Social Semiotics of School Uniforms in the Narratives of Mashhad Young Girls

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Introduction

Today, women are present in a variety of social settings such as family, neighborhood, school, university and workplace. In each of the social situations, women experience a degree of power exchange. School is one of the social environments in which women can achieve social, economic, and cultural capital as a student. Social space in Iran is governed by a dominant ideological approach, which has a predetermined framework for understanding and interpreting various aspects of social life and seeks to institutionalize certain beliefs in the society. Accordingly, the school has also become an ideological system that shapes the mentality of students based on the components of Islamic ideology. Coverage rules for girls in Iran are one of the processes of ideological development of the minds of students from childhood to adulthood that runs in schools. Hence, the education institution in the student's educational experience process reproduces certain beliefs and values. The educational experience of young girls involves several semiotic resources (e.g. school uniforms, queues, homework, grade, schoolyard, etc.). Although these resources provide diverse functions such as identity, law and order, integrity and coherence for students, they can have a different representation over time, according to which students are in a disabling process, and become passive and careless people about their community. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the critical and semantic representations of the students' experience in the form of a semiotic analysis of the narratives of young girls about one of the sources in this experience, namely, school uniforms.

Research Methodology

This research has been conducted using a qualitative and interpretive approach to the research problem among young girls aged 18 to 30 who lived in Mashhad and completed their 12-year primary education. The semi-structured interview technique was used to collect the data and its sampling method was based on pseudo-random method and in some cases snowball. In total, 16 interviews were conducted in the research process. Finally, for analyzing the collected data, the social semiotic method based on Van Leeuwen's twelve-step approach has been used.

Discussion of Results and Conclusions

The results of this study showed that young girls are confronted with two main approaches to school uniform during their educational experience. Some compromise and accept the rules, even though they are free of any element or sign of pleasure. But some other students try to show their dissatisfaction with the rules in this regard in a variety of ways. These people usually have the strategy of resistance and disapproval of the existing conditions.

School uniforms in the eyes of these actors represent the students’ infant position. Therefore, they oppose it in any way. However, in most cases, they find themselves inadequate in law. Particularly, any opposition from students is a cost to them from school administrators. In such a situation, the student sees conflicts between his values and the current values in the school. This process causes students to become socially isolated and ultimately alienate. Therefore, from the perspective of students, school uniforms are not only a choice, but also a task of an overwhelming power which is tied up by accepting a set of norms, requirements, and constraints.

In general, the rules for wearing school uniforms put students in a different direction from the formal
process of educational experience, which ultimately leads to a kind of alienation. Accordingly, in the students’ educational processes, a kind of semantic breakdown occurs. So, girls do not know the process of education as part of their lives, through which they can achieve economic and social capital and degree of spiritual development, but they see it as a reality imposed on themselves.

Keywords: Social Semiotics, Narrative, School Uniform, Semantic Representation, Education.

References


