

Multimodal Analysis of COVID-19 Ayuda Packages

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Abstract: The language of politics allows politicians to forward their propaganda and rhetoric when communicating with the public. When used effectively, it serves as a persuasive factor to help political figures gain public support. Thus, they utilize distinct linguistic devices in various modes of communication to their constituents. An example of a tool used in political persuasion are COVID-19 *ayuda* packages, a form of social amelioration distributed by local government units amidst the coronavirus pandemic to sustain the needs of the people in community quarantine. Three COVID-19 *ayuda* packages from the cities of Quezon, Taguig, and Pasig were gathered and analyzed using multimodal analysis. The choices of modalities in constructing the unifying message of each text were subjected to analysis guided by Geeraerts' lexical semantics, Saussure's signifier and signified, and Pierce's indexicality. These modalities were both linguistic and non-linguistic in nature, specifically individual slogan, graphic design, and type of packaging used. Findings revealed that different local government units made use of varying levels of political persuasion as reflected in the *ayuda* packages they gave the public. First is the "Trapo" level of political persuasion which is centered on the individual. It is an effort to persuade through the politics of patronage. Second is the subtle level of political persuasion where messages are hidden in misleading or elusive language and symbolism. Finally, the vague level of political persuasion is the approach centered on clever generalities and the use of popular universal issues and symbols.

Keywords: political persuasion; multimodal analysis; COVID-19; *ayuda*; *ayuda* package

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the first confirmed COVID-19 case in the Philippines on January 30, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020), the number of cases soon increased to a total of 598,000 (CNN Philippines, 2020). To contain the spread of the virus, distinct agencies such as the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) and the Department of Health (DOH) had to put necessary precautions in place. One of the responses of the government was to implement a strict community quarantine that first started in Metro Manila, and was eventually implemented throughout the whole country (WHO, 2020). The local government units (LGUs), provide their constituents with quarantine facilities, conduct contact tracing, implement COVID-19 testing, reinforce health care measures, and deliver relief goods (University of the Philippines, 2020) otherwise known as *ayuda*. These *ayuda* that commonly came in packages contained relief goods, mostly canned foods, noodles, rice, and sometimes

personal hygiene kits (Gutierrez, 2020). On its surface, the distribution of these COVID-19 *ayuda* packages by LGUs seem generous. However, in an all too often practice, political motivations are part of the impetus in these seemingly generous acts. Not only are these practices distasteful, but they may very well be a violation of law, more specifically of the "Heal as One Act". For a concrete example of such practices, the insertion of self-serving political slogans on publicly funded packages runs counter to the aforementioned law whose sole intention is to address concerns related to the current public health emergency. To iterate, involving politics in the distribution of relief packages during a period of national calamity disrupts the motives of this law (DILG, 2020). Unfortunately, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) continues to receive reports that some LGUs persist in inserting politics within the distribution of relief goods (DILG, 2020). In fact the Department of Interior and Local

Government (DILG) received reports that some LGUs continue to involve politics within the distribution of relief goods (DILG, 2020). In line with this, the current study aims to analyze the political persuasion techniques employed by select LGUs in their *ayuda* packages. It looks at political figures and their efforts to take advantage of their constituencies' socio-economic status, perceived political preference, their ethnic identity, and their educational backgrounds and how they use these to gain influence in order to advance self-serving policies that align with their views or concerns and ultimately redound to their own benefit (Velmonte, 2020).

In order to analyze these *ayuda* packages, this paper focuses on various modalities present in the data set such as the linguistics texts, semiotic aspects in the design of the slogan, as well as the indexicality that defines the material in which the package is made. Through the utilization of the multimodal analysis approach, the study attempts to understand the social semiotic aspect being displayed, whether this be in the form of visual elements or textual representation. Accordingly, this method is concentrated on how these components contribute towards developing meaning (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Further, this research utilizes the method of analyzing semiotic aspects to understand functions as well as the meanings (Camiciottoli & Gomez, 2018), and the study of lexical semantics (Geeraerts, 2010) in comprehending linguistic texts being displayed in portraying meaning. With this approach, the research identifies three levels of political persuasion with the "trapo" level politician approach that employ patronage politics in their persuasions (Quimpo, 2007); the subtle misleading language approach for political persuasion (Luu, 2016); and lastly, the vague and indirect language approach of a politician to further their interests and careers (Gruber, 1993).

2. METHODOLOGY

According to van Leeuwen & Jewitt (2001), multimodal analysis provides a systematic means of methodological approach on data analysis where it evokes an analytical approach to comprehending linguistic and non-linguistic elements. It also gives researchers the skill and knowledge to interpret various representations in

multimodal data, their saliency and whether they portray inclusivity and exclusivity (as cited in Archer & Newfield, 2014). Moreover, the foundation of the theoretical framework used in this study is influenced by Ledin & Machin (2020), where they discussed the use of multimodal analysis in allowing "*to break visual designs down into their basic components and understand how these work together*". In which, this concept helps in the analysis of the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the data, as they are analyzed by the three multimodal frameworks to further understand their meaning. They noted that the presence and importance of "*hidden meanings*" possess a communicative value on the ideological presentation of data being analyzed. Thus, using this framework as a foundation of this study helps in further understanding of the "*hidden meanings*" in the ways political persuasion is depicted in COVID-19 *ayuda* packages.

2.1 Data Gathering

This study uses a multimodal approach in the data analysis as it helps in qualitatively interpreting the communicative function and meaning of various multimodal elements (Dicks, 2019). Through convenience sampling, the data were gathered online specifically from Google and Facebook. Originally, there were 5 data gathered and selected based on the frequent occurrence of their photos on Google and Facebook. However, only 3 data were included in this paper to put forward the claims. The basis of sampling these 3 LGU *ayuda* packages are the presence of text/slogan, graphic design, and packaging, in which they exhibit multimodal elements and thus having the potential in representing 3 types of political persuasion. Moreover, the analysis was limited only on the front part where the text and graphic design is displayed, and the type of packaging used due that the back part of the packaging is not seen in the photos gathered.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The three modalities that were analyzed in the data are the type of packaging used, graphic design, and the slogan or text present in the COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging. Respectively, the framework used in analyzing the linguistic and non-linguistic modalities are indexicality (Pierce, 1958), signifier and signified (Saussure, 1959), and

lexical semantics (Geeraerts, 2010). Pierce (1958) identified indexicality as the relationship of an object or sign to an existential fact or spatial temporal meaning. Signifier concerns the denotative meaning of a word, and signified refers to the thought or concept it evokes (Saussure, 1959). Reda (2016) further explained Saussure's (1959) signifier and signified, and suggested that its relationship is "conventional rather than intrinsic" due that its meaning is arbitrary. However, Tierney (1994) noted that the absence of signifiers is important and becomes apparent through transgression. Hoenisch (1996) criticized Saussure and explained that meanings imparted from signs are ultimately indeterminate because their interpretation is subjective (Brown and Yule as cited in Hoenisch, 1996). Lexical semantics is defined by Geeraerts (2010) as the study of word meaning. Boguarev & Pustejovsky (1997) noted that one of the main issues in lexical semantics is polysemy, which refers to multiple meanings realized in a word. Polysemy creates lexical ambiguity in words and its meaning, hence, it has been considered as problematic (Boguarev & Pustejovsky, 1997). Leacock & Ravin (2000) suggested that understanding the context of the text helps in resolving such ambiguity issues. These concepts help in analyzing the three COVID-19 *ayuda* packages and their connection to political persuasion.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the multimodal analysis conducted using indexicality (Pierce, 1958), signifier and signified (Saussure, 1959), and lexical semantics (Geeraerts, 2010), it was found that there are three levels of political persuasion portrayed in the COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging: the trapo level of political persuasion, subtle political persuasion, and vague political persuasion. Trapo is defined by Kusaka (2017) as a traditional politician or in Tagalog, an "old rag". According to Smith (1997), it is a political system that counts on "patronage, feudalism, and the old boy network" (21). Quimpo (2007) argued that trapo are politicians who are clientelist that have transcended into the patrimonialism of politicians. Second, the subtle level of political persuasion. Luu (2016) explains that the presence of subtle use of language in politics also results in a subtle political effect to the public. He noted that "subtlety is key"

these modern times due that explicitness has been an inefficient practice of language use in politics. Lastly, the vague level of political persuasion, which was identified by Gruber (1993) as a *communicative strategy* that varies on the context of communication. Thus, suggesting that vagueness is not unusual in political language. Furthermore, these concepts are used in identifying the three levels of political persuasion of the COVID-19 *ayuda* packages.



Fig. 1. Quezon City *ayuda* packaging

Figure 1, the Quezon City COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging, shows a trapo level of political persuasion as manifested in its slogan, type of packaging used, and graphic design. Joy Belmonte, the current Quezon City mayor, initiated the *ayuda* distribution in their city (Belmonte, 2020). As seen in the Quezon City COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging, the slogan "JOY PARA SA BAYAN" which translates to "Joy for the nation" states Joy, the first name of their city mayor which is followed by stating that she is for the Quezon City public service. The inclusion of her name on the packaging could lead Quezon City citizens into interpreting that she funded the initiative when in fact it is from the taxpayers' money. With this, it could be said that the COVID-19 *ayuda* package is used to strengthen her influence over her constituents. Thus, the slogan affirms Quimpo's (2007) definition of trapo in which it attempts to be remembered and be favored by the citizens through mentioning her name and stating that she is for public service. To further prove that this exhibits a trapo level of political persuasion, the slogan's graphic design signifies (Saussure, 1959) the Philippine flag because it was presented in a white background with three yellow stars, and blue and red font colors. Thus, its graphic design attempted to draw a nationalistic theme for the Quezon City citizens to be persuaded into thinking that she is a nationalistic person. In addition, the text "KASAMA KA SA PAG-UNLAD" which translates to "you are included in the development" could be considered as an attempt to show care to the citizens. In which, the use of the pronoun "ka" which translates to "you" refers to the Quezon City

citizens, as the City Mayor initiated in providing their necessities during the pandemic (Belmonte, 2020). This is a lexical indicator of the text's way of addressing its specific audiences (Geeraerts, 2010). With this, it may look like they show care to the Quezon City citizens, however, it implies that the purpose of the text is to tone down its trapo characteristic. Meanwhile, the type of packaging used is a stable plastic bag which indexes (Pierce, 1989) as a sustainable and reusable bag that can also function as a kit for emergency necessities and first aid. This means that the Quezon City LGU portray themselves as not just caring to its citizens, but also to the environment (Worrell & Reuter, 2014).



Fig. 2. Taguig City ayuda packaging

Figure 2, the *ayuda* package of Taguig City, features the subtle level of political persuasion which displays a tenuous message based on the study of signifier and signified (Saussure, 1959), along with the study of lexical semantics (Geeraerts, 2010). The statement of the package that includes the letters “i” and “L”, which suggests “I Love” tries to reaffirm the Taguig City local government’s care for its citizens. This design purposely portrays that the LGU is deeply concerned with the wellbeing of its citizens. This message and the emotion it elicits through the package can be seen in the graphic design of the slogan where the signifier of the image is a heart that is present within the “L”. The design of the heart along with the red color of the box cover symbolizes passion (Birren, 1961). Again, both the heart together with the color of the box seeks to reinforce the idea that the city government is emotionally involved with its citizens and is deeply compassionate in relation to the welfare of its people. However, the “L” in this package does not simply emphasize the word “love”, but it also can refer to current mayor of Taguig city Lino Cayetano. The “i Love Taguig” is a known slogan that represents the Cayetano politicians in Taguig. The implicit inclusion of their name in the city logo classifies the level of political persuasion subtle. The design of the “i” resembles an image of an

individual where the “dot” represents the head, while the line features a body. This gives the notion that the message of this package is emphasizing that the local government prioritizes the wellbeing of its citizens. Lastly, in regards to indexicality (Pierce, 1958) of this package, it uses a simple plastic made container that can be reused for other purposes such as a storage box, sanitary kit, or a medical kit. This also sends the public a message that the LGU is concerned with the care for the environment. By providing these reusable containers they help promote recycling that is beneficial in preventing pollution as well as reducing greenhouse emissions (Worrell & Reuter, 2014). As seen in the design features with this *ayuda* package, the language of politics is ever present as it utilizes a rhetoric style of writing designed to persuade through the wordings used (Omozuwa & Ezejideaku, 2008).



Fig. 3. Pasig City ayuda packaging

Figure 3, the COVID-19 *ayuda* package of Pasig City, uses vague language for political persuasion which was identified by Gruber (1993) as a *communicative strategy* that varies on the context of communication. The vague political persuasion in these COVID-19 *ayuda* packages is evident precisely in the fact that it does not explicitly anchor the message towards the City Mayor’s political agenda. This is evident in the Pasig City COVID-19 *ayuda* package that features the word “Pasig” written in a wavy font that symbolizes the Pasig River, were it is considered to be a significant landmark in the town that provides identity towards the city of Pasig. (Gorme, et al., 2010). Furthermore, the letter “i” in the word Pasig is the only letter printed in blue to clearly make it stand out. In its design, the dot on the small letter “i” is made to look like a head while the bottom part is the body. This is to convey a person who happens to be a citizen of Pasig that this refers to him or her. Incidentally, one can notice the difference of perception and emotion when a non - Pasig citizen views the same. Through the design of the “i”, it is emphasized that the people of Pasig, as individuals,

are the main priority of the local government. Moreover, the tagline “lungsod ng Pasig umaagos ang pag-asa”, which translates to “Pasig City with overflowing hope”, is consistent with the use of lexical semantics (Geeraerts, 2010). “i” conveys that Pasig City's LGU guarantees hope for its citizens. Lastly, in terms of indexicality (Pierce, 1958) the use of “i” on this package is evident in that it tries to affirm a membership in a community. Presented now on an eco-bag, it encourages its citizenry, through the urging of the LGU, to recycle and to avoid the use of plastic to preserve natural resources as well as to prevent greenhouse emission (Worrel & Reuter, 2014). In effect, this too serves the interest of the LGU, and by extension its leaders, in the portrayal of being environmentally conscious and indirectly, progressively concerned for its constituents. Throughout the aspects that define the message of this package, the use of the language of politics is creatively designed to utilize words that can convince as well as arouse the emotions of their citizens in order to gain their support (Bolarinwa, 2016). Hence, Pasig City's COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging portrays a vague political persuasion. With the messaging and design, portraying the LGU as a progressive and caring figure behind the citizenry, pointing to a relevant and current social call and issue, and with the efforts to establish a sense of community membership given the “i” in Pasig, coupled with the absence of the name of the Mayor of Pasig City in the design and message, all points to an intentionality in using indirect and vague messaging in accomplishing political persuasion.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed COVID-19 *ayuda* packages using multimodal analysis. The graphic design, slogan, and type of packaging used reflect the style of political persuasion of the city mayors who distributed COVID-19 *ayuda* packages to their constituents. It was found that there are three levels of political persuasion realized based on the results of the analysis -- the trapo level of political persuasion, subtle political persuasion, and vague political persuasion. Quezon City was found to portray a trapo level of political persuasion, while Taguig City was found to portray a subtle political persuasion. The Pasig City LGU made use of vague political persuasion in their COVID-19 *ayuda* packages. This study affirms Mazuri's (1975)

findings that the use of language is important in presenting various political ideologies of the slogans. This was depicted in the text or slogans in COVID-19 *ayuda* packagings which apprise the way they use it as a tool in political persuasion. In addition, this study attest to Leacock and Ravin (2000) due that the political context of the COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging analyzed were the key element in understanding the intended messages portrayed in the slogan, graphic design, and type of packaging used by the City Mayors. Thus, these three modalities -- the text or slogan, graphic design, and type of packaging used in the COVID-19 *ayuda* packaging -- served as indicators in distinguishing the various ways or levels of political persuasion that the city mayors are imposing and spreading throughout their jurisdiction. Ultimately, this study contributes to the dearth in literature of *ayuda* packages through serving as a prompt for further research on other modalities present on COVID-19 or other *ayuda* packages which may also reveal other levels of political persuasion.

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