

A Case Study on Local Government Speeches amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Exploration of Language Use and Language Choice in the City of Ilagan and the City of Tuguegarao

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Abstract: Several studies have examined the ideologies adopted by presidents in various countries in their speeches concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, concluding that the language used by these officials and the manner in which they speak can either instill confidence among their constituents or provide unnecessary conflict. However, there are limited studies that examine the language choice and the ideologies from local government officials, especially those in the rural areas and regions with established languages apart from English and Filipino. The case study examines the speeches given by two mayors in neighboring cities, the City of Ilagan Mayor, Josemarie L. Diaz, and the City of Tuguegarao Mayor, Atty. Jefferson P. Soriano. The paper makes use of Critical Discourse Analysis anchored by Norman Fairclough's three interrelated dimensions of discourses that examines the text itself, how it is produced, and any socio-political or historical factors affecting the aforementioned factors. From the sample analysis gathered from six (6) publicly available videos, the mayor in Tuguegarao makes use of the languages widely known in his municipality along with English and Filipino to illustrate data gathered from COVID-19 cases, recoveries, and deaths. Meanwhile, the mayor in the City of Ilagan mainly uses English and Filipino in his COVID-19 related speeches. Both officials appeal towards maintaining solidarity with their citizens and prioritizing the safety of the residents. Other technical factors were also considered in the study such as the duration of the videos and the time in which the videos were published in their official Facebook pages.

Key Words: COVID-19; Discourse; Language Choice; Language Usage; Local Government Officials

1. INTRODUCTION

Speeches during the COVID-19 pandemic focus primarily on addressing the matter at hand while simultaneously reassuring the public that the local government is doing everything that they can to address the issue. Government officials should develop effective communication towards its constituents while the public should be able to raise

their concerns and be given an outlet to let them speak (Rudwick et al, 2021). Furthermore, issues on one's language choice and language use disrupt the necessary line between establishing effective communication which negatively impacts the public's perception on how the government is handling the matter at hand. Rudwick et al., (2021) also contextualizes the use of English in speeches made by government officials, which further excludes non-

proficient English residents in a time where the need for effective communication should be established. In relation to that, government officials should relay information that is not haphazardly handled, but well-planned and clear for the public to understand (McGuire et al, 2020). Which is why it is crucial for officials to be able to communicate clearly as it also gives the public a depiction of one's thinking and behavior on how they are currently handling such a precarious situation. Moreover, an official's ideologies are also expressed through how they address the public, that through language, they can influence the opinions and concerns of the public whilst ensuring the frontliners, private sectors, and the public of their safety and security (Dacay, 2018). In the context of the case study, both the City of Ilagan and the City of Tuguegarao use multiple languages that the people residing in each respective city use and peruse in different situations and contexts. Primarily, Ilocano and Ybanag are the cities' vernacular languages used in a variety of domains. Furthermore, Ybanag is the classification associated with the people in Northern Luzon, and it is also the language used in the area, more specifically in areas such as Cagayan where Tuguegarao is located (Dita, 2011). Meanwhile, English and Filipino are languages that are developed and are used in Education, as universities in the region view these as a powerful tool which draws in potential buyers in a region that heavily relies on the agricultural sector as well as technical and vocational knowledge (Asio, 2020).

The paper seeks to examine the language use and language choice of two mayors in two cities in Region II, namely, the City of Ilagan Mayor, Josemarie L. Diaz, and the City of Tuguegarao Mayor, Atty. Jefferson P. Soriano, through the lens of Fairclough's three inter-related dimensions of discourse.

2. METHODOLOGY

A sample of six (6) publicly available videos from each city's respective Facebook group will be analyzed for the research. The sample will be collected by compiling a list of all the videos which will be arranged chronologically from the earliest instance wherein the videos talk about topics about the COVID-19 pandemic, this will be further inspected by selecting video statements containing similar topics related to COVID-19 in the aforementioned videos.

The data will be collected through their respective Facebook pages, namely, "MyCity Ilagan"

for the City of Ilagan and "Tuguegarao City Information Office" for the City of Tuguegarao. Furthermore, the source of the data will also come from the speeches from the mayors in each respective city. They upload videos on official statements, addresses, and other relevant media-related information to their constituents regarding current issues concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and pertinent problems that require immediate intervention from the mayor.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. "Official Statement of City Mayor Jay L. Diaz"

From the video, the city mayor makes use of the English and Filipino language to address the public. His use of the English language is evident when he is presenting statistical information and data regarding COVID-19 cases, as well as the increasing number of cases in the area brought about by locally stranded individuals. However, his direct and strict tone with the English language changes when he switches to the Filipino language, his approach is more empathetic towards the situation of his constituents and urges them to understand the matter at hand.

2. "Aksyon Ora Mismo-City ni Mayor Jefferson Soriano Government of Tuguegarao"

In the video, the host and the city mayor exchange pleasantries in the Ybanag language and take time to address the efforts of front liners and notable individuals about their efforts against the COVID-19 situation in the city. The mayor makes use of mainly Filipino language, most notably in the decision of escalating the city's classification from General Community Quarantine with Heightened Restrictions to Enhanced Community Quarantine. His uneasy demeanor in the video statement partnered with frequent stammers and use of "*uhm*" is clearly evident as he explains the issue to his constituents. Lastly, the use of the English Language is limited to only explaining statistical data regarding the increase and current amount of COVID-19 cases.

3. "Aksyon Ora Mismo-City ni Mayor Jefferson Soriano Government of Tuguegarao"

From the video, the City Councilor speaks to the public first by giving notice to the efforts done by Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officers,

front liners, and the police force for continuously implementing health protocols to its citizens in Filipino. Furthermore, multiple languages were used by the mayor, Ybanag, which he used in a more conversational tone and when relaying information not dealing with statistics in COVID-19 cases, the mayor uses Filipino to emphasize the gravity of the amount of recorded cases in the city and with urging its citizens to be continue to abide by the city's current protocols and health guidelines, lastly, he makes use of the English Language when dealing with data and statistics regarding COVID cases.

4. "Official Statement of Mayor Jay L. Diaz Today, August 28, 2021"

The City of Ilagan mayor mainly uses English and Filipino to address the public, the mayor's use of the Filipino language aimed towards reassuring the public and adhering to their concerns on economic issues brought about by the implementation of a lockdown in 48 barangays in the city. Meanwhile, his use of English is geared towards reporting statistical data and reiterating current health protocols in the city.

5. "Official Statement of Mayor Jay L. Diaz"

As demonstrated in the video, the mayor's use of English and Filipino is attributed towards giving praise for the citizens' response and cooperation to the clean-up in all barangays in the City of Ilagan. With this, the city mayor exhibits a quality from the study by McGuire et al, (2020) on leadership and flexibility to tackle other issues whilst still handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, his uplifting tone and demeanor whilst speaking in English and Filipino is evident in the video. Lastly, the success of the operation coincides with the major development goals of the City of Ilagan, more specifically objectives regarding the environment and social sector.

6. "Aksyon Ora Mismo-City ni Mayor Jefferson Soriano Government of Tuguegarao"

From the video, the host briefly explains the topics for the segment and addresses the public listeners and viewers in the Filipino language. The mayor addresses the public and fellow members in the video in Ybanag, as well as reassuring the public that the recorded cases in the city are slowly decreasing. His use of the English language concerns the amount of active COVID-19 cases, reported deaths, and reported recoveries in the city. Lastly, his use of the Filipino language was evident throughout the video,

especially in reminding the public to get vaccinated as he sternly connects the amount of deaths being considerably linked with unvaccinated individuals.

4. CONCLUSIONS

From the sample analysis conducted, the linguistic choices made by the City of Ilagan mayor appeal towards maintaining solidarity with the citizens and upholding the safety of the residents in the city. Similarly, the linguistic choices of the Tuguegarao city mayor express maintaining solidarity with the people in the city. His language use was more centered towards guiding the public on the city's health protocols and guidelines and asking the citizens to abide by the city guidelines. Furthermore, from the sample collected, the Ilagan mayor did not exhibit any signs of slang as the language use was direct and precise. Also, technical jargons were exhibited only in the context of providing COVID-19 information and in execution of executive orders and important decisions. Moreover, the Tuguegarao mayor exhibited the use of puns in his speeches, with the intent of presenting a positive light on the situation at hand and the use of jargons for the same reason as the Ilagan mayor.

The role of language use and language choice of local government officials in rural areas is important to the community. As leaders in these areas, using the language the constituents are accustomed to clarifies the message between the sender and the intended audience. Although languages such as English and Filipino are the standard in certain areas, local government officials need to make use of the mother tongue when communicating with people to ensure that any information coming from them is as clear and as concise as it can be. Furthermore, a community leader must know the language of the community, since they have the responsibility of maintaining peace and solidarity among their constituents, especially during a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other initial findings look at the length and structure of the video itself, as the videos from the City of Tuguegarao are much more longer and are more impromptu in comparison to the videos from the City of Ilagan which are direct and brief spanning on up to 7-8 minutes while the other reaches towards 30 minutes, the length of the videos themselves may produce a negative effect that discourages the public to watch the video statements the longer it gets. But,

the video statements from the City of Tuguegarao are more impromptu and unstructured which is evident from the mayor's frequent stammers and occasional lapses regarding COVID-19 information. In comparison to the videos from the City of Ilagan, the videos are more structured and more articulate.

Another possible factor is the date and time of publishing the video, the videos gathered from the City of Tuguegarao are uploaded at instances wherein the public are attentive, this is also evident in every video as the hosts remind the viewers and listeners that they can be seen and heard in multiple platforms and are always live. In comparison with the videos from the city of Ilagan, the videos do not have a constant time frame for the time of publication which may be viewed late by the residents in the City of Ilagan.

As leaders of the community, local government officials should practice and prioritize effective communication when addressing their constituents. The messages and the information being relayed can be misinterpreted when using languages that are not extensively used in the community. Which is why advocating to strengthening the value of using the mother tongue within political discourse/communication is vital towards further establishing solidarity among their constituents and upholding their inherent responsibilities as government officials.

Further studies and analysis need to be given on the topic. One recommendation the researcher noted is examining the language use and language choice of local government officials in different mediums of delivery. The researcher focused on speeches which were recorded or broadcasted and then uploaded in their respective pages, other researchers may consider live speeches to compare with the findings of this paper. Furthermore, researchers may focus on topics after the COVID-19 pandemic and determine whether language use and language choice express similar or different themes from the paper. These may include topics concerning education and the gradual transition to Face-to-Face learning or topics concerning subsequent plans to rebound from the effect of COVID-19 in various sectors in their respective cities or municipalities.

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