Killun ya? ni killun: From Tautology to Ideology and Intersemiotic Translation

Dr. Naser N. AlBzour[1]

ABSTRACT

Strictly bearing in mind the intensively interactive nature of sign exploitation and manipulation, this paper mainly addresses how major semiotic aspects of communication and utterance production may facilitate the receptive process of such daily interaction. Thus, the current paper is a qualitative critical semiotic endeavor to explore the intricate components of the viral Lebanese tautological utterance *Killun ya?ni Killun* "يـ عـ ني كِلُّن كِلُّن" (all means all) that an old lady madly uttered during 2019-Lebanese protests that swept all over Beirut's streets against all political and sectarian dominance of lords of war and tycoons in their deplorably war-torn and impoverished country. The predominantly overt and covert messages that such an utterance has acquired evolve and operate far beyond the limitations of what lexical semantic components and indications of tautology may be mainly concerned with in terms of mere compositionality and textual informativity; rather, it can be comprehensively generated and perceived within the paradigms of intersemiotic implications and social semiotics that give rise to multidimensionality of sign interaction and effect (Sebeok, 2003). Therefore, this paper has revealed how the socio-political schematic repertoire of interlocutors is essentially needed while such a daily phrase and thus similar phrases are systematically encoded and decoded in different written, auditory and/or visual modes to serve a multitude of communicative functions at various levels and within a range of socio-cultural contexts.

Key Words: Compositionality, ideology, semantics, semiotics, sign interaction, social semiotics, tautology.
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1.   Introduction

Lebanon is a small Mediterranean Levant country where some of the most ancient civilizations originated and dominated especially the Phoenician and the Assyrian. It has been through a wide range of conquests through history since Ancient Egyptians, Islamic empires, till the French expansionists mandate early in the twentieth century and the Israeli continuous invasion and occupation of some parts of Lebanon during the past four decades. This unique diversity of rich culturally laden background has contributed to the peculiar socio-political upheaval in this miserably unstable state where political

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[1] Associate Professor of Linguistics and Translation Studies, English Department, Al Albayt University AABU, Mafraq/Jordan
Email: nnnbzour@gmail.com

and economic turmoil has badly hit and affected almost every single person of its population which has undergone many deadly conflicts and looming civil war every now and then (cf. Harris, 1997).

Lebanon is one of the most tumultuous hot spots on earth due to the incessant impact of a plethora of diverging socio-cultural components that have endangered the civil tranquility and unity of its people where clashing interest of an amalgamation of ethnic and religiously oriented sects can be discerned and traced, i.e. Maronite Christians, Sunnis, *Shiities, Druze and Alawites*. Each sect is claiming power and privileges in a particular region or cities, so all political, legislative and economic decisions there are susceptible to irrational sectarian calculations of narrow-minded goals that have trapped and smashed the whole nation (Hayek, 1999). This incredibly lack of harmony among the members of the Lebanese population in general and among their religious, tribal and political leaders combined with the external interference of clashing international interests has resulted in dozens of crises and setbacks for ages: a president gets assassinated, a prime minister's cavalcade gets detonated, a cabinet gets dissolved, and thus institutionalized corruption at all levels gets bigger, deeper and stronger (see McGowen, 1989).

All these tragic incidents that have stormed this country culminated in 2019 protests because many people felt overfed with such an unendurable life where banks and firms got bankrupt; municipal services stopped; millions of Lebanese went jobless and penniless. At this very point of time protesters were faced by the army to suppress their calls for a decent life irrespective of their age or gender or sect. Only then news agencies reported an unprecedented encounter between a seventy year old woman at one of the army's barricades. Her irate screams and curses were against the government; then escalated against other leaders when somebody challenged her to include Sa'ad AlHariri and Hassan Nasrullah, the Sunni and the Shiite top political leaders, respectively (see Ranstorp, 1997). Without any hesitation she uttered her blunt exclamation *killun ya?ni killun*; (of course she was cursing the genitals of their sisters; which is one of the most face-threatening and pejoratively obscene imprecatives in any Arab community). She enthusiastically repeated that curse several times and every protester started repeated that curse *killun ya?ni killun* till the phrase turned into a viral trend not only in Lebanon but also among Arab communities worldwide.

2.   Methodology and data analysis

Setting the major pillars of compositionality of *Killun ya?ni Killun*, this study is basically an endeavor that qualitatively explores the mechanism behind the multidimensionality of exploiting this utterance by pinpointing how it has undergone fundamental semiotic processes to capture such communicative values and functions based on the progress of sign radiation. Thus the researcher has traced the basic linguistic components and aspects of this tautological phrase as such and then followed up the semiotic divergence that this utterance has manifested since its origination in 2018 till present time and how it has been manipulated and thus circulated across the social media. A number of both serious and humorous cases have been spotted where *Killun ya?ni Killun* has been used by some bloggers and protestors in different parts of the Arab World. Then, the contextual indications and implications of the process of signification has been eventually analyzed and discussed in order to cope with how such a sign, i.e. *Killun ya?ni Killun* exceeded rudimentary linguistic analyses and captured various intrinsic semiotic functions.

3.   Theoretical background

Linguistically, the morphological and the semantic content of the word can be what basically makes up the totality of meaning of the word itself. By extension, what makes up and constitutes the overall meaning of a phrase or a sentence is the sum up of the compositional value of its words, (Platts, 1979). Thus meaning operates systematically from a micro circle into a wider macro circle based on how minimal and maximal morph-semantic units sustain their existence together in a linear direction (cf. AlBzour, B. 2016, Larson and Segal, 1995). Lexical Tautologies such as "life is life", "kids are kids" and "professors are professors" are among best exemplary candidates that exhibit obedience to fixed repetitive structures where lexemes or morphemes are usually used pleonastically/redundantly or they do serve mere emphatic functions, (cf. Szymanek, 2015). Sometimes, tautological expressions can be

discoursally more dynamic and thus used to serve some other pragmatic functions that can be contextually and culturally marked, (Sakahara, 2008; Sakai, 2009, *et al*).

Obviously, such an argument can be essentially useful as far as phrases and sentences are mathematically produced as isolated texts that stem from the speakers algorithmic competence to generate such morphemes and lexemes in a bit longer strings apart from the complexity of any interactive channeling of communicative acts, (see Kent 2004). Thus, the departure from the domains of semantics and pragmatics can be so conducive to understanding the creative nature of intersemiotic analyses of tautologies within their cognitive dimensions of language and thought, (see Davis, 2003).

Gaines (2006) reinstates that semiotics is a "descriptive process enquiring into the relevant significance of the relationships between objects and their spatial contexts. Since semiotics is the disciplined study of the life of signs…" (p. 174). Thus, Cognitive Semiotics is fundamentally "an interdisciplinary matrix of (subparts of) disciplines and methods, focused on the multifaceted phenomenon of meaning." (Zlatev, 2012, p. 1). This triggers and rationalizes Evola's (2005), claim in the same vein by shedding light on the role of cognitive semiotics in reading on-line religious texts and explains how deep interaction of signs can help interpret such texts.

Moreover, Zlatev (2012), attempted to elaborate on how such cognitive semiotic analyses based on interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches can be of paramount importance while analyzing graphics, (cf. Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005 and Allingham, 2008). Furthermore, Rousi (2013), conducted an interesting study in which the researcher underpins how qualitative analyses of iconic signs can be futile without drawing upon comprehensive cognitive semiotics, (cf. Konderak 2015; and Zlatev, 2012).

Eco (1976) puts it in a nutshell and argues that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign", (2002,2-8). This scope bridges any communicative gap that language users may encounter in their daily interaction because signs ultimately do stand for, qualify for or refer to notions, objects, states, events, actions, situations, and/or processes. (Johansen & Larsen 2002, pp.26). Thus, Caple (2013) argues that cohesive relationships can be clearly and conspicuously set among various semiotic resources such as lexical items and visual signs; this is essentially what Sebeok (2003) has asserted in dissecting humorous texts and jokes.

Cognitively, different signs such as gestures, symbols, icons and indexes can be of a direct or an indirect impact on the recipients (Brandt, 2003 and Floch, 2001). Therefore, any linear linguistic approach to the texture of the phrases would fail short to explain the mechanism of meaning production and meaning perception once used creatively, (cf. Konderak 2016 and Brandt 2003). Such an argument is immensely a reflection of what Roman Jakobson (1959) anticipated and introduced six decades ago as intersemiotic translation within the Peircean framework of sign formulation and sign interpretation, (see Peirce, 1931-1958; Eco, 1976). This Intersemiotic behavior or transmutation is exactly what Snell-Hornby (2006) reintroduced as new trends of "shifting paradigms" in translation studies. Such shifts are mainly triggered by a systematic channeling of semantic content into semiotic functions, (AlBour B. and AlBzour N. 2015).

4.   Analysis and discussion

The structural constituents of the sign system can never be fully understood without considering the dynamic nature of the signs and the generative power of the code system according to which all signs can coexist and interact in a harmonious fashion that fits the semiosis of both the sender and the recipient within a specific channel of socio-cultural communicative acts (cf. Hymes, 1974). Therefore, Hodge and G. Kress (1988) argue for a robust integration of social semiotics to delve into the true aspects of the overall socio-textual meaning of signs, (Halliday, 1978; Hodge and Kress 1988; Randviir, 2004, et al).

The data in question reflect how the Lebanese tautology *Killun ya?ni Killun* has been widely and effective used in various modes via social media to the extent that the strikes in Lebanon were called the Revolution of *Killun ya?ni Killun*. This diversity of Intersemiotic representation can be evidently recognized in the following four major categories that accumulate a huge amount of socio-cultural perspectives and purposes:

4.1 Verbal sign progress

The cliché of *Killun ya?ni Killun* consists of the quantifier *Killun* reduplicated twice in addition to the verb ya?ni which serves to some extent a copulative linking function. This tautological phrase has been widely and conventionally used and held verbally as a written banner by masses on different streets in Beirut and other major Lebanese cities. Such big or even very small banners are verbally encoded as indexical signs that originated symbolically since words when coined represent utter arbitrariness between the signified and the signifier, yet they can behave indexically once well-established by the passage of time. This can be clearly noticed in (4.1.aز):

(4.1.a)

However, the same protestors explicated and extended the significance of the sign of *Killun ya?ni Killun* by adding the word "ثورة" , i.e. revolution, thus creating a performative value of the slogan itself as in (4.1.b.):

Apparently, the tautological slogan in this banner has been smartly encoded not only because the word "revolution" has been added to aggravate the impact of the sign interaction, but also because the protestors have incorporated the assimilated colors of the Lebanese flag, i.e. white, red from both sides and green in the middle that symbolically stands for the unity of all Lebanese Killun in the literal sense of the intensifier Killun ALL except the political and the sectarian elites who are intended by the slogan *Killun ya?ni Killun* itself. This sign interaction can be discerned once one refers to the other manifestation of the sign as it appears in (4.1.c.).

(4.1.b.)

As it can be noticed, (4.1.c) is to some extent similar to 4.1.b since the verbal slogan *killun ya?ni killun* shows up in

both; however, the sign progress relies on the way in which (4.1.c.) resorts to employing the flag itself as an over iconic sign of unity instead of the covert signification that the distribution of the three colors represents in (4.1.b.)

(4.1.c.)

4.2 Multiple sign interaction

The Lebanese protestors utilized the function of their own tautology as a slogan with another already well-established sign that Arab protestors used all over the Arab World during the events of 2011 Arab Spring where furious masses tried to oust their dictators in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and other countries. The crowds took over the Arab streets while chanting "ارحل" i.e. the imperative singular "LEAVE". Consequently, four presidents were forced to step down and to flee their countries. Therefore, the Lebanese protestors raised their flag in (4.2.a.) and combined their *killun ya?ni killun* with hash tag irHalo, i.e. "You ALL LEAVE". This multiple sign interaction enhances the intended message that the macro sign constituents in (4.2.a) do signify and convey.

(4.2.a.)

Moreover, the sign manipulation in (4.2.b.) can be seen more explicit as the protestors raised a similar banner that contains almost all the aforementioned signs and codes in (4.1.a.), (4.1.b.), (4.1.c.), as well as (4.2.a.); however, with one more conspicuous iconic sign combination that directly portrays

each of the top leaders who are specifically meant by *killun ya?ni killun*, i.e. The Shiite leader (Hassan Nasrallah), the Lebanese Parliament Speaker (Nibih Berri), the Lebanese president (Michel Aoun), the Sunni leader (Sa'ad AlHariri) and the Lebanese Druz leader (Walid Jumblatt) as it can be recognized in text (4.2.b.) below:

Thus, the iconicity of the pictures of these five influential figures intertwined with the verbal slogan *killun ya?ni killun* and the Lebanese flag behind leave no chance for any speculations of interpreting the overall slogans but what anticipated and explained in all the previous banners and slogans: "You must step down and leave, ALL of you without any exception". This iconicity is further polarized in another slogan as it can be obviously seen in (4.2.c.)

(4.2.b.)

This slogan comprises a long list of eighteen political figures, ministers and former president as well as war lords topped by the same aforementioned five leaders in addition to Samir Geagea, the Chief commander of the Lebanese forces, which was incriminated in committing many bloody massacres

(4.2.c.)

in Lebanon during the past decades. Nonetheless, Hassan Nasrallah is within the circle of focus of most slogans because he is the one who was mainly intended by uttering for the first time *Killun ya?ni killun* since he is in charge of the most powerful military and political party in Lebanon *Hizbullah* over the past thirty five years. This predictable focus on Nasrallah has been explicated verbally as it can be seen in (4.2.d.):

In addition to the scene of the protestors and the Lebanese flag in the background, the predominant sign is the verbal sign *Killun ya?ni killun* with another rhyming phrase that defines the limitation of the slogan to deny any exception, *Nasrallah waHad minnun*, i.e. Nasrallah is one of those corrupt leaders.

(4.2.d.)

4.3   Intrasemiotic sign extension

Verbal signs and signification can be intrasemiotically extended within the same verbal domain when dialect variation occurs. Interestingly enough, the Lebanese slogan *killun ya?ni killun* has been intrasemiotically, i.e. verbally transferred into Jordanian arenas and squares where some Jordanian youth in 2019 gathered in Amman and complained against the frenzy of Higher Education fees then developed to rebelling against the soaring prices, poverty, unemployment, and all aspects of economic corruption in their country despite all political endeavors of reforms that the king of Jordan himself has initiated and earnestly called for by all means. Therefore, some of those protestors, and even some parliament members went against the government, so they raised and chanted the same Lebanese slogan *killun ya?ni killun* at the onset for a while as it can be seen in the (4.3.a.) that shows the so-called "*ThabHtoona*", i.e. "*You have slaughtered us*" *Movement*, whose members expressed the severity of their agony and deprivation in that sheep-slaughter-based metaphor:

(4.3.a.)

More strikingly, the protestors went further and tried to unify their calls against the government, the parliament and the political elite a whole, and thus strongly asked King Abdulla II to

dismiss and replace all of them without any exception *killun ya?ni killun,* but later they devised their own vernacular slogan which semantically and iformatively encapsulates the same compositional meaning of *killun ya?ni killun,* so they used the Jordanian idiomatic expression *"galam gayim"* as it can be exhibited in (4.3.b.):

(4.3.b.)

The slogan in (4.3.b.) is smartly devised to combine both the Jordanian vernacular idiom as a verbal sign which is quasi-tautological in form and semiologically critical in function. So *"galam gayim"* excludes and exempts nobody for any reason, on the one hand, and intrinsically interacts with the clock-wise directionality of the arrow movement in order to emphasize this totality of utter no-exemption, on the other hand. However, it is worth noticing that the Jordanian version has not gone as viral as the Lebanese counterpart for many sociolinguistic discoursal factors such as the prestigious status of Lebanese dialect, the spontaneity of the original utterance, the gender of the initiator, i.e. an aging woman as well as severity and the intensity of the Lebanese crisis which is way more complicated and more catastrophic than the Jordanian protest, this frequency and circulation can be an interesting topic for further research.

This sign extension, furthermore, has be creatively applied to the revolutionary arena in the Yemen where lords of war and militia-political leaders have destroyed the country for ages. Thus, a cartoonist employed the Lebanese slogan *killun ya?ni killun* in a caricature where one of their top leaders has been forcefully ousted and expelled outside. The sign interaction is productively manipulated where the iconic name of the Yemen has been exploited by drawing on the shape of the initial letter "Y" and a catapult used to eject the former president as it can be seen in (4.3.c.):

(4.3.c.)

4.4   Interseniotic radiation

Subtle Intersemiotic manipulation of the Lebanese slogan *killun ya?ni killun* can be more interestingly observed where nonconventional usage and mutation of sign form or mode occur as a kind of sign radiation into different fields or genre as it can be obviously noticed in (4.4.a.), (4.4.b.) and (4.4.c.):

The sign interaction in (4.4.a.) radiates into a symbolic statue headed by *killun ya?ni killun* in the right corner and a verbal statement referring to corruption and sectarianism on the pedestal. The symbolic content of the statue encapsulates all the figures mentioned and intended in (4.2.b.) and (4.2.c.) since the statue stands for such political and religious figures who have transformed into sacred idols that resemble in their sanctity the holiness of such objects for in pagan's rituals and cannons. Thus, the verbal sign *killun ya?ni killun* combined with an iconic sign of a man pulling the robe explicitly refer to the process of undermining this idol and demolishing its statue.

Such an Intersemiotic radiation can be of less critical value as it operates in the field of humor as it can be seen in (4.4.b.):

Many entertainers have employed *killun ya?ni killun* in their jokes and standup comedy shows as they tend to

(4.4.a.)

(4.4.b.)

recontextualize the content of (4.2.d) *killun ya?ni killun Nasrallah waHad minnun* where a presumable protestor is shouting and repeating this full slogan but replacing *Nasrallah* by "My Wife". The humorous sign radiation is encoded based on the well-establised convictions *vis-à-vis* Nasrallah's dominance and power in Lebanon which is by analogy similar to the stereotypical dominance of a Lebanese wife. Thus, the need for riddance of both of them is quite essential!

(4.4.c.)

Finally, the Intersemiotic manipulation of signs and sign interaction has gone to an evidently different mode and genre as the slogan *killun ya?ni killun* has employed in some lyrics that some Lebanese bands sang on many occasions during the protests as it can be seen in (4.4.c.)

These lyrics have been going viral every now and then as they critically and poignantly depict the Lebanese crises during the past decades. The combination of offensive diction and pop music have aggravated the criminal acts of those top sectarian and political leaders and their allies and proponents. The detailed content of such songs is beyond the scope of this paper, but it can be the target of some future research as diction and music can be analyzed in order to measure some aspects of critical semiotics.

5.   Conclusion

The researcher has tried mainly to investigate how the Lebanese tautology *killun ya?ni killun* has been exploited semiotically to achieve some intrinsic communicative and ideological goals far beyond the mere limitations of its compositional and informative content. The critical functional approach that the researcher has followed in this paper is so conducive to fathoming various layers of meanings and functions that have been successfully attained by Arab interlocutors in different contexts. Such an intricate interaction of signs exhibits how creative our signifying order can be as signs can be encoded in multifaceted manners that engender sophisticated yet systematic sign interaction, extension and radiation. The overall interpretation of signs in their appropriate contexts can be fully achieved as far as semiotic competence is concerned in our daily communication. In tandem with Pinker's (1997) expostulation concerning how the such processes take place, further research in the area of critical semiotics and Intersemiotic discourse is highly recommended to explore and understand how our semiosis can be better approached and systematized in relation to linguistic and communicative research when various types of verbal, visual and auditory signs are cleverly employed in critical semiotics.

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Bio

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