



## Voices on the Wheels: A Semiotic Analysis of Vehicular Discourse in Punjab, Pakistan

Manal Arshad<sup>1</sup>, Ishba Aziz<sup>2</sup>, Rafia Bilal<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MS Scholar, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: 00577msengf24@student.iiu.edu.pk

<sup>2</sup> International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: 00280msengf24@student.iiu.edu.pk

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English, Female Campus, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: rafia.bilal@iiu.edu.pk

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received: January 27, 2025

Revised: May 24, 2025

Accepted: May 25, 2025

Available Online: May 26, 2025

#### Keywords:

Semiotics  
Saussure  
Vehicular Discourse  
Signifier  
Signified  
Rawalpindi  
Urban Discourse  
Social Identity

#### Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

### ABSTRACT

This research examines the inscriptions that are printed on the vehicles in different cities of Punjab. Using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs, it analyzes the manner in which these messages function as semiotic signals, thereby revealing deeper meanings that are embedded in the local, social, political, cultural, and religious contexts. The sample size consisted of inscriptions on fifteen vehicles across multiple highways, and were analyzed to identify recurrent themes, symbols, and cultural narratives that represent the values and identity of the local population. The findings reveal that these mobile inscriptions go beyond mere decoration or humor, and they reflect drivers' identities, express spiritual beliefs, voice socio-political grievances, and challenge societal norms. By transforming ordinary vehicles into mobile billboards of public emotion, this research demonstrates how individuals engage in public environments to generate meaning. This research is interdisciplinary in nature as it bridges between sociolinguistics, discourse studies, and cultural semiotics by emphasizing vehicle discourse as a primary but understudied form of popular discourse in Pakistan as well as urban South Asia.

© 2025 The Authors, Published by iRASD. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License

Corresponding Author's Email: rafia.bilal@iiu.edu.pk

## 1. Introduction

In contemporary cosmopolitan cities of Punjab, public transportation systems serve not merely as mechanisms of mobility but also as dynamic and vibrant sites for spiritual reflection, artistic expression, and socio-political commentary. The slogans, inscriptions, and poetic phrases or verses on the vehicles in different cities of Punjab exhibit a unique display of public discourse that captures both permanence and transience. These mobile texts, which are frequently disregarded in conventional academic research, offer a perceptive examination of the social consciousness of citizens, particularly transportation workers, who employ their art to communicate their experiences, objectives, hilarity, and ideas. Vehicular discourse is a substitute communicative discourse in public spaces that allows underprivileged voices to influence cultural narratives through the use of texts and visuals. These inscriptions operate within a sophisticated semiotic framework that involves the interaction of words, symbols, colours, and designs to convey sophisticated meanings. This form of discourse is particularly crucial in Pakistan, given its lengthy history of active political participation, religious expression, and poetry.

These inscriptions are quite widespread in Pakistan, yet they have received minimal scholarly attention with respect to their social, political, cultural or religious implications and semiotic structure. Although previous researches have investigated truck art and vehicular discourse as expressions of resistance, identity construction, or social critique from different perspectives, there is currently a lack of a comprehensive semiotic research that demonstrates how meaning is constructed using linguistic signals in this context. Using Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic paradigm of the sign, the current research endeavours to bridge this gap by carrying out a semiotic analysis of the texts on automobiles in Punjab. According to Saussure's theory (2011), language is a collection of arbitrary signs that are generated by the "signifier" (form) and the

"signified" (concept). The system's meaning is exclusively determined by their interactions within the larger system. By employing this approach to analyze the vehicular inscriptions, the readers will be able to comprehend the manner in which this text reflects and refracts the voices of drivers about the prevailing social, political, and cultural concepts. This research demonstrates the intricate social implications of daily expressions on wheels through a qualitative examination of vehicular inscriptions and their visual components. The research aims to expose the layers of public opinion, cultural beliefs, and personal identity that are concealed in seemingly everyday words by decoding the mobile messages. Consequently, it will illustrate the influence of popular speech on the formation of collective consciousness.

### **1.1. Research Objectives**

This research entails a semiotic analysis of the textual discourse exhibited on the trucks in Punjab, utilizing Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs. The objectives have been divided into linguistic/semiotic and social dimensions:

#### **1.1.1. Linguistic/Semiotic Dimension**

The linguistics / semiotic objectives of this research are:

1. To identify various types of signifiers i.e. words and phrases, in the vehicular inscriptions in Punjab.
2. To explore the stylistic and lexical characteristics of these inscriptions. (Such as metaphors, symbols, and figurative language etc.)
3. To examine the relationship between the signifier (text) and the signified (conceptual conceptions) in accordance with Saussure's theory of signs.

#### **1.1.2. Social Dimension**

The social dimension of this research includes the following objectives:

1. To decode the socio-cultural, religious, political, and ideological meanings inherent in the textual inscriptions.
2. To explore how these inscriptions reflect the lived experiences of truck drivers, detailing their economic challenges and emotional conditions.
3. To understand how spiritual beliefs and moral values are articulated through this form of textual expression.
4. To investigate how truck inscriptions act as manifestations of personal identity, resistance, and critique of dominant societal narratives.
5. To emphasize the role of trucks as mobile texts that contribute to a lively and vibrant form of popular urban discourse in South Asia.

### **1.2. Research Questions**

The research questions of this research are:

1. How do the inscriptions commonly found on trucks in Punjab function as signifiers according to Saussure's dyadic model of the sign?
2. What concepts or cultural meanings (signified) are invoked by these signifiers?
3. In what ways do vehicle inscriptions reflect personal, social, religious, or political identities?

### **1.3. Statement of Problem**

This research intends to explore how language displayed on the trucks functions as a dynamic medium of everyday cultural communication. Unlike static billboards or posters produced by corporate entities, the inscriptions found on vehicles are deeply personal, context-specific, and dynamic. They encapsulate the voices, emotions, and lived experiences of working-class individuals, particularly those who navigate the bustling streets as truck drivers. It highlights the value of social communication at the grassroots level, a form of expression that, because of its cultural relevance, merits careful scholarly research. By analyzing the textual choices made by these drivers, the research reveals how informal, non-institutional language serves as a potent medium for expressing identity, resistance, humor, faith, and social commentary within public spaces. By focusing on moving vehicles as mobile texts, this research

illuminates how everyday language shapes the cultural and ideological landscape of urban Pakistan.

#### **1.4. Significance of Study**

This research is unique in its innovative application of Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs to the analysis of vehicular discourse, a subject that has been largely unexplored in previous publications. It provides a novel semiotic perspective by examining the relationship between signifiers, the textual forms depicted in these inscriptions, and signified, the complex cultural, emotional, and ideological implications they inspire. Truck inscriptions are not only positioned as humorous creative flights, but also as movable, living signs that actively construct and communicate complex identities, social resistance, ardently held convictions, and publicly significant ambitions. This research contributes to the comprehension of urban semiotics and sociolinguistics and provides new perspectives on the ways in which common language, which is generated outside of elitist or commercial contexts, functions as a powerful instrument for cultural expression and socio-political engagement. This research is essential because it elucidates the process by which language and meaning are generated and disseminated in public spaces. Using Saussure's semiotic theory, the investigation demonstrates how the signifiers inscribed on the trucks convey intricate, multifaceted meanings that resonate with the values, identities, and experiences of the local community. Additionally, this research enhances broader conversations within urban semiotics, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies by highlighting how everyday language choices can offer valuable insights into societal norms, emotional conditions, and collective ideologies.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section entails the review of related researches done in the field of vehicular discourse. Bilal, Sultan and Bilal (2024) in their research entitled "Configuring socio-economic crises through vehicular discourse in Pakistan: A socio- linguistic outlook" introduced vehicular discourse as unique genre in sociolinguistic research particularly in Pakistan. The research used a qualitative methodology to analyze the texts written on rickshaws and trucks in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. It aimed to explore sociological dimensions of vehicular discourse. The analysis revealed the socioeconomic challenges faced by the people by applying Janks linguistic analysis model that is based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar. The article elucidates that the writings reflect inflation, economic pressures, political circumstances, and unemployment in the country. The analysis provides a deep insight into the day-to-day life of public transport drivers in Pakistan. This research is relevant to this current research as it also scrutinizes words on vehicles, but is different at the same time, as the data for this research has been collected from different cities of Punjab and undergoes semiotics analysis, thus adding a new dimension to the existing reservoir of researches.

In their research on *Socio-Economic Challenges in Pakistan*, Aslam (2012), explored complex socio-economic challenges faced by the people of Pakistan. It links continuous military involvement and political instability to country's economic downfall. This research highlighted Musharraf era's economic plans with long term structural laws, with specific attention to Pakistan's developmental problems. It is directly related to this analysis as it informs the socio-economic context of the country. It helps to ground the texts on trucks within border economic conditions of Pakistan. A similar research was conducted by Mahmood (2021), in which he employed Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the social and cultural significance of the slogans and words displayed on Pakistani vehicles. The investigation centered on the analysis of data from twenty randomly selected vehicles, which were categorized into six fundamental themes: statements regarding the meaning of life, impacting messages, ambiguous phrases, everyday annoyances, provocative claims, and religious expressions. The research demonstrated that these vehicular inscriptions accurately represent the Pakistani people's religious sentiments, ideas, humour, and larger sociopolitical situations. Mahmood contends that these publications, despite their unofficial status, provide a robust forum for public discourse, thereby articulating the identities of drivers and their shared concerns. Consequently, the inscriptions that are observed on automobiles are highly valuable communication instruments in Pakistani society.

Bilal and Shehzad (2019), in their research entitled "Discourse Analysis of Written Text on Pakistani Public Transport Vehicles" analyzed multilingual text inscribed on public transport vehicles through discourse analysis. It drew on Janks' linguistic analysis rubric and Halliday's

Systemic Functional Grammar. The researchers categorized text according to the diverse themes, including love, socio-economic problems, religion, morality and desire for upward mobility. The sample consisted of ten texts that reflected socio-cultural realities and aspirations. This research is important as it links linguistic features with broader social structures. In her book "Impact of Truck Art, as Popular Culture on Pakistani Society," Sheikh (2018), Sheikh investigated the importance of Pakistani truck art as a vibrant component of popular culture that offers both aesthetic appeal, and communicative value to society. The book demonstrates how truck art integrates political critique, religious themes, poetry, and representations of regional identity through visual analysis, interviews with artisans, research, and fieldwork. According to Sheikh, truck art is representation of emotions, beliefs, and longings of drivers. This articles describes truck art as a powerful public communication tool. This research is significant as it integrates cultural studies, anthropology, and visual arts to analyze a cultural phenomenon that is often overlooked in academic discussion.

Schmid (2000) in her article "Truck Art as Arena of Contest" analyzed Pakistani truck art as an active expression of popular culture. She viewed truck art as a socio-political and religious discourse. According to her, truck art is an "arena of contest" in which social inequalities are aggressively questioned, rather than being visually attractive. The research demonstrates how vehicles function as movable canvases that represent political disputes, religious debate, and cultural identities through fieldwork and interviews with artisans, painters, and drivers. Schmid also emphasized the fact that the graphics and inscriptions on vehicles generate numerous discourses that challenge power systems, thereby reflecting the true reality of drivers. This research provides a critical contextual analysis of truck art as a communication instrument, highlighting its role in challenging dominant narratives and fostering cultural dialogue. It is of the utmost importance to scholars in visual anthropology, cultural studies, and South Asian popular art, as well as to this research, which is examining the texts engraved on trucks in Punjab. This research systematically analyzes the signifier-signified relationships in vehicle transcriptions using Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs. This theoretical framework is suitable to uncover meanings conveyed through language in public spaces. Despite the extensive research on truck art in South Asia, and the intricate visual semiotics of urban landscapes, a significant gap remains in academic inquiry focused specifically on the textual discourse inscribed on vehicles in Pakistani cities, particularly Punjab. Most existing literature has concentrated on stunning visual aesthetics and elaborate decorative patterns, often overlooking the rich linguistic content that encompasses evocative words, catchy slogans, and poetic expressions. These inscriptions represent a vital site of meaning-making that require deeper exploration. Therefore, it addresses a clear gap by doing a semiotic and sociolinguistic analysis of textual inscriptions on the trucks in Punjab, thereby extending the scope of vehicular discourse into the realm of language and meaning in South Asian urban settings.

### **3. Methodology**

This section sheds light on the methodology of the current research.

#### **3.1. Theoretical & Analytical Framework:**

This research is qualitative in nature and employs Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralist model of language (2011) that served as the foundation for contemporary semiotics. His theory is centered on the concept of the linguistic sign, which he defined as a two-part entity consisting of the "signifier" and the "signified."

- Signifier: The physical or material form of the sign, such as a written word, phrase, or sound.
- Signified: The conceptual meaning or idea that the signifier invokes in the mind of the observer.

The connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, as Saussure observes. Specifically, the form of a word is not intrinsically or naturally associated with its meaning. Rather, the context of language and social behaviours are the sources of meaning. The arbitrariness of language is essential for contextual comprehension.

Saussure's methodology focuses upon an analytical approach that concentrates on:

1. Locating the signifiers, which are the written vehicle texts.
2. Analyzing the signified, or ideas or interpretations that texts bring.
3. Establishing connections between texts and the broader socio-cultural context of Rawalpindi.

### 3.2. Data Collection & Sample Size:

Field tour to bus stations and Grand Trunk highways of various cities in Punjab was conducted. The selection of inscriptions was done on the basis of their visibility and legibility. Inscriptions selected were captured in clarity and detail. In addition to this, field notes were taken to document location and vehicle type, thereby maintaining the original environment of each observation.

Random sampling technique was employed to prevent any selection bias. Trucks were selected randomly on different days of the week including weekends and weekdays at different times of the day, and on different days of the week. This approach was used to analyse a variety of expressions in urban and suburban environments. The objective of this research was to analyse the complexity of human civilization through analyses of words on wheels. The sample comprised of fifteen automobiles. By thoughtfully choosing vehicles from different Punjabi cities, dynamic automotive cultural was achieved. This purposeful sampling technique facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the city's vehicular speech by reflecting the distinctive characteristics and demands of various regions. The text was translated into English language to facilitate the non-native speakers of English.

## 4. Data Analysis

Using Saussure's semiotic model, this section analyzes the data and examines the relationship between the signifier and the signified.

**Table 1: Semiotics Analysis of Text no 1**

Urdu Text	English Translation
شاہین تیری پرواز سے جلتا ہے زمانہ	O Shaheen (falcon), the world burns with envy at your flight

**Figure 1**



The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

- a. Signifier: In this figure, the text written in Urdu language and visual decoration including the colorful flowers, are signifiers.
- b. Signified: They are:
  1. Shaheen (Falcon): A metaphor deeply rooted in Iqbal's poetry, symbolizing ambition, freedom, spiritual elevation, and power.
  2. "Parwaz" (Flight): Signifies aspiration and the ability to transcend worldly limits.

The phrase, "Zamana jalta hai" (The world burns in envy) connote jealousy, resistance, or awe from society in the face of greatness. The phrase "Shaheen teri parwaz se jalta hai zamana" painted on the back of the truck functions as a powerful cultural sign within the framework of Saussurean semiotics. The visual signifier, the poetic Urdu text combined with floral

motifs and vibrant truck art design, evokes the signified concept of pride, resistance, and individual greatness. The term "Shaheen," a bird, famously used by Allama Iqbal, symbolizes spiritual elevation and independence, while the phrase as a whole suggests societal envy towards those who rise above the ordinary. This expression of identity through visual language reflects how common people, particularly truck drivers, appropriately link the unique literary symbols to articulate their own aspirations and struggles, converting their vehicles into mobile narratives of pride and defiance.

**Table 2: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 2:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
یہ دنیا فانی ہے	This world is temporary

**Figure 2**



The semiotic analysis of this text has been given below:

- Signifier: The entire phrase, "ye duniya fani hai" is the signifier.
- Signified: The concept that life and the world are temporary and will come to an end.

This text on the truck, "Yeh duniya faani hai" (This world is temporary), conveys a religious and philosophical worldview deeply rooted in Islamic belief and South Asian cultural consciousness. Applying Saussure's semiotic framework, the signifier is the written text presented in expressive Urdu script with decorative motifs, while the signified is the concept of impermanence, mortality, and the transient nature of worldly life. This phrase functions as a reminder of death and the transient nature of worldly existence, which is commonly found in Islamic discourse. Painted on a vehicle, this phrase becomes a public visual sign of spiritual reflection, transforming a vehicle into a symbolic space that communicates religious values and existential awareness in everyday life.

**Table 3: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 3:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
دل میرا 2 جی بی اور غم میرا 32 جی بی	My heart is 2GB, but my sorrow is 32GB

**Figure 3**



The semiotic analysis of this text has been done in the following lines:

- Signifier: The humorous Urdu phrase "Dil mera 2GB aur gham mera 32GB" painted on the Vehicle's rear in colorful and bold letters is the signifier.
- Signified: A creative metaphor expressing emotional overwhelm, where the limited capacity of the heart (2GB) is exaggeratedly outmatched by the weight of sorrow (32GB), reflecting themes of emotional vulnerability, love, heartbreak, and psychological burden using modern technological references.

Using Saussure's semiotic framework, the phrase "Dil mera 2GB aur gham mera 32GB" operates as a sign composed of a humorous signifier and a deeply resonant signified. The signifier is the digital-age metaphor written in expressive Urdu, draws attention due to its relatable blend of modern technology and timeless emotional expression. The signified is the inaptness between emotional capacity and emotional burden, humorously presenting the heart as a low-memory device overwhelmed by excessive grief. This playful phrase reflects the urban Pakistani tendency to repurpose contemporary symbols (like gigabytes) for traditional emotional storytelling. On the surface, it entertains; at a deeper level, it expresses inner emotional tension in a relatable, culturally accessible form. Positioned on a small truck, this text functions as a moving narrative of unsaid emotions, thus transforming the vehicle into a symbol of public sentiment and individual psychology. It also underscores how vehicle inscriptions serve as semiotic sites where humor, technology, and sorrow intersect, making deeply personal feelings visible in the collective urban space.

**Table 4: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 4:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
دو دن کے لیے مہمان یہاں	"A guest here for just two days,
مالوم نہیں منزل ہے کہاں	No idea where the destination is."

**Figure 4**



The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

- Signifier: This text written in Urdu language, "Do din ke liye mehmaan yahaan, maloom nahin manzil hai kahaan" painted on the back of a vehicle in flowing calligraphy with minimal yet solemn decoration, emphasizing its introspective tone, constitutes the signifier.
- Signified: The concept that life is brief and uncertain has been signified in this text. The humans are temporary guests in this world, and their final destination (in both a literal and spiritual sense) remains unknown. It reflects themes of existential reflection, human vulnerability, and submission to divine fate.

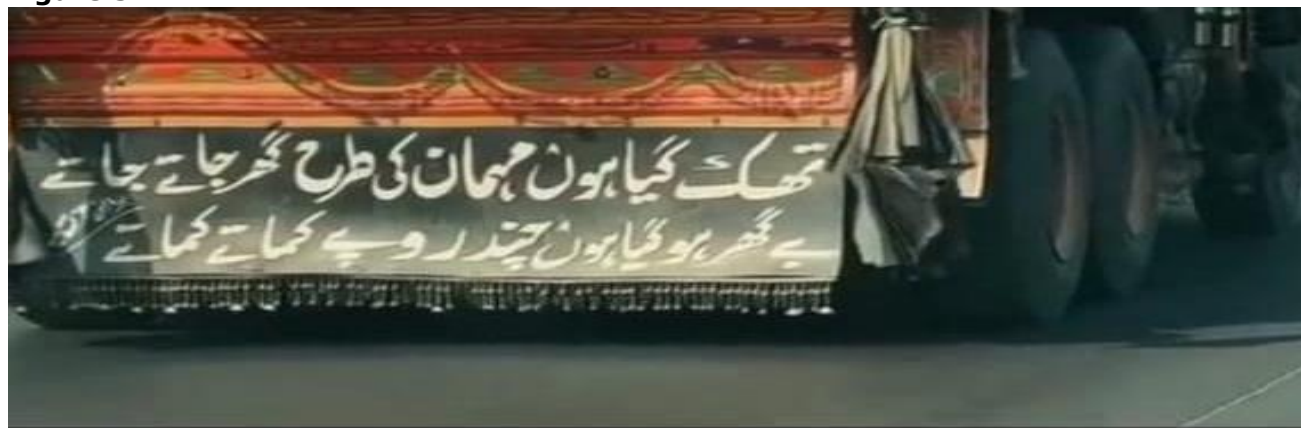
As per Saussure's theory, this text functions as an expressive symbol that conveys a philosophical and spiritual message through everyday language. The signifier, the printed phrase "Do din ke liye mehmaan yahaan, maloom nahin manzil hai kahaan," evokes questions and impermanence by emphasising a fleeting guest and an unknown location. The existential theory is the signified, which posits that

human existence is transient and that the outcome is beyond our conscious knowledge or control. The message's importance is significantly increased when it is displayed on a vehicle that traverses the city. The text underscores the ephemerality of the voyage and the enigma of its conclusion, while the car itself represents the progression of life. This sign converts an ordinary transportation vehicle into a mobile mirror of spiritual reflection, providing the readers with a moment of tranquillity and contemplation in the midst of urban chaos.

**Table 5: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 5:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
تھک گیا ہوں مہمان کی طرح گھر جاتے جاتے بے گھر ہو گیا ہوں، چھند روپے کماتے کماتے	I am tired of returning home like a guest I've become homeless, earning just a few rupees.

**Figure 5**



The semiotic analysis of this text is given below:

- Signifier: The Urdu inscription "Thak gaya hoon mehmaan ki tarhan ghar jaatay jaatay, beggar ho gaya hoon chand rupay kamataay kamataay" painted on the rear of a vehicle, typically in weary, flowing calligraphy with faded or subdued colors that reflect emotional exhaustion, is the signifier.
- Signified: A deep sense of economic struggle, emotional fatigue, and displacement has been signified through the text. It depicts the life of a working-class individual who, despite returning home, feels like a stranger, alienated from his surroundings, and burdened by the unending cycle of poverty and toil.

Through the lens of Saussure's semiotic model, this poetic phrase encodes socioeconomic distress and emotional alienation of the truck driver. The Urdu text on the truck's back is the signifier that presents two powerful metaphors: returning home like a guest and becoming homeless despite constant labour. The signified is the broader condition of economic distress and psychological alienation experienced by the drivers in the urban working class. This inscription positioned on a public vehicle, makes it a mouthpiece for the common people, and transforms personal hardship into a public statement. The vehicle itself becomes a representative of working-class individuals-always working, yet never achieving security and rest. This roaming expression of sorrow captures collective anxieties of many labourers in Punjab and beyond. It critiques socioeconomic system of the country while inviting empathy from viewers. As such, it is a representative of how everyday texts function as emotionally charged and culturally grounded signs in the country's semiotic environment.

**Table 6: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 6:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
کاش انسان بھی نوٹ کی طرح ہوتے روشنی کی طرف کر کے دیکھ لیتے کہ اصلی ہیں یا نقلی	Wish humans were like currency notes! They could be held up to the light to see if they're real or fake.

**Figure 6**



The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

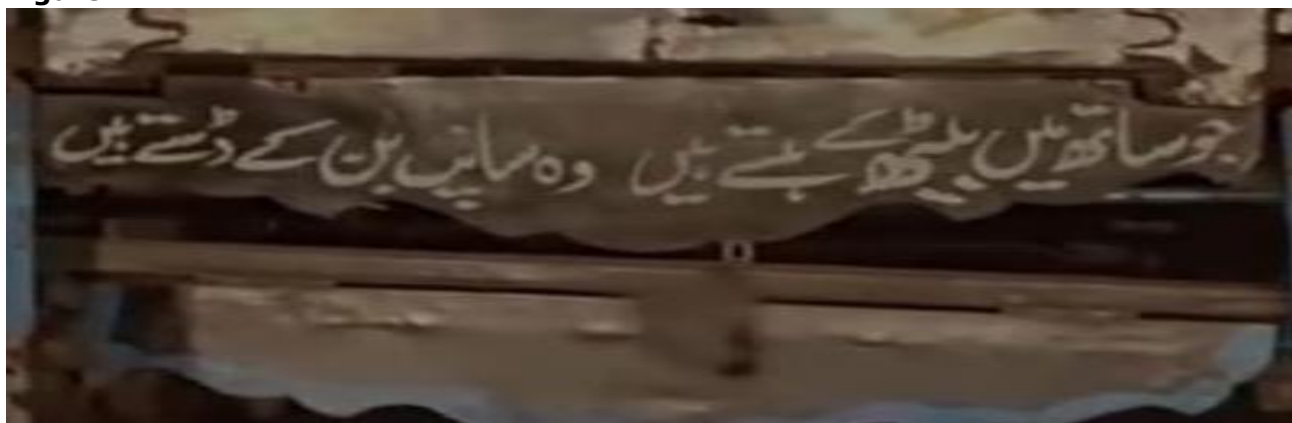
- Signifier: The inscription "Kash insaan bhi note ki tarhan hotay, roshni ki taraf kar ke dekh letay asli hain ya Naqli", written in a sharp tone, is the signifier.
- Signified: This inscription effectively conveys a significant amount of scepticism towards the contemporary society. It yearns for a society where the legitimacy of people could be verified in the similar way as can be done for the forged money. It highlights the challenge for distinguishing between sincerity and dishonesty in the activities of humans in day to day life.

The signifier, which is the poetic inscription, compares people to money whereas the signified is the abstract concept of the desire for emotional truthfulness in comparison to deceit. This couplet provides deeper insight for the critical evaluation of the current state of relationships, which are usually characterized by betrayal and manipulation. It serves as a powerful tool to symbolize the emotional challenges faced by society and serves as a reflection of the emotional barriers of society inscribed on the trucks which not only carry the goods but also the weight of emotions. It not only provides the resonance with the sentiment but also encourages people to value the integrity of those in their vicinity. Several examples like these can be witnessed on Pakistani trucks where poetic connections are utilized to accomplish the moral criticism of the broader social and cultural context.

**Table 7: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 7:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
جو ساتھ بیٹھ کر ہنستے ہیں، وہی سانپ بن کر ڈستے ہیں۔	"Those who sit with you laughing, Later turn into snakes and bite."

**Figure 7**



The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

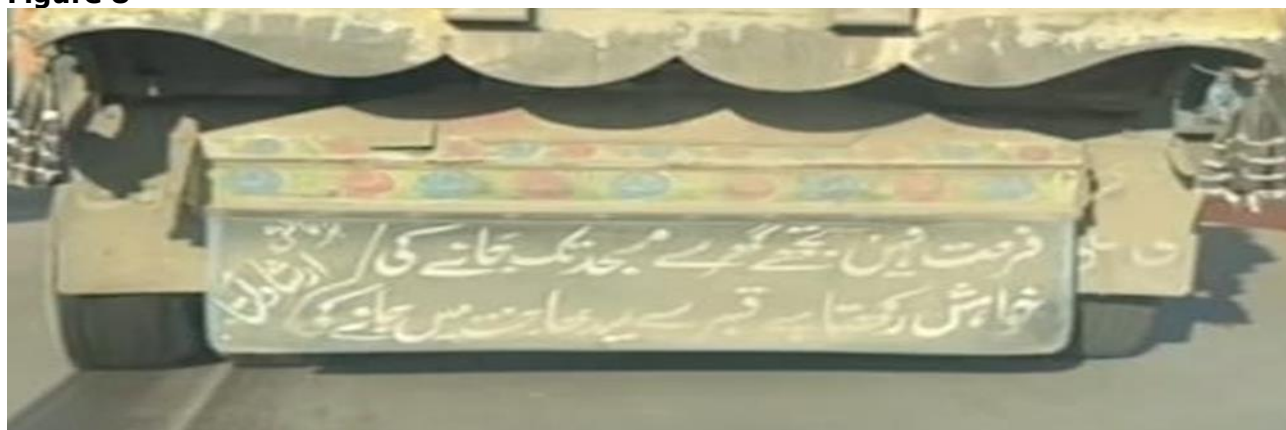
- Signifier: The Urdu phrase "Jo sath ma beth ky hansty hain, woh sanp ban ky dasty hain" inscribed on a truck in striking calligraphy, accompanied by imagery such as a snake representing betrayal or disloyalty, is the signifier.
- Signified: This phrase signifies faithlessness of human relationships. It conveys the idea that those who appear friendly and joyful in your company may later act deceitfully, causing emotional harm like a venomous snake's bite.

According to Saussure's dyadic model, the signifier is the written poetic phrase combined with any visual symbolism on the vehicle, while the signified is the concept of deceit and betrayal by close companions. This phrase cautions the readers about deceptiveness of appearance. Engraved on a vehicle, it becomes a moving moral lesson travelling across different cities. The imagery of snake encapsulates cultural symbolism linked to betrayal and danger. Such inscriptions are a reflection on the fragile nature of trust and relationships in human societies. In the context of different cities of Punjab, this text functions as a semiotic sign that communicates collective experiences of human relationships, resonating with a wide audience who may identify with feelings of betrayal. The vehicle thereby becomes a traveling medium that broadcasts emotional wisdom and cultural warnings.

**Table 8: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 8:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
فرصت نہیں تجھے گھر سے مسجد تک جانے کی !خواہش رکھتا ہے قبر سے سیدھا جنت میں جانے کی	"You don't have the time to go from home to the mosque, But you wish to go straight from the grave to paradise."

**Figure 8**



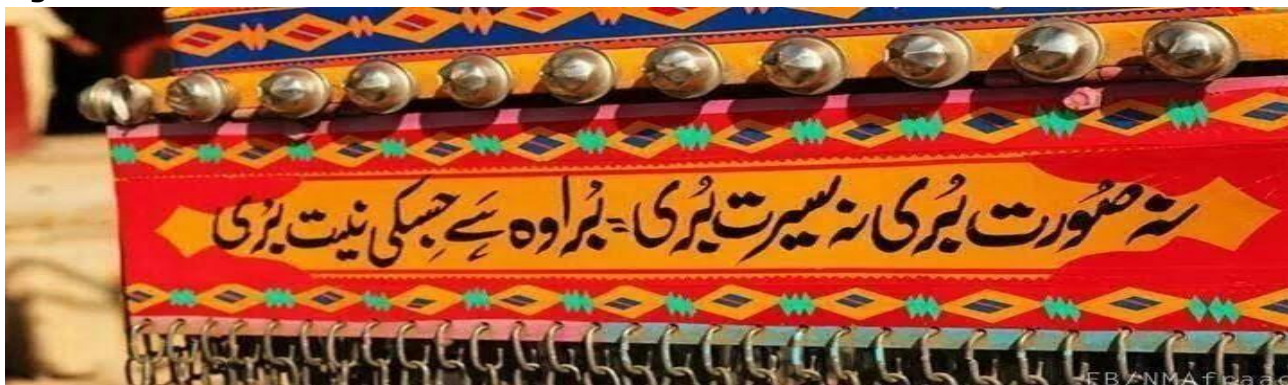
The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

- Signifier: The Urdu inscription "Fursat nahi tujhay ghar say masjid tak janay ki" written on a truck represents the driver's level of spirituality and the idea of life hereafter, thus reflecting his ideology.
- Signified: This inscription is the representation of the contradiction of human thoughts and actions. The people neglect the religious obligations of praying in this life, and have the desire to enter the paradise after death.

The signified is defined through the signifier which refers to negligence in offering prayers and still desiring for divine payback. This text is basically an emphasis on the irony of humans who long for the ultimate reward of heaven without any effort and labour in religious obligations. This message is a religious reminder that is beautifully interwoven with the everyday lives of humans. In the Pakistani Muslim society, this semiotic relationship between the signifier and signified can be viewed in terms of shared religious beliefs and cultural knowledge between the individuals. Therefore, this inscription provides a socio-religious commentary that can be observed through the mobile text on the truck, conjoining spiritual symbolism with the poetic language to encourage the viewers to reflect on their religious activities and lifestyle.

**Table 9: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 9:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
— نہ صورت بری، نہ سیرت بری —	Neither the appearance is bad, nor the character is bad;

**Figure 9**

The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

- Signifier: The Urdu phrase "Na soorat buri na seerat buri, bura woh hai jis ki niyat buri" displayed prominently on the vehicle in bold, flowing calligraphy, emphasizing the moral weight of the statement.
- Signified: This text conveys a moral and ethical message by underscoring the significance of one's inner intentions over their outward appearance and actions. It emphasises that the purity or corruption of one's spirit and intentions, rather than outward impressions, is the source of actual goodness or badness.

According to the semiotic theory, in this text the signified is the ethical and cultural notion that moral evaluation of the people should be based on inner beauty rather than physical appearances, primarily reflecting accepted beliefs in Pakistan and Islamic moral philosophy. This inscription functions as an ethical reminder for the readers, thereby converting it into a mobile carrier of cultural knowledge. By conveying social conceptions regarding human nature and judgment, the sentence prompts viewers to contemplate the sincerity and intentions of the people. Through this text, the driver presents a contrast between the external form, which is the physical appearance and character, with intentions that reside in the hearts, and believes that the latter should be focused upon.

**Table 10: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 10:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
دنیا راضی ہو نہیں سکتی بندہ مکدا مک جاند اے۔	The world can never be pleased; a person just keeps fading away"

**Figure 10**

The semiotic analysis has been done in the given lines:

- Signifier: the entire text is the signifier.

- b. Signified: This line captures the mental or physical exhaustion that one experiences when attempting to please the people around them. One cannot reach the societal expectations even if he tries endlessly. The text is indicative of a philosophical acknowledgement of the inherent misery in social life and the constraints putting others before one's own self.

Saussure's dyadic technique facilitates comprehension of the existential concept of personal fatigue and worldly unhappiness by utilising the signifier, which is the visible, physical Urdu inscription and its artistic presentation on the vehicle. This text is representative of universal human experience. One has to overcome a lot of obstacles to achieve wide-spread acceptance. It also takes into account the impact it has on an individual's well-being. This message becomes a reflection of personal resilience. It highlights not only the impact of resisting societal expectations, but also the importance of endurance in the midst of societal pressures. This inscription invites empathy from viewers by connecting individual struggles with universal social issues.

**Table 11: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 11:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
رکھ کر رستوں میں نفرتوں کے کنٹینر تم نے دل کو اسلام آباد بنا ڈالا۔	By placing the containers of hatred on the roads, You turned the heart into Islamabad.

**Figure 11**



The semiotic analysis has been done in the following lines:

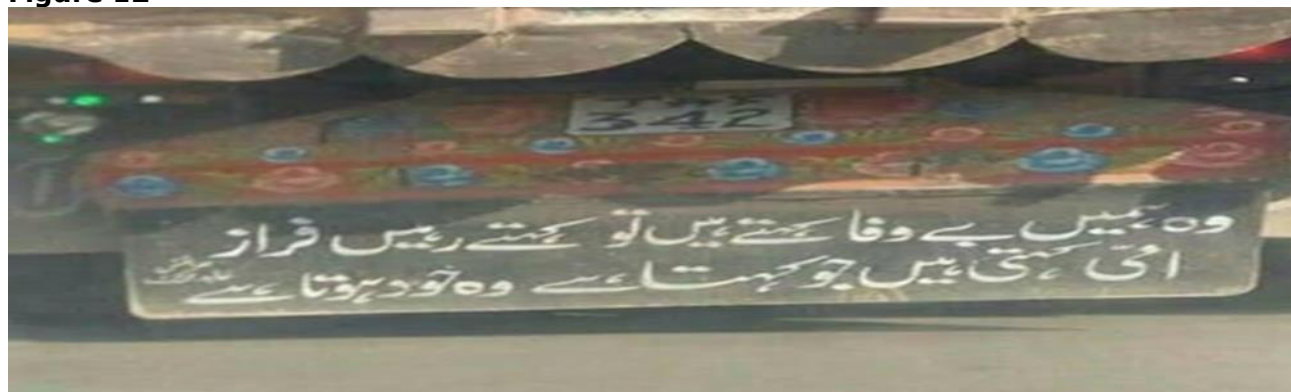
- a. Signifier: The Urdu phrase "rakh kar raston ma nafraton ky container, Tum ny dil ko Islamabad banaa dala" painted on the back of the truck, is the signifier.
- b. Signified: This text is representative of the emotional and social consequences of anger and division. "Turning the heart into Islamabad" signifies the transformation of one's interior emotional space into a location characterized by division, tension, and conflict. The "containers of hatred" serve as symbolic representations of barriers or impediments, which are actually the roadblocks in Islamabad.

The signifier can be clarified by Saussure's semiotic approach, which is the written script on the truck and invites the readers to contemplate by relating the metaphor to the situation of political unrest in the country. The implication is that the driver's beloved has transformed her heart into a sealed entity due to which he is unable to convey his emotions to her. His feelings have been symbolized by road containers that are used as barriers in Islamabad to prevent the protestors from entering the city. This symbolic mapping transforms a political and spatial reality into an internalized emotional state that illustrates the manner in which public hostility intrudes personal spaces. The placement of containers in Islamabad, symbolize unrest and hatred, to relate the reality to the emotional state of people and its impact on them. So it serves as a semiotic connection between the sociopolitical reality and how it is presented through these inscriptions.

**Table 12: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 12:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
— وہ ہمیں بے وفا کہتے ہیں تو کہتے رہیں، فراز امی کہتی ہیں: جو کہتا ہے، وہ خود ہوتا ہے۔	They call me unfaithful, let them say it, Faraz. My mother says — whoever says such things, is that himself.

**Figure 12**



According to the Semiotic analysis, the signifier and the signified have been identified in the given lines:

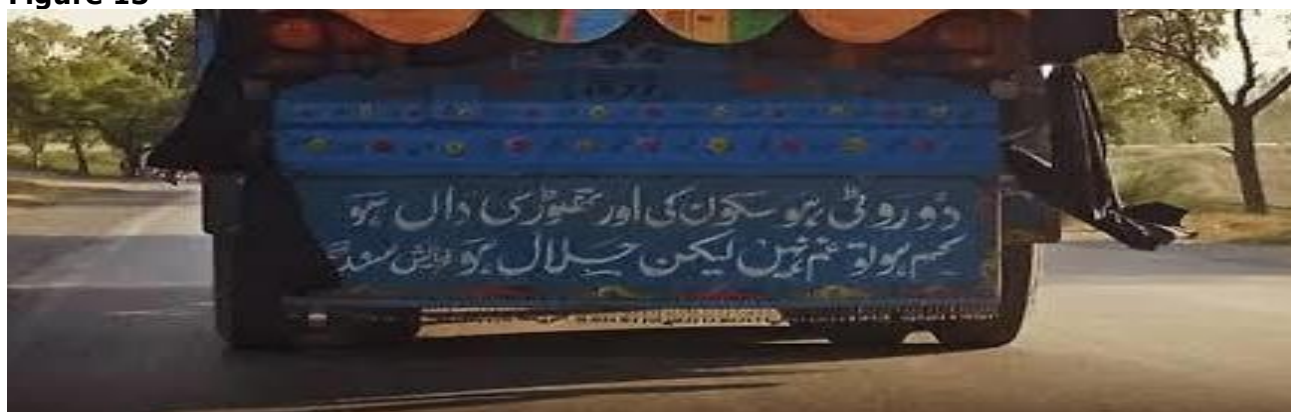
- Signifier: The Urdu text "Woh humein bewafaa kehty hain to kehty rahein Faraz, Ammi kehtien han jo kehta hai woh khud hota hai" constitutes the signifier.
- Signified: The speaker's consistency and the confidence of their closest confidante (mother) are underscored by this statement, which thereby addresses accusations of dishonesty. Additionally, it implies that individuals who accuse others of betrayal disclose more about their own nature than the accused individuals

According to Saussure's semiotic theory, the signifier is the poetic text in Urdu language, which reflects an emotive response to societal criticism. It showcases the concept of loyalty and trust, which is juxtaposed against false accusations, reflecting personal integrity and familial support. The mother's voice provides an authoritative counterpoint to slander or rumour, thereby capturing a conflict between public opinion and private truth. The negative social rhetoric is challenged by emphasising the inner truth and the safeguarding wisdom of mother reassurance, which are in alignment with traditional values of family honour and personal repute in Pakistan's social context. The words, "ami khti hain" refers to the familial support that people have in Pakistani society. The vehicular inscription thus acts as a mobile platform to showcase the personal narrative of people.

**Table 13: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 13:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
دو روٹیاں سکون کی ہوں اور تھوڑی دال ہو کم ہو تو غم نہیں، لیکن حلال ہو۔	Two pieces of bread and a little lentil, earned peacefully, No regret if its bare minimum, but it must be permissible (halal)."

**Figure 13**



According to the semiotic analysis of this text, the signifier and signified are:

- a. Signifier: the entire text is the signifier.
- b. Signified: a yearning for a modest, tranquil existence that is sustained by lawful, honest (halal) funds. A rejection of earthly extravagance in favour of spiritual and moral integrity. There is a religious and cultural emphasis on halal contentment and lifestyle.

The initial statement, "Do roti ho sakoon ki aur thori daal ho," elicits thoughts of fundamental existence and initially prioritises peace of mind over abundance. Referring to "two rotis" and "a little daal" serves to metonymize modest yet respectable living in a nation that is coping with economic uncertainty, unemployment, and inflation. In the second line, "Kam ho to gham nahi lakin halal ho," a strong moral stance has been established, i.e. the source of income or sustenance must be permissible (halal), and the quantity of either is secondary. This is consistent with Pakistan's deeply ingrained cultural traditions and Islamic principles, which integrates financial ethics with spiritual purity. Consequently, this voice functions as a semiotic sign that integrates the simplicity of language with the profound morality. It offers the perspective of working-class individuals, such as truck drivers, who may not be wealthy but derive enormous satisfaction from their sincere efforts to earn the living.

**Table 14: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 14:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
زندگی میں جب بھی مشکل مقام آیا نہ بریک نے ساتھ دیا، نہ کوئی گینر کام آیا۔	Whenever a difficult stage came in life, Neither the brakes, nor any gear worked

**Figure 14**



The semiotic analysis of this text has been done in the given lines:

- a. Signifier: "zindagi mei jub bi kahin mushkil mukam aya na break na sath dia na koi gear kam aya", is the signifier.
- b. Signified: The text signifies that the life is full of hardships and challenges. Referring to past experiences, the driver states that in times of catastrophe or calamity, all his support mechanisms failed. The non-functional brake and gear are metaphorical expressions, that have been used to represent the absence of close friends and family members to convey helplessness, perseverance, or the unpredictability of life. It indirectly refers to the absence of family or friends support in hard times.

According to Saussure's dyadic model, a sign is formed by the signifier (words, symbols) and the signified (the meaning or concept associated with them). In this poetic text, mechanical metaphors have been used, taken from the domain of driving, which are "brake" and "gear", and have been used to symbolize life's support systems or coping mechanisms, indirectly referring to close family members and friends. The "difficult stage in life" is likened to a dangerous or uncertain road condition. Just as one would rely on brakes and gears for controlling the vehicles while driving, in the same manner, a person looks forward to assistance from friends and close family in difficult times.

However, the verse asserts that “neither brakes nor gears worked,” implying a sense of abandonment, unpredictability, or disillusionment. This reflects a profound emotional reality for many working-class individuals, especially truck drivers, who often navigate not just physical roads but also metaphorical ones filled with social, emotional, and economic instability. This inscription becomes a sign in Saussure’s terms—its signifier is a witty, culturally resonant metaphor using driving jargon, while its signified is a universal human experience of facing trials without support. The arbitrary nature of the sign is key, i.e. there is no natural link between “gear” and “coping” or “brake” and “support.” These meanings are socially constructed and understood through the cultural and occupational context of the readers, especially those familiar with driving and its symbolic associations.

**Table 15: Semiotic Analysis of Text no 15:**

Urdu Text	English Translation
ہوتی وفا خون کے رشتوں میں نہ بکتا یوسف مصر کے بازاروں میں۔	If loyalty existed in blood relationships, Yusuf would not have been sold in the markets of Egypt.

**Figure 15**



The semiotic analysis has been done in the following lines:

- Signifier: The entire text is the signifier, “Hoti wafa khoon k rishton main Na bikta Yusuf Misar k bazaaron main”
- Signified: Betrayal by close kin: Even blood relations cannot guarantee loyalty.

This text is based on a historical/religious reference, based on the true story of Prophet Yousaf (Joseph), who was betrayed and sold by his very own brothers. The text is a broader critique of hypocrisy, greed, and disloyalty in familial or trusted relationships, and a cultural lamentation about lost values and moral decay in modern society. According to this religious story, Prophet Yusuf was sold into slavery by his own brothers out of jealousy, making it one of the most intense epitome of betrayal by kin. By stating, “If loyalty truly existed in blood relations, Yusuf would not have been sold in Egypt,” the inscription communicates distrust in familial loyalty, which is a compelling and emotionally charged message. It implies that even the strongest social bonds (family, blood) can fracture under envy or greed. The arbitrary relationship between the form (poetic lines about Yusuf) and the meaning (critique of contemporary familial betrayal) illustrates Saussure’s idea: meaning is not intrinsic but created by cultural convention. This intricate message is comprehensible to a reader who is well-versed in cultural idioms and religious history. This placard on the truck functions as a symbolic narrative of the driver's personal emotive experiences, which are likely to be related to moral disillusionment, betrayal, or learnt caution. It conveys a personal or social truth that is rooted in the collective cultural memory.

## 5. Conclusion

This research looked into the discourse written on the trucks in different cities across Punjab. Using Saussurean semiotic theory, the research analyzed the vehicular inscriptions and uncovered multiple layers of meanings embedded in them, which ranged from personal affiliations and humour to political stance and religious commentary. The in-depth analysis revealed a dynamic tapestry of cultural beliefs, ideological perspectives and personal emotional experiences that are entwined in the lives of the drivers. Through these inscriptions, the drivers

have challenged the dominant cultural narratives. In academic research, vehicular discourse has been typically overlooked, but through this research it has been noticed that the vehicles serve to function as diverse spaces for voicing the underprivileged people of the society. The principal aim of this exploratory research was to determine how vehicular inscriptions in different cities across Punjab operate as a form of semiotic conversation, guided by Ferdinand de Saussure's theoretical framework of the sign. The research findings validate the fact that these texts on the vehicles are powerful signifiers, which act visually and linguistically, to employ a range of expressive ideologies. They included poetic lyrics, religious themes, metaphorical language, and sociopolitical references. For instance, the inscription "My heart is 2GB, but my sorrow is 32GB" humorously yet touchingly captures the emotional burden on the driver through the use of metaphor of digital memory, thus blending technological symbolism with human sentiment. This investigation uncovered an intricate link between cultural, emotional, and political messages embedded in the vehicle inscriptions, with specific attention given to deriving their intended meanings.

The use of Phrases such as "This world is temporary" reflects Islamic ideology of spiritual awareness and the impermanence of worldly life, serving as a public reminder of mortality. In the same way, the inscription "Let there be two pieces of bread with peace and a small amount of lentils; if the quantity is less, there is no sorrow—but it must be halal" encapsulates moral values such as thankfulness, minimalism, honesty, and moral provisions, which are all deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. The vehicular discourse on the trucks also articulates political grievances, social strains, emotional struggles, and moral reflections. For instance, the inscription "You transformed the heart into Islamabad by putting hateful containers on the roads" recontextualizes a political criticism as a deeply personal lament, reflecting emotional limitations and societal division. These texts strengthen the argument that truck inscriptions in Punjab are far beyond the ornamental art, they are meaningful signs rooted in a shared cultural code. The layman, particularly from working-class, utilizes this conversational visual language to narrate lived experiences, resist marginalization, and assert both individual and collective identities. The research ascertains a wealth of semiotic artifacts within these mobile inscriptions, offering a vivid and resonant voice to the semiotic landscape of urban Pakistan.

## References

- Aslam, F., & Baloch, A. J. (2012). *Socio-Economic Challenges in Pakistan*. <http://sujo.usindh.edu.pk/index.php/THE-GOVERNMENT/article/download/922/864>
- Bilal, R., & Shehzad, W. (2019). Discourse analysis of written text on Pakistani public transport vehicles. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(1), 496. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n1p496>
- Bilal, R., Sultan, A., & Bilal, A. (2024). Configuring Socio-economic Crises through Vehicular Discourse in Pakistan: A Socio-linguistic Outlook. *Erevna: Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 8(2), 20-36.
- Mahmood, S. (2021). Written text on Pakistani vehicles: A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Communication, Language and Culture*, 1(1), 40-57. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33093/jclc.2021.1.1.3>
- Schmid, A. (2000). Truck art as arena of contest. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(4), 235-241. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2000.11892273>
- Sheikh, S. Z. (2018). Impact of truck art, as popular culture on Pakistani society. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*, 6(5), 1061-1070.