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## Semiotic and Critical Discourse Analysis of the Editorial Caricatures on Covid-19 Vaccine

**A B S T R A C T**

This paper aims to study some selected caricatures from selected editorial sources undertaking COVID-19 vaccine to signify how they are assembled to expose the messages and donate the social and political practices in the context. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has stated Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a pandemic. A worldwide, systematic initiative is required in order to avoid even more dissemination of the virus which has been occurring over a large geographical region and affecting an exceedingly high percentage of the population. The caricatures which are going to be analysed are related to the lack of covid vaccine and the worldwide citizens' negative reactions against the authorities. Depending on the CDA and Semiotic models, the caricatures will be analysed based on the linguistic messages (to cover the portrayal of the verbal descriptions relating to lexical choices), the literal denoted messages (to describe the non-linguistic features) and the symbolic connoted messages (to interpret the link between the textual and denoted elements).

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### تحليل الخطاب السيميائي و النقدي للرسوم الكاريكاتورية التحريرية حول لقاح كوفيد- ١٩

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**الخلاصة:**

يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة بعض الرسوم الكاريكاتورية المختارة من مصادر للدلالة على كيفية تجميعها لتحليل رسائل تحريرية تتناول لقاح كوفيد ١٩ ومنح الممارسات الاجتماعية و السياسية في سياق الكلام. أعلنت أمانة الصحة العالمية في ٢٠١٩، ان مرض فيروس كورونا وباء عالمي يقتضي مبادرة

منهجية للحد من انتشار الفيروس في مساحة جغرافية واسعة و الذي يؤثر على نسبة كبيرة جدا من السكان. ترتبط الرسوم الكاريكاتورية التي تم تحليلها بنقص لقاح فيروس كورونا و ردود افعال السلبية للمواطنين في جميع أنحاء العالم ضد السلطات. اعتمادا على نماذج تحليل الرسوم الكاريكاتورية بناءا على الرسائل اللغوية (لتغطية الرسوم الكاريكاتورية للأوصاف اللفظية المتعلقة بالأختبارات اللغوية و المادية) و الرسائل الرمزية (لوصف الميزات الغير اللغوية) و رسائل ذات دلالة رمزية (لتفسير و المشار إليها الارتباط بين العناصر النصية).

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** كوفيد-١٩, لقاح, التحليل الخطاب النقدي, السيميائي, كاريكاتير, نظرية فيركلف و بارش

## 1- Introduction

This research has been performed by integrating the critical discourse analysis (CDA) model and the Semiotic Model. Barthes' semiotics and the critical discourse research model of Fairclough provide a systematic structure for analyzing semiotics and discourse in the modern socio-cultural and economic, and political processes. Fairclough's three-dimensional models have been used in the bottom-up scheme integrating it with the semiotic model of Roland Barthes on parallel lines. The data analysis practice starts from a broader perspective to a narrow one. Cultural and social context is then explained initially, and discursive practice and text analysis with semiotic analysis follow it at the micro-level. In his works, Barthes (1957, 1964, 1972, 1977) claims that the symbol is respecting its denotative and connotative meanings. There are three parts of the meaning system: The linguistic messaging (text), the iconic uncoded communication (literal/denoted image) and the iconic encoded message (symbolic/connoted image).

A unique subset of current scientific linguistics that has expanded internationally in recent times, CDA is an analytical tool for debate. The emphasis of scholars via numerous CDA research was not only on what language is but also on why language poses such a condition. The CDA attempts to determine the meaning of discussion and how discourse produces this sort of meaning. It seeks to reveal the effect of ideology on the discussion through the surface level of language structure, for social order and power relationships, the counteractive influence of dialogue on philosophy, and how

the two components arise from and operate. It tries to expose, in a word, the connection between language, ideology and power. (Fang, 2016: 1076).

As a discipline in the social sciences and humanities, critical discourse analysis has now strongly evolved to the point that the abbreviation 'CDA' is extensively employed to denote an identifiable framework to language learning that exists through a variety of dissimilar forms. Some researchers have demonstrated that critical discourse analysis is similar to creating an "orthodoxy intellectual (Billig, 2002: 44).

A quickly developing area of language science is critical discourse analysis (CDA). Discourse is known to be a 'group practice style' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 258), and the sense of language usage is kept in mind to be fundamental to discourse (Wodak, 2001: 81). A particular concern to CDA is the connection between language and control. CDA can be defined as neo-Marxist; it is generally agreed that CDA cannot be categorized as a single instrument. Instead, as a method consisting of several points of view and diverse approaches for analyzing the relationship between language and social significance, it claims that cultural and economic considerations are important in the development and maintenance of ties of influence.

Similarly, Freedman, Sargent & Stears (2013) argue that CDA is not an analysis method but a social movement. It can include lexicon analysis, syntax, local and global meaning (semantics), speech acts, and other contextual relationships (pragmatics), argumentation, rhetoric, style, narrative frameworks, or any other traditional discourse organization. Van Dijk (1995) also suggests that CDA is derived from critical semiotics, critical linguistics, and generally, from a socio-politically studying of vocabulary, conversation and correspondence as a special technique for text and speech analysis (p. 176).

## **2-Definition of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary method to research into discourse that considers language as a means of social contact, or speech and text. Researchers operating in the CDA tradition contend that (non-linguistic) social culture and linguistic practice reflect each other and concentrate on studying how language forms are used and how social power relations are reinforced (Fairclough, 1995).

According to Fairclough and Wodak(1997: 258, 284) the terms Critical Linguistics (CL) and Study of Critical Discourse (CDA) are also used synonymously. The word CDA seems to be favoured in recent times and denotes the principle predominantly identified as CL. 'Language as social practice' is regarded by the CDA and contemplates the meaning of language practice (Wodak, 2000:123).

Moreover, in the connection between law and control, a clear concern is taken by the CDA. The term CDA is currently employed to relate more precisely to researchers' critical linguistic approach: the essential communication factor and the discursive text's larger component. Critical Discourse Analysis is characterized as a section of discourse analysis that analyzes ambiguous and also explicit systemic relations of domination, segregation, authority and influence as articulated in language (Fairclough, 1993: 133)

Critical Discourse Analysis is characterized as a branch of discourse analysis that deals with the analysis of opaque and visible systemic relationships of domination, prejudice, power and control as articulated in language as Faircloughwrote:

Discourse research also aims to analyze logically opaque causal associations and determination of causality and decision among (a) discursive activities (b) and discuss how the ambiguity of these encounters between dialogue and culture is itself a component that guarantees dominance and hegemony. (Fairclough, 1993: 135)

In a related vein, van Dijk (1998) proposed that the study of critical speech is an arena in which written and spoken texts are studied and interpreted to uncover the discursive roots of influence, superiority, oppression and prejudice. This discusses how these discursive origins are retained and repeated in specific political, historical, and social contexts.

Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to make evident the connections between discourse structures, social activities and social institutions, links that may be opaque to the layman (Sheyholislami, 2001: 1).

### **3- Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis**

#### **3.1. Dialectical-Relational Approach**

The Dialectical-Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Study of Fairclough (1989, 1995) is an inherently Marxist paradigm, rooted in his research on language, politics and control, which we find a vocabulary that is very strong, including domination, resistance, discursive practice hybridization, discourse technologization, and popular discourse conversationalization.

Fairclough, as Wodak and Meyer (2009, p.1-33) clarify, highlights the semiotic meditation in debates of social tension, which transforms into his involvement in social progressions (i.e., practices, events, and social structures). His advocacy for basic language understanding is a realistic approach (Fairclough, 2007).

#### **3.2. Socio-Cognitive Approach**

A method marked by the relationship of intellect, conversation and culture is the Socio-Cognitive Discourse Study of Van Dijk. It started with informal text linguistics and then introduced features and the frame obtained from cognitive psychology of memory's traditional psychological paradigm. Stereotypes, the propagation of racial bias, and power misuse by leaders and opposition by controlled communities are a major part of van Dijk's practical study.

Van Dijk also stresses the control of the aspects of dialogue to obtain access to authority. The K-device, which is a shorthand for intimate, interpersonal, community, systemic, national and cultural awareness, is another factor in his account of the development and understanding of discourse (van Dijk 2005, p.71). Cognition realized as a product of agreement of mutual conceptual constructs is the connection between social and discourse systems. (van Dijk 2009, p.62-86).

While social constructs impact discursive contact, the prior is claimed to be "enacted, implemented, legitimized, verified or questioned by text and speech" in the latter (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 266). Van Dijk (2009, p.62-86) claims that CDA requires a context paradigm such as the theory of social representation of Moscovici (2000): the perception of one person is influenced by dynamic structures known as social perceptions, i.e., the ideas, beliefs, norms and images exchanged in a social community and enabled and retained in discourse. He promotes the study of macrostructures of semantics, local

concepts, formal systems, modes of global and local discourse, basic linguistic realizations and context. Coherence, lexical and subject collection, rhetorical statistics, speech acts, propositional systems, consequences, hesitation, and turn-taking regulation are the things he reflects on.

Despite its strength, I believe in this approach that a somewhat defective clarification does not completely assure intersubjective consensus between researchers of how to implement some of the rules described by van Dijk in the practice of discourse; hence, multiple understanding is accessible to methods and conclusions.

### **3.3. Discourse-Historical approach**

The Discourse-Historical Method (DHA) (Wodak and others) aims to identify, among other things, those situations in which those in control utilize language and other semiotic behaviours to preserve supremacy. (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009, p.87).

Originally, DHA in anti-Semitic rhetoric was associated with biased utterances. The latest trends involve the discursive creation of national homogeneity via discourses of distinction and the social alienation of out-groups, and the restoration of the past via sanitized representations. The basic approach portrays sociolinguistics and ethnography; it also offers Habermas' notion of the public domain and strategic communicative behaviour an essential position, as contrasted to the ideal understanding-oriented conversation. The significance of taking the textual and qualitative layers of research together is its core tenet.

The meaning paradigm used in DHA refers to historical information interpreted because of four layers. :

- (a) The linguistic co-text,
- (b) The inter-textual and inter-discursive level,
- (c) The extra-linguistic level,
- (d) The sociopolitical and historical level (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

The connectivity among different texts and discourses contributes explicitly to de-contextualization and re-contextualization, mechanisms in which it is possible to delete items that are characteristic of a given context and introduce them into a modern setting in which they have not been conventionally identified. A variety of theoretical and informative tools were further developed by DHA, building on linguistic models and the principle of argumentation.

Specifically, DHA lists six ideological positioning techniques (i.e., selection, estimation, argumentation, viewpoint, exacerbation and mitigation) that are studied as part of a broader framework that often involves describing a discourse's contents, linguistic modes of speech, and context-dependent stereotypical linguistic realizations. The focus on the synthesis of observation, theory and procedure, and the difference between implementation and theoretical frameworks is DHA's strengths. Its sociological analyses, political and historical, are also a crucial component of its approach, particularly concerning genre structures, although one of its shortcomings is the absence of a truly systematic protocol in this regard.

#### **4- Semiotics: An Overview**

The term 'Semiotics' has been derived from the Greek word 'semeiotikos' which means "the study of signs". Hartmann and Stork (1972) state that "Semiotics is the systematic study of linguistic and non-linguistic signs". Eco (1976) and Chalndler (2007) say that the sign (semiotics) can refer to a notion or an object that accomplishes the mission of a sign. In semiotics, the multiplicity between signifiers and signified create the concept of meaning. The signifier can be a picture or a graphic that represents something like words or letters. Then, the signified is the coherent facet of the idea. Sobur (2006) states that the terms signifier and signified was recommend by Saussure as "Signifier is seen as physical forms. Signified is seen as meaning revealed through concepts. Existence of Saussure's semiotics is relation between signifier and signified based on convention, known as signification". Jurjensen (2014) clarifies that Barthes was an innovator of structuralism and post-structuralism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, Syahri (2011) explains that Barthes' idea is "the study of meanings or symbols in a language or sign. Order signification is divided into denotation, connotation and other aspects of the sign, that is myth". Then, Hjelmslev (1961: 114) in Barthes (1957) states:

"unity of a signifier with an idea or signified is sign. In other words, signifier is a meaningful "sound" or meaningful "scribble". Thus, signifier is material aspect of the language; it is what is said or heard and what is written or read. Meanwhile, signified is mental, thoughts or image of concept".

#### **5- Corona Virus: a brief Introduction**

A modern micro-organism that induces hosts to have lung infections is a coronavirus. This is the biggest health risk confronting the population

worldwide. That is why it has been characterized as a worldwide pandemic. Human beings are usually affected by the infection. This virus chromosome is similar to that of other family members. In immune-compromised patients, death usually happens if the patient is remained unresolved (Hammad, Ur, Bajwa,2020, p.1).

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was legally told of a bunch of pneumonia cases in Wuhan City in China. The coronavirus is a member of the cocoronavirinae subfamily, the coronaviridae family, and the Nidovirales order. This virus typically causes breathing and gastrointestinal infections. That is why the new epidemic is attributed to the distinctive  $\beta$ -coronavirus (COVID-19). The genome of the virus is the single-stranded positive sense of RNA. Many studies have been undertaken to determine the root of this virus. Phylogenetic studies have also been performed, and this virus is of bat origin. For this virus, bats are serving as reservoir hosts. This virus is identical to the human coronavirus (SARS-Co V) by 82 percent and to MERS-Co V by 50 percent. Research has demonstrated that MERS-Co V was spread from bats to camels. Different hypotheses remain surrounding the latest virus pandemic(Hammad, Ur, Bajwa,2020, p.2).

Coronaviruses are RNA viruses that can be detected under an electron microscope with a crown-like shape. In Latin, the term corona is derived from the word coronium, meaning crown. Its crown-like structure is accountable for the existence of surface glycoproteins. Of this virus, four genera can be listed. There are alpha-coronavirus,  $\beta$ -coronavirus,  $\gamma$ -coronavirus, and delta coronavirus. There is more classification of the  $\beta$ -coronavirus into five lineages. Phylogenetic tests have shown that bats and rodents spread alpha-coronavirus and  $\beta$ -coronavirus.

Coronavirus is a large family, and gastrointestinal, GIT, hepatic, and neurological diseases are caused by members of this family. Around seven coronaviruses are available that can kill human beings. HCoV-OC43, HCoV-HKU1, HCoV-229 E, and HCoV-NL63, all under the umbrella of alpha-coronaviruses, are multiple coronaviruses that can affect humans. Such viruses contribute to upper respiratory infections, and the disorder is self-limiting(Hammad, Ur, Bajwa,2020, p.2).

## 6-Caricature: An Overview

The English word caricature originates from the Italian word caricare, which in the 18th century meant to fill, to fee, and was widely used. The 16th and 17th centuries saw the rise of caricatures in literature. They were seen as a means to mock rulers by the European elite, but there is proof of them right back to previous cave paintings (Helly, Douglas, 2020), an exaggerated, usually comical, representation of a person or subject caricature. The caricature was originally an artistic concept. Artists painted people's portraits, exaggerating real attributes to create a silly portrait. When applied to fiction, caricature implies that to create comedy, the writer has exaggerated aspects of an individual or subject.

According to Shafali (2014: 3),the caricature is “Utilizing gross exaggeration or distortion, as for comedic impact or in mockery, an image or definition.”Alternatively,a Caricature is a humorous likeness of a person, created through selective exaggeration of his physiognomy (facial features) and other physical attributes.”Tom (2011: 2),says that a caricature is a portrait with the volume turned up. A caricature is a painting, or more commonly a picture, of an object or item in which the characteristics and structure have been blurred and exaggeratedto ridicule or satirize the topic.According to Lasbeauxarts (2018) Caricature is a drawing of a human individual that obscures or misrepresents those attributes but maintains a similarity: an unrealistic piece of portrait painting, in other words. According to Michael (2014:1),caricature is the art of distortion, pulling, stretching and probing into a likeness to find the salient features.Ralatively, Gibson (1971: 27) states that the presence of caricatures has shown theorists and psychologists somewhat of a nuisance bent on studying graphical depiction. The distinction between caricature and traditional “realistic” representation is part of the issue.

## 7- Data Analysis

In this part, the researchers will depend on Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis and Barthes' model of semiotics as an inclusive framework to analyse the data.Fairclough describes the subsequent process: The researcher examines one social problem with a potential semiotic part. Through defining its modes (or semi-iotic forms of being), genres (or semi-iotic ways of behaving

and interacting) and discourse, this dimension is examined (or semiotic ways of construing the world). Later, it identifies the distinctions between forms, genres and discourses. Next, the researcher investigates how the colonization of dominant styles, genres and discourses is resisted. The emphasis then turns to the context's structural analysis and the agent, transitivity, body language, tense, modality, visual image analysis. Interdiscursiveness is finally struggled with. Irrespective of this methodology is evident neatness. On the other hand, In semiotics, the multiplicity between signifiers and signified create the concept of meaning. The signifier can be a picture or a graphic that represents something like words or letters. Then, the signified is the coherent facet of the idea.

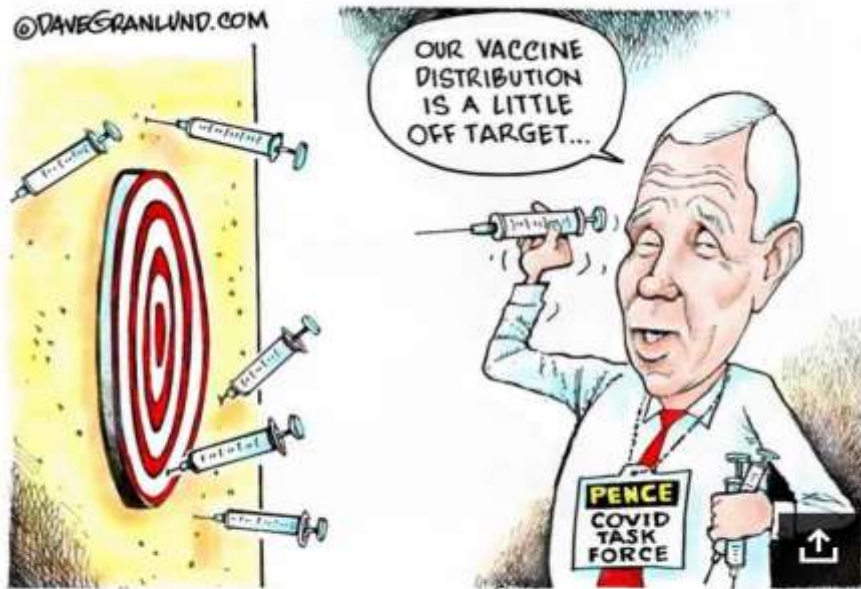
Thus, the researchers have selected four caricatures from selected editorial sources tackling COVID-19 vaccine to denote how they are constructed to reveal the messages and contribute the social and political practices in the context. The caricatures, as mentioned earlier, will be analysed in terms of the linguistic messages (to cover the portrayal of the verbal descriptions relating to lexical and physical choices), the literal denoted messages (to describe the non-linguistic features) and the symbolic connoted messages (to interpret the link between the textual and denoted elements).

Mike Luckovich | Creators Syndicate



Figure 1: Taken from *Syracuse* dated Dec. 20, 2020

In figure 1, there are two linguistic messages: the caption in the bubble “I WANT TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL. I WANT TO PLAY WITH MY FRIENDS, AND I WANT TO HUG MY GRANDPARENTS.”, and, on the right-hand side of the cartoon, a caption on the bag “VACCINE”. The literal denoted captions consist of an aged doctor, who is wearing a mask, glasses, medical uniform and a stethoscope around his neck, and a small child, sitting on the doctor’s leg, who is wearing a mask as well. Furthermore, in the cartoon there is a bag of vaccine. Both the literal and denoted captions inter-semiotically reveal the connoted message. The child’s verbal caption in the bubble and her innocent and poor face expose her eagerness to get rid of the pandemic of coronavirus by getting a certain vaccine, and go back to her normal life spending times with her friends and her family members. On the other hand, the doctor’s reaction is foregrounded as the startled gesture of his face highlights his inability to offer the child a certain vaccine which is not prepared yet to be used. Here, by blending the verbal and visual messages, the cartoonist intends to criticize the political leaders who have not been able to develop COVID-19 vaccines so far, after nearly a year from the beginning of the pandemic.



Dave Granlund, USA TODAY Network  
USA TODAY NETWORK

**Figure 2:** Taken from *USA TODAYNetwork* dated Jan. 11,2021

In figure 2, two linguistic captions are identified in this cartoon: the caption of the man in the bubble “OUR VACCINE CONTRIBUTION IS A LITTLE OFF TARGET” and the script on the identification badge hanging around the man’s neck “PENCE: COVID TASK FORCE”. The visual and literal signs of the cartoon include an aged man with three syringes in his hands and an archery target board which has been shot with five syringes. In this cartoon, a man is throwing syringes at a target board but he cannot hit the target center. The linguistic and literal elements connote the cartoonist’s intention of what he is going to deliver in the context. The caption on the badge reveals that the man is the vice president of the United States. Then, the caption in the bubble connotes that the vice president (or the USA authorities) could not keep his promise in providing COVID-19 vaccine so as to save the American citizens’ lives. Thus, similar to the previous cartoon in figure 1, this cartoon is a criticism on the politicians who cannot see that people’s lives are really at stake.

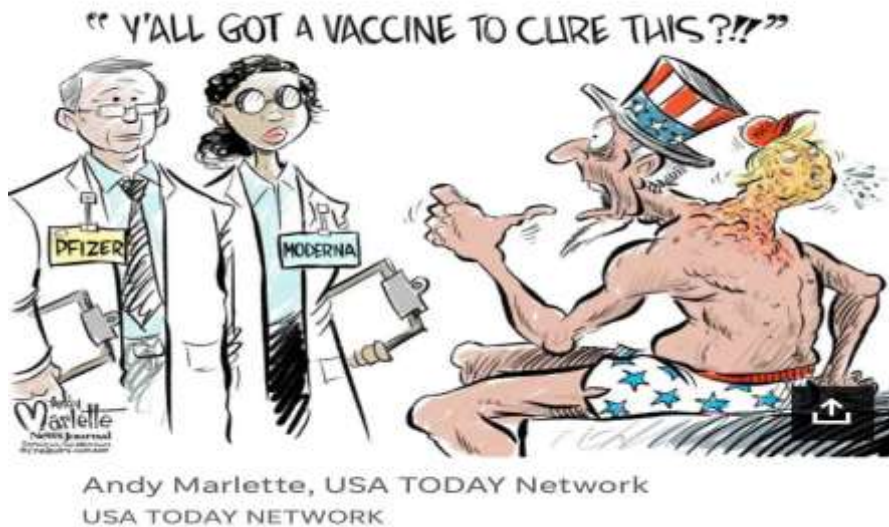


Figure 3: Taken from *USA TODAY Network* dated Jan. 11, 2021

In figure 3, three linguistic messages can be seen: the caption of a half-naked man “Y’ALL GOT A VACCINE TO CURE THIS ?!!” and two labelled badges on the man’s chest “PFIZER” and on the woman’s chest “MODERNA”. The denoted captions are made up of a half-naked aged man, who is wearing shorts

and a hat decorated with American flag, and two other people (a man and a woman), who are standing next to each other, wearing glasses and medical uniform, and carrying file folders in their hands. The verbal and pictorial captions together reveal the concealed target of the cartoon. The scripts on the two labelled badges (Pfizer and Moderna) indicate the development and rolling out two COVID-19 vaccines by both pharmaceutical companies. The man in the medical uniform stands for Albert Bourla, the Greek executive officer of the American pharmaceutical corporation Pfizer, and the woman alludes to Kizzmekia Corbett, the African American immunologist who serves at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and had a major role in developing the COVID-19 vaccine of Moderna. So, it seems that two types of vaccine have been developed, but the affected man's reaction is crucial. The man's caption "Y'ALL GOT A VACCINE TO CURE THIS ?!!", especially the double exclamatory marks "!!", exposes his (or American citizens') doubt concerning the development of the vaccine due to the fact that American citizens were promised to get the vaccine much earlier. Then, the man's shattered and fatigue situation is shown by the cartoonist to criticize the American authorities who have reached the development of the vaccines at a time which is too late, whenever the casualties are hundreds and thousands. Furthermore, the helplessness and desperateness of the affected man is much more determined by the depressed facial expression of the two scientists who can realize the serious and critical situation of the affected man.



Figure 4: Taken from *USA TODAY Network* dated Jan. 11, 2021

In figure 4, there are three linguistic messages: two verbal captions on the right-side “COVID VACCINE! ENTER” and on the left-side “TAKE A NUMBER” of the walls, and another caption “SHOTS HERE” on the slogan. Additionally, there are question marks appearing above the vaccine receivers’ heads and several arrow directional signs on the walls. The literal signs of the cartoon include several vaccine receivers who are all wearing masks and a lot of cabins. Likewise, both the literal and denoted captions reveal the connoted message. The overall visual and denoted elements show that the COVID-19 vaccine is now available, but the same captions reveal the cartoonist’s concealed intentions behind the signs. The location of the vaccine shots is beyond a lot of cabin rows which is not easy enough to reach it, and this is more ensured by using the question marks; literally alluding to questions asked by the vaccine receivers who are distracted and consequently they cannot get to the position of the vaccine. Nevertheless, the cartoonist’s much deeper intention is to criticize the authority by exposing that the availability and the amount of the vaccine is not enough for all the citizens.

## 8- Conclusion

This section is related to the findings of the analysis performed in this paper. This study has investigated how the signs and language elements of political and social cartoons of COVID-19 vaccine, designed in selected editorial sources, are compiled to unveil people’s negative reactions towards the government officials. Both Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis and Barthes’ model of semiotics, in terms of three levels of messages: linguistic, literal and symbolic messages, have been used to connote the social and political practices in the context. Consequently, relying on both models in analysing the caricatures will acknowledge the readers to realize the concealed discourses and practices encoded in the cartoons. Through the discourse analysis two main points have been uncovered: 1-The reader observes the failure of the government officials to control the pandemic as it is increasing day by day. 2- The reader even finds out the untrustworthiness and unreliability of the authorities who have not been able to develop the vaccine in time so as to prevent the critical casualties.

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