer to SHEEP as an active sign that may trigger specific discoursal functions. Therefore, seventy quotes and sayings have been found for this very communicative end. Such quotes have gone viral over the past ten years by virtue of the frenzy of using social media worldwide; they are usually ascribed to political and spiritual leaders, philosophers, poets, and celebrities. The research qualitatively examined each quote and tried to relate each word in the quote to one another in order to explain how such words are connected and manipulated with reference to the core sign SHEEP. The linguistic components along with the cultural components have been closely considered so that the research can ultimately present a cogent argumentation that accounts for the idea of cognitive mapping of all the active signs in each stretch of discourse in light of the critical dimensions of the discourse that aims at indoctrinating specific beliefs, attitudes and convictions encapsulated in such typical traits and/or stereotypes.

3. Theoretical Background

Critical discourse analysis, henceforth CDA, has been one of the most popular trends in linguistics research over the past three decades as a result of the vivid nature of the data used in such down to earth studies away from the rigid formalism of traditional theoretical discipline of linguistics such as phonology, morphology and syntax. CDA investigates a wide scope of fields and issues that reflect the close relationship between daily discourse and it's socio-political contexts in terms of their ideological backgrounds and intended targets (Dijk 2008). Such social targets can be best understood in light of the very interactive relationship and focal impact of critical discourse in its social surroundings between the sender and the recipients (Fairclough 1992).

Such relationships involve a huge amount of intricate power-oriented discoursal inclinations. Therefore, Weiss &Wodak (2003: 12) argue that "CDA takes a particular interest in the relationship between language and power". Accordingly, Dijk (2001) neatly simplifies what CDA is all about by claiming that "discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, produced, legitimated, and resist by talk and text in the social and political context". Such a communicative impact of CDA can be seen in light of the idea of dominance and power schemas that it may trigger (Hodge and Kress, 1988)

Thus, Fairclough (1992) portrays such clashing beliefs and ideologies in terms of a series of transformations which summarizes the "struggle to reshape discursive practices and the ideologies built into them in the context of the restructuring or transformation of relations of domination" (p. 88). This is to some extent the core principle of that can explain the discoursal dimensions of legitimization and ideology (Dijk, 2001). In this very respect, one of the primary goals of CDA can be obviously traced in both written and spoken texts that we hear or read via social media, newspapers, space channels and various modes of hyperspace (Fowler, 1991).

Discoursal functions and tools are of paramount importance as the convey how premeditated options can be exploited in their various contexts as such in terms of modality, coherence, recontexulization, relexicalization and over lexicalization, i.e. repetitive and synonymous lexical choices (Leeuwen, 2008). Therefore, employing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches and assumptions have been truly emphasized in the kernel argument of such discourse-oriented studies (cf. Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1992; Fairclogh, 2005). Cognitive studies as such are among the most useful targets of CDA analyses. (Dijk, 2008), therefore, attempts to regulate and set the foundations for such CDA interests and cognition-based approaches have been in effect to establish a "theory of social cognition which enables to build a theoretical bridge between societal power of classes, groups or institutions at the macro level of the analysis and the enactment of power interaction and discourse at the social micro level" (Dijk, 2001: 18).

Context, as a result plays a vital role in CDA research. Such a linguistic constructed has been given utmost priority by systemic-grounded approaches (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). In order to contextualize such cognitive models of communication and interaction at the level of production and perception, Dijk (2005) hypothesized a practical framework that deems context as a mental entity according to which users can appropriately and successfully exchange successive stretches of discourse.
This flow of communication essentially takes place according to schematic shared knowledge and socio-cultural norms of institutionalized common sense of schemas, habits, beliefs and all cultural components; therefore, Dijk argues that context is the mental representation of the participants about the relevant properties of the social situation in which participants interact, produce and comprehend a text" (*Ibid*., 75)."

Corpus-based CDA, on the other hand, has been of the fruitful tools that scholars in the field have successfully utilized in data collection and data analysis. The reliability of such a quantitative approach is relatively trustworthy since a plethora of strategies and instruments can be communicatively approached such is grammatical distribution, collocational patterns, lexical choices, pronominal and x-phoric techniques to capture how discoursal effect can be attained (Cheng, 2004; Cheng, 2013; Stubbs 1997; Teubert& Krishnamurthy, 2007).

There is no doubt that *emic* and *etic* boundaries can be of a great help in such case (see Pike 1967). However, cognitive ethnolinguistic variables are much more important (Bartmiński, 2009), so beyond the structural premises of such structural distinctions, AlBzour B. (2016) maintains that "it is indispensible to pinpoint the role of conceptualizing schematic components of any meaningful elements because such schemata represent our cognitive ability to decode and to encode the texture of any text within the scope of both theoretical and applied linguistics". In this very respect, cultural linguistic studies can work hand in hand with CDA in a unified crucible that can achieve a high degree of perception of the sytematicity of semiosic universe. This can be easily captured when anthropological linguistic dimensions are critically implemented and investigated within their cognitive implications (Palmer 1996). This requires a substantial departure from the boundaries and the limitations of traditional ethnosemantic approaches so that pay primary heed to the semantic content of lexical items and their lexical field assumptions (Mankekar, 1999; Khanduri 2014).

The dire need for such interdisciplinary perspectives arises because lexical and even sentential semantics falls short to cater for various meaningful components of the texture and the function of discourse because "Semantic theory focuses on cognitive meaning and leaves the complexities of intention and innuendo to other disciplines…", Schogt (1992, 197). Consequently, the stereotypical and the ideological roots and foundations of any text cannot be appropriately comprehended outside their sociocultural frontiers and their ethno-semiotic implications (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Hymes, 1964). Such ethno-semiotic paradigms and interaction cannot be fulfilled with the existence of strictly operating systems higher than compositional axioms and mere semantic indications and restrictions of the scope of meaning that humans do exploit and even prevaricate on a daily basis (Peterson, 2003).

Cognitive Semiotics is fundamentally "an interdisciplinary matrix of (subparts of) disciplines and methods, focused on the multifaceted phenomenon of meaning." (Zlatev, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, our semiosis operates according to complicated yet systematic patterns and operations; so it is imperative to encompass any field of science in order to account for non-incidental features of our existence (Sebeok 1972; Sebeok, 1992)   forms of meaning within modeling systems enables researchers to lead more comprehensive analyses based on an a vast amount of possibilities (Sebeok and Danesi, 2000). Consequently, global semiotics can be properly set to serve the ultimate objectives of this research as far as sign interaction can be deemed inevitable (Petrilli, 2001; Ponzio and Petrilli 2001). One of the most efficient and cogent approaches to trace such global signification and representation can be attained through solid cognitive mapping that takes care of both literal and figurative firing between the source and the target domains (Sweetser, 1990; Dancygier and Sweetser, 2014).

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section examines the semiotic behavior of the word sheep in its socio-cultural contexts in order to highlight how such communicative acts have been carried out and purposefully delivered to achieve some specific discoursal goals. In light of Sweetser's (1990) pro-conceptual representation and analyses of the relationship between source and target domains, the researched has identified four major categories of cognitive mapping that such quotes involve and describe as long as the word sheep is mainly concerned with strict relevance to other major signs that coexist with SHEEP.

4.1. SHEEP and LION Unidirectional Mapping

The first group of quotes can be best classified under SHEEP-LION cognitive schemata of unidirectional mapping; i.e. A → B. Concrete-to-concrete mapping is immensely frequent in our daily communication simply because early brain functions mainly involve sensory-motor operations of linguistic and nonlinguistic processing. This is how Jean Piaget describes genetic epistemology, as a cognitive timetable which is biologically designed to guarantee the development of human's growth:

Sensory-motor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational and abstract or formal operational stage (Piaget, 1967). This sort of explicit mapping can be seen in (4.1.a.) as a sort of predominant one-to-one correspondence:

(4.1.a.)

It's better to be a lion for a day than a sheep all your life. Elizabeth Kenny

This stretch of discourse portrays a dogmatic aspect of the speaker's attitude and beliefs simply as a person who prefers dignity and honor over anything else. Of course, the sender is Elizabeth Kenny, a great nurse who fought for many years to cure sick people in different parts of the world in peace and in war; and she wrote her famous book My Battle and Victory: History of the Discovery of Poliomyelitis, which describes her struggle as a nurse against Poliomyelitis. Therefore, the recipient can figure out the ideological impact of such a message as encoded in this quote based on opposite relational features as it can be seen in (diagram No.1.):
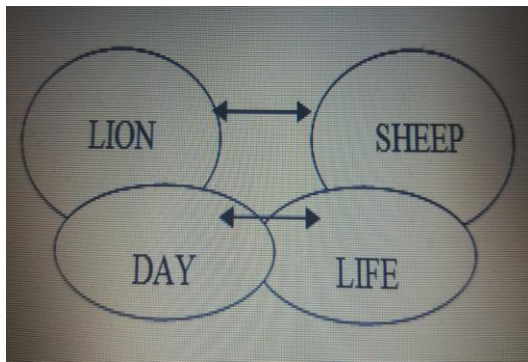
(*Diagram No.1. Opposite Mapping*)

Diagram No.1. can illustrate in one way or another how such cognitive mapping essentially hinges upon the opposite relationship between DAY as a transient period of time and LIFE as a very long period of time. Then, a concrete mapping takes place as DAY is associated with LION and LIFE is associated with SHEEP. Of course, LION can be deemed as a set of features and associations such as power, strength, fight, ferocity, bravery, audacity, intelligence, etc.; SHEEP, on the contrary, represents a set of features and associations such as cowardice, fear, timidity, submissiveness, weakness, stupidity, etc. As a result of this transparent mapping the message can be easily processed, sent and received. A group of quotes and phrases are cross-linguistically processed and conveyed in this very conceptual manner concerning the negative schematic image of sheep as it can be seen in (41.b.), (4.1.c.) and (4.1.d.):

(4.1.b.)

A truly strong person does not need the approval of others any more than a lion needs the approval of sheep. Vernon Howard

(4.1.c.)

We need more people speaking out. This country is not overrun with rebels and free thinkers. It's overrun with sheep and conformists. Bill Maher

(4.1.d.)

If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter. George Washington

It is evident in all these examples above that any cognitive mapping of SHEEP in such cases involves a strong negative attitude and abomination due to the schematic background that depicts SHEEP as coward, helpless, incompetent and untrustworthy.

4.2. SHEEP and SHEPHERD Bidirectional Mapping

Another group of quotes exhibit another aspect of such SHEEP-based conceptualization of SHEEP-SHEPHERD cognitive multidirectional interaction of signs. Again, such cognitive mapping is mainly yet not exclusively based on concrete-to-concrete mapping among signs and the associations of such signs in a way that typically reflects the cultural aspects of SHEEP-SHEPHERED relationship, where a shepherd is cross-culturally portrayed as the guardian and the protector of the sheep. Nonetheless, relationship has been shifted in another less frequent direction of cognitive processing as it can be seen in (4.2.a.):

(4.2.a.)

It is the duty of a good shepherd to shear his sheep, not to skin them. Tiberius

This quote is commonly ascribed to Tiberius Caesar Augustus, one of the greatest emperors and diplomats of Rome. The socio-political message that Tiberius cleverly sends in this message is based on the clash between what a shepherd should be and what he might do in some cases in a reference to the relationship between the emperor and his people. The source domain her is the emperor and the people, on the one hand, and the shepherd and his herd of sheep, on the other hand as it can be seen in the following diagram (Diagram No.2):

(*Diagram No.2. Resultative Mapping*)

Apparently, this sheep-shepherd mapping conveys a diplomatic message that regulates the practical and pragmatic relationship between the ruler and his people. This communicative act can be fully captured only if the recipient is familiar with the two scenarios of the ruler-people relationship; i.e. the ruler is designated to serve his people and the ruler takes power to use his people to the extreme. This has been cognitively encoded in the schematic functions that a shepherd assumes too, i.e. to take care of his sheep and to benefit from his sheep too, but not to slaughter his sheep. This mapping can be systematically attained once we determine how this superior-inferior or domineer-dominated relationship operates in the source domain and in the target domain; thus we can decide how such a pragmatic political doctrine can guarantee the existence of both sides of the equation based on the balance between the best interests of the shepherd and the best interests of the sheep. Now, compare the previous example in (4.2.a.) to some other similar cases such as (4.2.b.), (4.2.c.) and (4.2.d.):

(4.2.b.)

In levying taxes and in shearing sheep it is well to stop when you get down to the skin. Austin O'Malley

(4.2.c.)

The statesman shears the sheep; the politician skins them. Austin O'Malley

(4.2.d.)

People, like sheep, tend to follow a leader- occasionally in the right direction. Alexander Chase

Notably, this conceptual analogy in such SHEEP-SHEPHERED cases is similar to the core conceptualization of LEADER-PEOPLE relations pattern-wise, philosophy-wise and manner-wise, i.e. sheep are similar to peoples the way they gather, the way they show submission, the way they accept to be used; however, at a certain point of extreme pressure the shepherd or the leader may lose control over them or may lose them when he overuses their potentials.

4.3. SHEEP and LION Multidirectional Mapping

Another instance that shows a more intricate relationship between SHEEP and LION can be seen in the following example:

(4.3.a.)

I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion. Alexander the Great

This quote explicitly reflects the speaker's military background and schematic knowledge as the psychological and the lexical choices do closely interact show how cognitive processing takes place in Alexander the Great's, an acknowledged hero, mental space and how this can be accordingly perceived by recipients of this stretch of discourse. AFRAID is the first sign that triggers the schematic repertoire of the speaker since fear does contradict with our own background about the personal traits of Alexander the Great as a brave person. Simultaneously, LEAD has a close relationship with the speaker's identity as a great leader himself; then ARMY follows to add another brick to the military image of the speaker and his attitude; in addition, LION as a symbol of bravery and fierceness subjugated to SHEEP as a symbol of cowardice culminates the first part of the story in a coherent way; then the second part is contradictorily juxtaposed with the first part so that the intended message can be systematically conveyed and instilled:

(*Diagram No.3. Serial Mapping*)

However, the schematic representation and mapping of (4.3.a.) cannot be cognitively processed in this very simplistic linear fashion; rather, more sophisticated parallel processing is needed while the traits and the semantic features get rapidly and simultaneously interconnected (see Pinker, Steven and Mehler; 1988 and Smolensky, 1999) as it can be illustrated in the following diagram:
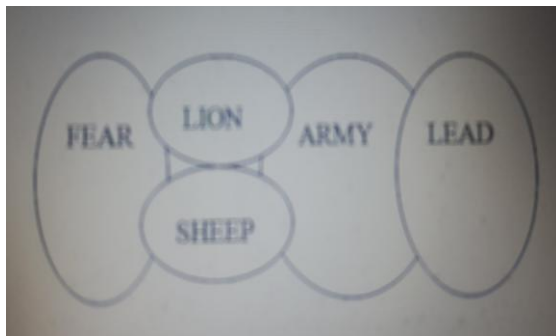
(*Diagram No. 4. Interactive Mapping*)

Scrutinizing the semantic content of each word in the quote and the way such words and signs can be interrelated, the researchers assume that there is a unique interactive mapping between the source domains and the target domains does not operate in a serially-ordered manner; rather, it operates in a closely productive manner in which mapping occurs not only at the level of lexemes but at the level of shared knowledge that determines the sets of features that each lexeme exhibits as it can be relatively hypothesized in (diagram No. 4.). So, FEAR can be seen as a set of features and associations such as negative attitude, weakness, lack of confidence, indecisiveness, et.; LION can be deemed as a set of features and associations such as power, strength, ferocity, bravery, fight, audacity, intelligence, etc.; SHEEP, on the contrary, represents a set of features and associations such as cowardice, fear, timidity, weakness, submissiveness, stupidity, etc.; ARMY, furthermore, comprises a set of features and associations such as team, organization, law & order, power, multitudes, war, destruction, etc.; and finally LEAD combines a set of features and associations such as

intelligence, power, authority, courage, decisiveness, etc. The same cognitive mechanism operates in many other cases such as (4.3.b), (4.3.c) and (4.3.d.):

(4.3.b.)

I am more afraid of an army of 100 sheep led by a lion than an army of 100 lions led by a sheep. Charles Maurice de Talleyr

(4.3.c.)

It is better to have a lion at the head of an army of sheep, than a sheep at the head of an army of lions. Daniel Defoe

(4.3.d.)

**A lion can lead sheep, but sheep cannot lead a lion. Matshona Dhliwayo**

These examples can demonstrate that the result of this multi-directional interaction of mapping between these attributes and features creates the total impact of the communicative act in a way that instigates the brain functions to process such signs simultaneously and effectively irrespective of some minor details as it can be captured once one thinks of the totality of features of LION, SHEEP and LEAD and how they schematically generate such universal production and perception.

4.4. SHEEP and WOLF Clashing Directional Schemata

In this section, the discourse of the quotes in question can be more likely approached based on the schemata as whole instead of considering some a single salient feature or features that may operate multidirectionally as in (4.3). Instead, all the features of WOLF and all the features of the SHEEP are taken together in a single dichotomy, i.e. A totally contradicts with B. This is substantially different from the combination between LION and SHEEP because SHEEP in (4.3.) always stands for any negative attitude in terms of timidity, passivity or stupidity, etc. while LION always stands for any positive attitude in terms of ferocity, superiority or audacity together or in light of each trait as such. However, WOLF, although a member of the predator family like LION, is oftentimes presented as evil and cunning source of power as opposed to SHEEP which is weak and helpless yet oftentimes good or simple when juxtaposed with WOLF as in (4.4.a.):

(4.4.a.)

It never troubles the wolf how many the sheep may be. Virgil
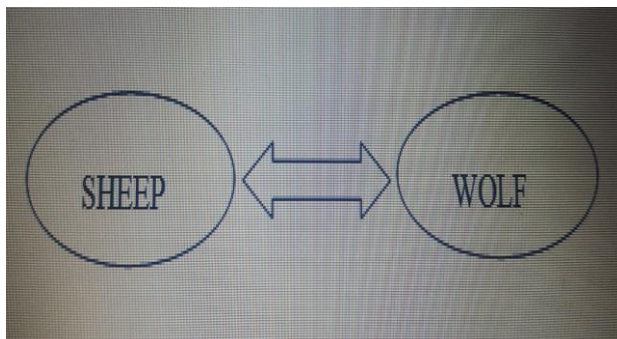
(*Diagram 5. Clashing Mapping Schemata*)

The overt mechanism of cognitive mapping in (4.4.a.) can show how SHEEP get outsmarted by WOLF despite the fact that SHEEP may outnumber WOLF. This schemata has been explicitly transferred into critical discourse of some political doctrines that underestimates the credibility of democratic "majority-wins-choices" when unfair representation is the norm simply because such choices are predictable in a way that depicts majority as a victimizer and minority as a victim by exploiting the clashing schemata of SHEEP and WOLF as it can be seen in (4.4.b) and (4.4.c)

(4.4.b.)

Majority rule only works if you're also considering individual rights because you can't have five wolves and one sheep voting on what to have for supper. Larry Flynt

(4.4.c.)

Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner. James Bovard

(4.4.d.)

Pacifists are like sheep who believe that wolves are vegetarians. Yves Montand

5. Conclusion

This paper attempted to explore the cognitive mapping of our schematic knowledge as manifested in a sample of sheep-based discourse in some expressions and quotes in order to provide a piece of evidence that may support the argument in favor of semiosic universe. The results and the findings of this study have impressively shown how systematic our cognitive processing as humans can be when such expressions are used literally and figuratively. Unlike traditional analyses of metaphorical expressions, the cognitive/conceptual approach adopted in this paper can be very comprehensive and can engender more fruitful results that go in tandem with the major assumptions of Sebeok's semiosis and how such assumption can be extended to various fields of sciences in order to establish an optimal theory of meaning based on the universality of signs and sign interaction at all levels of communication. Therefore, the researchers have demonstrated how SHEEP, as an example, has been exploited in light of how its salient properties and salient features show substantial resilience to and operationally interact with some other signs in various texts. Such an overwhelming interaction exhibits an overall cognitive behavior that can be discerned by language users cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. Hence, the researchers recommend that further studies be conducted in such relevant areas and within the same framework and for similar goals; this can lead ultimately to more synthetic arguments that may open new horizons for other researchers in linguistics, translation studies, ethnography and artificial intelligence.

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Bio

1. Dr. Naser N. AlBzour earned his Ph.D. Degree in Linguistics and Translation from Purdue University, USA, in 2011. His Ph.D. dissertation concentrated on Multidisciplinary approaches of Semiotics, Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis with relevance to Translation Studies. He was appointed at AlAlbayt University in 2011. Currently, he is an Associate Professor of Linguistics and Translation at AABU. Here is his Email Address: nnnbzour@gmail.com

2. Dr. Baseel A. AlBzour is currently an associate professor of Linguistics and Translation Studies at AlAlbayt University. She received her Ph.D. Degree in Linguistics and Translation from Purdue University, USA, in 2011. Her Ph.D. dissertation investigated various Multidisciplinary issues such as Semantics, Pragmatics and Semiotics in relation to modern Translation Theory. She was on a scholarship from AABU. Here is her Email Address: bbbzoor@yahoo.com