

# Linguistic and Cultural Features of Philippine Covid-19 Infographics

Gina B. Ugalingan

*De La Salle University-Manila*

*gina.ugalingan@dlsu.edu.ph*

**Abstract:** Different fields have provided empirical evidence that infographics are very useful in sharing complex information to the public. Covid-19 infographics as mode of communicating health information to the public are examples of linguistic landscape. For infographics to serve their purpose, studies showed that content and design should be organized and well-planned (Balkac & Ergun, 2018; Caron et al., 2018; Yarbrough, 2019). This paper aims to identify the linguistic and cultural features of thirty-one (31) Covid-19 infographics found on official government websites and official social media platforms of the Philippines. Based on the results, Philippine infographics' organizational patterns employed numbers, arrows, bullet form images, and boxes to illustrate order, sequence and coherence. Another is that Philippine infographics' diction utilized the first and second pronouns on health advisories, while the third person point of view was evident on business protocols. Lastly are the cultural features of Philippine infographics which reflect that socioeconomic gap is present based on the language accessibility. The study recommends that health infographics should provide concise information by ensuring effective, organized and well-planned content. Also, the Philippine government should provide more access by utilizing both Filipino and English languages in all the Covid-19 infographics.

**Key Words:** Covid-19; semiotics; multimodality; linguistic landscape; infographics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Infographic refers to the simplified and condensed version of complex information using both text and non-text features. Covid-19 infographic as mode of communicating health information is a concrete example of linguistic landscape. The use of language in a public space including online spaces represents the vital role of disseminating health advisories against during the pandemic. Almost all countries are in solidarity to slow down the increasing number of deaths caused by the Covid-19. As a result, creating similar infographics focusing on health advisories aims to impose and regulate safety health protocols and responsible behavior from the people. However, these infographics are also contextualized to fit the language, culture and demographics of each country.

Since infographics do not only utilize text but also non-text information, the need of having shared knowledge on the semantic meaning of these images should be familiar to the audience to make sense of the message. The purposeful placement of text and non-text is fundamental to achieve understanding and share the same meaning by the members of the community (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This explains the principle of multimodal critical discourse analysis. This framework serves as the guide in investigating the different modes of the Philippine Covid-19 infographics.

A closer examination of these Covid-19 infographics would provide empirical evidence on the current rhetorical practices of this genre. Studies on infographics are mostly related to the fields of science, journalism and marketing. While most of the studies in multimodality particularly on semiotics are limited to public and physical signages.

Language on public spaces, whether physical or digital, is what linguistic landscape aims to investigate as one of the tools to probe how effective the information can be communicated to the public. Linguistic landscape (LL) refers to all semiotic signs in public spaces and examines how language is utilized in social context (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

Different fields have provided empirical evidence that infographics are very useful in sharing complex information to the public. Studies have examined different characteristics of effective infographics (Balkac & Ergun, 2018; Caron et al., 2018; Yarbrough, 2019). For instance, Balkac and Ergun (2018) pointed out the importance of infographics in health care by ensuring that the content must not have complex information. Graphics, color and font should be well-designed to achieve easy reading experience. Second, Yarbrough (2019) reported that infographics should summarize information, support easy recall of content and use meaningful images. Lastly, Caron et al. (2018) emphasized the used of health statistics, credible sources and ethical use of images.

In the field of education, the role of infographics has shown positive response and preference among students especially in understanding concepts related to their courses. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explained the role of multimodal literacy since visual modes are becoming the center of communication. They enumerated the different modes involved in a text like words, numbers, images, and diagrams. Studies have examined the benefits of incorporating infographics in teaching different concepts to students (Caron et al., 2018; Yarbrough, 2019).

Not only in the field of education, but infographics has also been very useful in other professional fields particularly in the field of health and news (Balkac & Ergun, 2018; Caron et al., 2018).

The present study aims to identify the linguistic and cultural features of Philippine Covid-19 infographics.

## 2. METHOD

The present study analyzed thirty-one (31) Philippine Covid-19 infographics from official

government websites and social media official accounts. Twenty-six of these infographics used the English language, while the remaining five utilized the Filipino language.

To gather Covid-19 infographics from Philippines, the researcher was able to access the different government websites and official Facebook accounts of the Department of Health, the Department of Tourism, and the Department of Trade and Industry.

All infographics were chosen based on Covid-19 health-related protocols (e.g., washing of hands, wearing a face mask, avoiding public spaces, social distancing protocol, etc.).

## 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Results showed that Philippine Covid-19 infographics have similar linguistic and cultural features.

### 3.1 Organizational Patterns

The organizational patterns of Philippine infographics were analyzed based on how Covid-19 information was presented. Certain features were examined like lay-out of content and cohesion devices in the forms of transitional markers, numbers and arrows.

Results showed that in terms of organization, Philippine infographics mostly employed numbers and bullet images to guide audience on how to understand the information. When numbers were not utilized, information was organized from left to right and top to bottom direction. Another organizational pattern observed was how boxes and lines were used to separate the different ideas presented.

Another observation was most infographics were one-page material as the goal of these health advisories was to provide brief and concise information. However, there were some themes that had more than one page as the information needed to be specified with a number of steps, reminders and a number of details. For example, a Philippine infographic had a four-page infographic on how to dispose a surgical mask. Another example was a six-page infographic on how offices should conduct work in a shared space. This could mean that certain

government agencies recognized the need to utilize more than one page material because of the amount of information needed to be disseminated to the target audience.

### *3.2 Point of View*

In terms of point of view, the pronouns used were analyzed based on how Covid-19 information were presented. This linguistic feature represented how the Philippine government was addressing the public.

Results showed that Philippine infographics from the Department of Health mostly employed second person point of view by explicit or implicit use of the pronoun “you”. Most of the health reminders start with a verb or the imperative structure of giving orders. The use second pronoun could mean closer proximity of a relationship between the speaker and the target audience. However, the third person point of view was evident on infographics from the Department of Tourism and the Department of Trade and Industry. The use of third pronoun could mean formality between the speaker and the target audience. This could be the reason why business sector utilized a more formal tone than the health sector.

### *3.3 Cultural Features*

Most of the infographics in this study, utilized images like cartoons to represent the people affected by the global pandemic. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) multimodal critical discourse analysis explained how non-texts are dominant and highlighted like infographic health advisories. All infographics in this study utilized the principle of shared knowledge on the semantic meaning of these images to achieve the goal of the government which was to provide information and direct certain health protocols about Covid-19.

Results showed that most infographics from the Department of Health concerning specific health protocols were written only in Filipino language, but infographics from the Department of Tourism and the Department of Trade and Industry concerning workers, travelers and business sectors were written only in English. This could mean the lack of Filipinos the access to both languages.

In terms of information dissemination, all three government agencies utilized social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. All infographics contained information on how citizens could get help from the government. For example, Philippine infographics provided information related to social media pages and hashtags like #WeRecoverAsOne, #FlySafePH, #BeatCovid19. This shows how Filipinos are so engaged with social media by getting information online (Lalu, 2020).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study described the common linguistic and cultural features of the Philippine Covid-19 infographics. Based on these findings, Covid-19 infographics were utilized by the government to share complex information to the public.

First, Philippine Covid-19 infographics followed similar organizational patterns like numbers, arrows, bullet form images, and boxes to illustrate order, sequence and coherence. Second, Philippine Covid-19 infographics utilized the first and second pronouns on health advisories, while the third person pronoun was evident on business protocols. Lastly, Philippine Covid-19 infographics reflected that socioeconomic gap was present based on the language accessibility.

In addition, Philippine Covid-19 infographics reflected a culture where citizens would rely on social media as their main source of information. The use of hashtags was also observed among the government materials to promote health information.

Also, the difference in access to information through language used was evident. Philippine Covid-19 infographics only presented a singular use of language depending on the target audience. For instance, The researcher observed that the Department of Health only used the Filipino language in most of the health advisories published on their official Facebook and government website. While other agencies like Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Tourism only utilized the English language in their infographics to present the business protocols.

After identifying the linguistic and cultural features of Philippine infographics, it is recommended that health infographics should provide helpful

information by ensuring effective, organized, well-planned content before posting on official websites. Presenting heavy-text information through a number of sentences and paragraphs would defeat the purpose of an infographic material especially when addressing the group who belongs to the lower socioeconomic status of the community. Instead, short, well-constructed, clear imperative phrases should be prioritized with corresponding universal and familiar images that are well-understood. Design, lay-out and colors should also be purposeful to capture the attention and relay the urgency of the health advisory.

Lastly, the Philippine government should also consider providing access by utilizing both Filipino and English languages in all the Covid-19 infographics.

## 5. REFERENCES

- Balkac, M., & Ergun, E. (2018). Role of Infographics in Healthcare. *Chinese Medical Journal*, 131(20), 2514–2517. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0366-6999.243569>
- Caron, R.M., Liu, E., & Peck, B. (2018). Teaching health impact and behavior with infographics. *The Journal of Health Administration Education*, 353-376.
- Kress, G., & T. van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Lalu, G.P. (2020, 28 September). SWS: 45% of Filipino adults use internet; 1 in 4 read news through Facebook. *Inquirer.net*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1332871/sws-45-of-filipino-adults-use-internet-1-in-4-read-news-through-facebook>
- Landry, R. & Bourhis, R.Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16 (23), 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0261927X970161002>
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S.W. (2003). *Discourses in place: Language in the material world*. London: Routledge
- Yarbrough, J.R. (2019). Infographics: In support of online visual learning. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 23(2), 1-15.