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A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of WHO EMRO on COVID-19

Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the discourse of COVID-19 in the representations of the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO EMRO). It applied the model of Machin and Mayr (2012), with its visual and linguistic toolkits, to four multimodal representations of COVID-19 from WHO EMRO. The study utilized the qualitative and quantitative approaches. The results revealed that the representations included the pandemic itself, the people involved, and human values. The individuals involved were represented in various capacities, including breadwinners, healthcare workers, nurses, and heroes. They were also shown as offering their lives to protect us. Furthermore, WHO, with its suboffices, including EMRO, is represented as the leading global health authority, especially in declaring pandemics and their treatment mechanisms. The authoritative power of the EMRO is highlighted by using its logo. The ideology is demonstrated in equity and solidarity, as all people are equal and should play roles to stop the pandemic. Colors played a crucial part in the WHO EMRO representations of COVID-19, from showing the constant threat of the pandemic to depicting the fatigue people suffered from at the time.

Keywords: MCDA, WHO, Covid-19, Machin and Mayr (2012), Visual and Linguistic Toolkits



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تحليل خطاب نقدي متعدد الوسائل لتناول المكتب الإقليمي لمنظمة الصحة العالمية لشرق المتوسط لكوفيد-19 مستخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تناول خطاب كوفيد-19 في تمثيلات المكتب الإقليمي لمنظمة الصحة العالمية لشرق المتوسط. طبقت الدراسة نموذج ماشين وماير (2012) Machin and Mayr على عينة من أربع تمثيلات متعددة الوسائل لكوفيد-19 من هذا المكتب الإقليمي، واعتمدت على المنهجين الكيفي والكمي. كشفت الدراسة على أن هذه التمثيلات تضمنت الجائحة والأفراد المعنيين وبعض القيم البشرية. ففيما يتعلق بالأفراد، أوضحت النتائج تمثيلهم في عدة أدوار، مثل المعيلين وموظفي الرعاية الصحية وطاقم التمريض وأبطال، يضحون بحياتهم لإنقاذنا. بالإضافة لذلك، برز دور منظمة الصحة العالمية، ومكاتبها الفرعية، مثل المكتب الإقليمي لشرق المتوسط، باعتبارها السلطة العالمية الأعلى في إعلان الجوائح واستراتيجيات مكافحتها، ويبرز الدور السلطوي للمكتب الإقليمي لشرق المتوسط باستخدام شعارها. برزت أيديولوجية المنظمة في الدعوة إلى أن الجميع متساوون ويداً واحدة في وجه الجائحة. وكان للألوان دوراً في هذه التمثيلات لكوفيد-19، باعتباره تهديداً مستمراً ومروراً بالأشخاص المعنيين، الذين كانوا يعانون من الجائحة في ذلك الوقت.

الكلمات الرئيسية: تحليل خطاب نقدي متعدد الوسائل، كوفيد-19، ماشين وماير (2012)، الأدوات البصرية

واللغوية للتحليل

A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of WHO EMRO on COVID-19

By

Hammam A. Abdelhamid¹, Bahaa-eddin. M. Mazid², Ahmed M. Abu-hassoub³

1. Introduction

In today's digital and multimedia-rich world, multimodality plays a crucial role in various fields from effective communication to media literacy and education. For example, multimodality reflects real-world communication because most human communication is multimodal. In face-to-face communication, conversations include speech, facial expressions, and gestures; in digital media, texts, visuals, and sounds are combined (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001).

Multimodality plays a crucial role in supporting media literacy. People understand persuasion and bias better when exploring multimodal texts, e.g., election propaganda, news, and memes (Jewitt, 2014). For example, Mohamed (2020) investigated the multimodality of Canadian Federal Elections.

1.1.Context of the Study

Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) draws upon the concept of critical discourse analysis and utilizes elements beyond the text. It handles the various components of a context, including words, images, layout, etc., to highlight the hidden images to be delivered. According to Machin (2016b), MCDA acknowledges that the visual plays a significant role because of its less denotative and more symbolic nature compared to language.

MCDA examines how power and ideology are constructed in various media contexts, including images, texts, and sounds, within media and political discourses. Moreover, it analyzes how visuals, texts, and audio reinforce narratives (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For example, political, especially election, advertisements often employ heroic images and stirring music, combined with patriotic colors, such as red and white, to evoke nationalism and support the political party (Mohamed, 2020). Investigating these aspects showcases how mass media shape public perception and disseminate ideology.

The social impact of technological advancements has motivated the notion that interaction is not limited to language, but is also created in combination with other factors,

including color, sound, image, and layout. According to van Leeuwen (2008), the multimodal character of digital texts redefines the use of language resources.

In the last months of 2019, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) broke out in Wuhan, China (Aragbuwa & Adejumo, 2021). It is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (World Health Organization, n.d.). On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Thus, it has become a source of worry worldwide (Adebomi, 2022). It resulted from a biological event that caused disruptions to people and societies (Barreneche, 2024).

The present study analyzes the representation of COVID-19 via the official website and social media accounts of the WHO EMRO during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investigating the discourse of EMRO is important because it covers a region with different conflicts, crises, as well as economic and social levels; hence, this discourse reveals how the ideology and power of the WHO and its suboffices handle such pre-existing issues. Addressing a regional office, rather than the broader context of the WHO, reveals aspects about the role of regional offices. It highlights how the WHO addresses the people of the different regions of the world in terms of the way of addressing, the terms used, the clothing, and the issues addressed, besides COVID-19. The study makes use of the toolkits of Machin and Mayr (2012).

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The present study is an MCDA of some of the WHO EMRO's COVID-19 officially published images. It detects the linguistic and visual techniques adopted to highlight COVID-19. It aims to

- 1- Identify the linguistic and visual techniques adopted to highlight COVID-19.
- 2- Determine the extent to which the linguistic and visual modes complement each other in communicating COVID-19.

1.3.Statement of the Problem

MCDA is an important field of study that helps unveil the ideologies, tools, and implications of discourse. Despite the devastating consequences of COVID-19 worldwide, the discourse surrounding COVID-19, based on the representations of the WHO EMRO, has not been comprehensively and critically studied. Therefore, the present study applies MCDA to the representations of pandemics by the WHO EMRO, with a focus on the discourse surrounding COVID-19.

1.4. Questions of the Study

- 1) What are the linguistic and visual techniques adopted to highlight COVID-19?
- 2) How do the linguistic and visual modes complement each other in communicating

COVID-19?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The present study is significant because it analyzes a pandemic, i.e., COVID-19, that has affected the entire world and caused millions of casualties, using MCDA. Unlike traditional approaches that investigate linguistic or textual analysis, the study leverages MCDA to scrutinize the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, including imagery, color schemes, spatial arrangement, and gestures, in the WHO EMRO's COVID-19 discourse; accordingly, how global health authorities construct meaning and promote guidelines under pandemics could be understood. The study is also significant in terms of conducting an MCDA of COVID-19 in the discourse of the WHO EMRO. It analyzes the official website posts and Facebook posts of the EMRO, not like other studies that covered the posts or publications of certain health ministries, with no relation to the comments of followers.

2. Review of the Literature

Because it helps systematically study the language along with various semiotic modes, including images, diagrams, and graphics in a text, multimedia critical discourse analysis (MCDA) has been adopted as an analytical framework for various studies. For instance, Mayr (2016) approached MCDA from a systemic-functional approach and concluded the study by assessing the methods used for this approach of analysis. The sample covered the mediated representation of crime in the British leading program, *Crimewatch*. The study showed that MCDA is increasingly applied, especially in a political context. Additionally, MCDA can be considerably employed to analyze the ways that ideological structures can be communicated, naturalized, and legitimized beyond the linguistic level.

Camelia (2020) presented an MCDA of the Facebook posts of the Ministry of Health in Romania and the online users' comments. The study examined how the Romanian authority and citizens employed multimodal texts represented by semiotic resources to give and make meanings of the COVID-19-related social practices. It revealed that the Romanian authorities, represented by the Ministry of Health, focused its messages on de(legitimizing) the actions of the varying abstract participants in an information campaign meant to counter fake news.

Bisiada (2021) conducted a critical analysis of the discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic to explore its widespread polarization via social media platforms. The study examined knowledge production on the new disease, arguing that in the outbreak of the

pandemic, posts and comments went viral via social media without a real knowledge background. It adopted a psychological and critical discourse approach and criticized two discursive structures of exclusion, the terms science and conspiracy theory, which have characterized the knowledge production discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic on social media. It proposed a Foucauldian approach that problematized truth claims and scientificity as always ideological and that is aware of power as inherent to all knowledge production in the context of COVID-19.

Morgan (2021) investigated the persuasive, discursive strategies employed by marketers to sell herbal weight loss pills. The study included a sample of four major purveyors of herbal weight-loss products. It adopted Machin's MCDA to investigate how dietary supplement websites verbally and visually encode medical and pharmaceutical discourses to promote a thin body 'ideal' and the consumption of slimming pills. Additionally, it speculated how medical and pharmaceutical discourses operate to responsibilize the weight loss consumer and thereby contribute to the transformation of the consumer as patient, all the while configuring the seller as "expert" advisor and provider of ostensibly clinically sanctioned and effective weight loss 'remedies'. The results revealed that the medicalization and pharmaceuticalization of the weight loss consumer involved a subtle and intricate mix of discursive strategies: Responsibilizing the consumer to evaluate their bodies and take responsibility for their body shape and size.

Gill and Lennon (2022) carried out an in-depth MCDA of four selected UK adverts (one screenshot per advert, per phase) aimed at raising awareness of COVID-19 and reporting compliance with public health policy. The study revealed that fear was constructed using less conventional meaning potentials in favor of more implicit multimodal semiotic interactions. By portraying a 'good' pandemic subject as one who made 'moral' and 'rational' decisions to comply with COVID-19 policy, pre-existing societal inequalities, which might hinder compliance, particularly for the socioeconomically disadvantaged groups of society, were reduced and problematized. This raises ethical concerns over notions of 'expertise' and the 'rationalizing' of 'irrational' lifestyles. The present study adopted MCDA to investigate the theme of COVID-19 in the WHO EMRO's representations. It is not limited to certain countries or one platform, but it investigates a broader context, i.e., EMRO, and a more general sample, the official website and Facebook posts.

3. Theoretical Framework

Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) mainly develops the theory and practice of analyzing a discourse by employing multiple semiotic resources, e.g., language, image,

space, and architecture (Esra, 2015). It views non-linguistic communication as a means of social construction (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Mayr (2016) argues that MCDA can be seen as an expansion of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the interaction between the visual and verbal elements. In the present context of COVID-19, MCDA, in line with CDA, helps reveal power relations in the discourse, such as believing that doctors have the power to provide the care needed (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

MCDA illustrates how images, photos, diagrams, and graphics create meaning, describing the choices made by the author (Machin, 2016b). It is interesting to show how images and other means used are regulated by the producer and how they are experienced by the viewer (Machin, 2016a). A central notion to MCDA, like other discourse analysis approaches, is the sense of being critical (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In other words, texts may use visual strategies and language to look natural but may be ideological and seek to shape the representations of events to serve certain things (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

MCDA "views other modes of communication as a means of social construction" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 10), which shapes and is shaped by society. In this context, discourses are thought of as means of re-contextualizing social practices (Van Leeuwen, 2009) by substituting, adding, or even removing components, including identities, causalities, or processes, along with shifts in the order of sequence (Machin, 2016a). MCDA addresses how the different semiotic resources can be utilized to serve the purposes of "communication in this process of in this process of deletion, addition, substitution, and evaluation" (Machin, 2013, p. 353).

The present study adopts the toolkit developed by Machin and Mayr (2012) because it is one of the methods that allows observing how texts are linguistically and visually composed. This toolkit heavily draws on the work of Halliday (1978) and (1985) (as reported in Machin and Mayr 2012). For the sake of analysis, it comprises the linguistic toolkit (nominalization, presupposition, representing people, and abstraction) and the visual toolkit (iconography, salience, gaze, pose, distance, angle, and individualization versus collectivization).

3.1.Linguistic toolkit

The linguistic toolkit comprises several tools, such as nominalization, presupposition, and representation of people, that may help foreground and/or background different discourses and associations.

3.1.1. Nominalization

It is a concealment strategy and replaces verbal processes with a nominal structure. Nominalization can clearly hide both the agent and the affected, since our vision has been

channeled and narrowed. Since an action becomes a thing, it can be counted, described, classified, and qualified through the resources of the nominal group, but this means that causality is of a secondary concern (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 138-144).

3.1.2. Presupposition

Presupposition is a discursive strategy that means taking a certain meaning/ information in the text for granted, rather than being part of the main propositional content (Adebomi, 2024). It is about the meaning/ concept the addressee is supposed to be familiar with (Mohamed, 2020). Presupposition can be utilized to establish a basis for what sounds like a logical argument and allow the speakers to strategically avoid being explicit about what they mean (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 155-156).

3.1.3. Representing people: Language and identity

Machin and Mayr (2012) report several representational choices for the communicator to represent people as they may like to highlight a specific background or part of people's identities. Such representational choices will always bring associations of values, ideas, and activities. In the classification of people, Machin and Mayr (2012) draw on a comprehensive inventory introduced by Van Leeuwen (1996) for the classifications of people and the ideological effects that these classifications may have. Machin and Mayr (2012, pp. 77-91) use one or many of these techniques:

3.1.4. Abstraction

To achieve persuasion, a speaker/ writer may use abstraction to convey abstract/ rhetorical specifications about a person. According to Fairclough (2003), the abstraction of circumstances, identities, and processes is a sign of ideological work, which is particularly important for MCDA (Machin, 2013). Machin and Mayr (2012) mention several abstraction techniques, such as conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and hyperbole. For instance, in introducing conceptual metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) believe that familiar linguistic metaphors are no more than apparent representations of underlying conceptual relationships.

3.2. Visual toolkit

This sub-section covers the visual toolkit, encompassing some tools that are of paramount importance for analyzing semiotic choices. It includes iconography, salience, gaze, pose, distance, and angle.

3.2.1. Iconography

Within MCDA, the analysis of iconography focuses on how varying elements in an image, e.g., settings and objects, can signify discourse in a manner that is probably unclear when seen initially. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), every image denotes and

connotes. While denotations relate to the elements depicted in the image, connotations relate to the ideas and/ or values communicated by such elements.

3.2.2. Settings

Settings are the broader contextual environments, where a multimodal text or communicative event occurs, including physical, social, cultural, and ideological aspects (Ledin & Machin, 2018). MCDA looks at the way a setting can be employed to communicate general ideas, to connote discourses and their values, and to define identities and actions. Visually speaking, some semiotic choices do not document practices but symbolize communication and caring (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 52-54).

3.2.3. Salience

Exploring salience helps identify specific features that are created to stand out, to draw attention, and to foreground certain meanings. Machin and Mayr (pp. 54-56) believe that salience relates to the features made noticeable for foregrounding particular meanings and values. It can be achieved using these elements: Potent cultural symbols (some elements carry much cultural symbolism), size (indicates the ranking of importance, ranging from the largest to the smallest and vice versa), color (richer/ matte/ striking colors or contrasts), tone (using brightness to attract the eye; brighter tones on items could be used to make them shine), focus (various elements can be used to give salience to an element; it can be heightened to exaggerate details, or focus can be reduced), foregrounding (creates importance), and overlapping (has the effect of placing elements in front of others).

3.2.4. Gaze

When analyzing the gaze, which is a semiotic resource used to communicate interest and engagement, Machin and Mayr (2012) argue that a viewer may look directly at the viewer, off frame, and look downwards or upwards. Gaze is important because it helps the image fulfill two functions, i.e., demand and offer information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996).

3.2.5. Pose

Pose shows some information about the person depicted in terms of values and behaviors. A pose is analyzed in terms of taking up space, relaxation or intensity, openness vs closeness, and intimacy or distance (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 75-76).

3.2.6. Distance

Distance signifies social relations and identifies the type of relations between people, whether they are intimate or not, and whether they want to connect with each other or not. In terms of visuals, distance translates as "size of frame" (close, medium, or long shot). For

instance, depicting the participants in close proximity brings the viewer into more intimate relations with the participants to personalize them (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 97-98).

3.2.7. Angle

Like seeing real life, the angle of the image helps the viewer engage with the depicted people. This engagement means confronting people, coming face-to-face, or merely observing others. Visually, we may engage with the participants from a vertical angle; looking down on someone can give a sense of their vulnerability, but looking up at them can give a sense of their power (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp. 98-100).

4. Method

This is a qualitative-quantitative study. The following steps are adopted in analyzing data: (1) Analyzing four representative samples from the official website and accounts of WHO EMRO according to the linguistic toolkit (nominalization, presupposition, representing people, and abstraction) of Machin and Mayr (2012), (2) analyzing the data according to the visual toolkit (iconography, salience, gaze, pose, distance, angle, and individualization versus collectivization) of Machin and Mayr (2012), and (3) drawing conclusions based on the analysis. The sampled data are collected because they are representative, cover different themes, and involve many people in varying contexts and roles.

Analysis

Example (1)



Figure 1: A man wearing a mask asking people to mask up to help return to work

Source:

https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/coronavirus/eye_smile_having_a_job.jpg?ua=1

1. Linguistic analysis

The caption reads: EYE SMILE// SO THAT I CAN// GO BACK TO// HAVING A JOB// # MASKUP. It is all in capital letters.

- Nominalization: The image makes use of the phrase "HAVING A JOB" rather than a verb-based construction, such as "work", "to be employed/ reemployed", or "have a job". This nominalization abstracts the concept of employment, treating it as a static state or possession, rather than an ongoing process, which shifts the focus from the action of working to the condition of employment, emphasizing its value and desirability.
 - Presupposition: The caption reads "SO THAT I CAN// GO BACK TO// HAVING A JOB", which presupposes that the person in the image either has lost his job or is at risk of losing it due to the pandemic. Additionally, it assumes that individual actions like "wearing a mask" are directly linked to the possibility of returning to work and assuming a usual everyday life of having a job and earning a living. This presupposition suggests that individual actions, even the simplest, could have social and economic implications.
 - Representing people:
 - Personalization/ Impersonalization; Using the first-person pronoun "I" personalizes the message, making it relatable to individual viewers, who are addressed in the imperative "implied second person/ EYE SMILE/ MASK UP".
 - Individualization vs collectivization: The individualization strategy adopted in the caption positions the viewers as the agents of change, who, through individual actions that could be carried out individually or collectively using the imperative form, are responsible for their own and their community's well-being. Furthermore, using a single person, rather than a group, reinforces the focus on individual responsibility (a one-to-one action) rather than a collective action.
- The image individualizes the message by featuring a single person and the first-person language, which encourages the viewers to see themselves in the subject's position and emphasizes personal agency. In contrast, using the hashtag #MASKUP and the WHO logo introduces a subtle element of collectivization, suggesting that many individuals acting together can achieve a common goal, i.e., stopping the pandemic. The philosophy underpinning #MASKUP could be I wear a mask to protect you, and you wear a mask to protect me, to highlight the need for shared responsibility.
- Nomination or functionalization: The image uses functionalization. It refers to the person involved by his role, as one who looks for the end of the pandemic to get back to work.

- Using the first-person pronoun "I" personalizes the message.
- Abstraction: The phrase "EYE SMILE" abstracts the idea of communication, "smile", and friendliness behind a mask, not from the mouth, focusing on the visible part of the face (the eyes) and not the mouth to convey genuine emotions, not using fake words. It abstracts complex social and economic aspects and processes of public health and employment into simple concepts (eye smile/ mask up and having a job), which makes the actions called to by the image more accessible.

2. Visual toolkit

A man (in a blue or white-collar setting) wears an amber mask with messy hair on a grey background. He asks people to mask up in order to play their role in ending COVID-19 and getting back to work to earn their living.

- Iconography: The mask is a central icon, immediately recognizable as a symbol of pandemic-era public health. The mask is amber, which indicates that a system is stable; threats exist, but the situation is unclear (Prinea, Culwick, & Endlich, 2021). In this case, the mask serves as a universal warning to continue wearing masks until the situation is resolved, which is unclear, yet it is unclear when it will come to an end. The mask is a central icon, immediately recognizable as a symbol of public health during the pandemic era. Moreover, the WHO logo at the bottom adds institutional authority and credibility to the message.
- Salience: The color contrast of the amber mask stands out against the monochrome background. It draws immediate attention to protective equipment, i.e., a mask, that should always be adhered to. Moreover, the bold, white, all-caps text is highly salient, ensuring the message is not missed.
- Gaze: The subject (one man) looks directly at the viewer, emphasizing that the message is intended for you (the receiver/s) only. This direct gaze would create engagement and a sense of connection, reinforcing the personal appeal of the message.
- Pose: The subject is shown in a neutral, upright pose, suggesting seriousness and approachability. The visible part of body language (i.e., the mouth is masked, and the eyes are smiling) is open and non-threatening, aligning with the message of community-mindedness and personal responsibility.
- Distance: The image is framed at a medium-close distance, with a focus on the upper body. This distance is intimate and fosters a sense of identification. However, it is not

so close to invading personal space. Therefore, it creates a balance between personal appeal and public messaging.

- Angel: The angel is at eye level; it positions the viewer as an equal to the subject. From this perspective, the image supports the idea of shared responsibility and mutual understanding between the audience and its subject.

Critically speaking, the image idealizes the importance of employment and being a breadwinner with no other means of getting money but a salary. The work is valorized and contextualized. Using MCDA reveals how using simple words and visuals legitimize labor (shown by the man) and the social responsibility of others (Eye smile). In summary, the analysis reveals that this image effectively combines linguistic and visual elements to convey a persuasive and authoritative public health message. The hashtag and the logo used demonstrate evidence-based action. They also promote the preventive public health approach.

Example (2)



Figure 2: A healthcare worker wearing a mask with smiley eyes

Source: http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/coronavirus/eye_smile_world_without_covid_19.jpg?ua=1.

1. Linguistic toolkit

The caption reads: EYE SMILE// FOR A WORLD// WITHOUT// COVID-19// #MASKUP. It is all in capital letters.

- Nominalization: The image makes use of the phrase “FOR A WORLD” rather than a verb-based construction, such as “live”, “exist”, or “enjoy life”. This nominalization abstracts the concepts of life and existence, treating them as a static state or

possession, rather than an ongoing process, which shifts the focus from life (as a concept wherever in the world) to having a world free of COVID-19.

- Presupposition: The caption reads “FOR A WORLD WITHOUT COVID-19”, which presupposes that the person in the image dreams of having a world with no more persistent pandemic, i.e., COVID-19. Furthermore, it assumes that individual actions like “wearing a mask” are directly linked to the possibility of reassuming life and enjoying a world without COVID-19, as was the case before. This presupposition suggests that even the simplest individual actions can have profound social implications and contribute to saving the world.
- Representing people:
 - Personalization/ Impersonalization: The viewers are addressed in the imperative “implied second person/ EYE SMILE/ MASK UP”.

The image individualizes the message by featuring a single person and the first-person language, which encourages the viewers to see themselves in the subject’s position and emphasizes personal agency. In contrast, using the hashtag #MASKUP and the WHO logo introduces a subtle element of collectivization, suggesting that many individuals acting together can achieve a common goal, i.e., stopping the pandemic.

- Individualization versus collectivization: The individualization strategy adopted in the caption positions the viewers as the agents of change, who, through individual actions that could be carried out individually or collectively using the imperative form, are responsible for their own and their community’s well-being.
 - Aggregation: The use of “world” denotes the universality of the message.
- Abstraction: The phrase “EYE SMILE” abstracts the idea of communication, “smile”, and friendliness behind a mask, not from the mouth, focusing on the visible part of the face (the eyes) and not the mouth to convey genuine emotions, not using fake words. It abstracts complex social and health aspects and processes of public health into simple concepts (eye smile/ mask up), which makes the actions called to by the image more accessible.

2. Visual toolkit

A healthcare worker (a woman) wears an amber mask with a tired face on a grey background. She asks people to mask up in order to play their role in ending COVID-19 and getting back to having a world without COVID-19.

- Iconography: The mask is a central icon, immediately recognizable as a symbol of pandemic-era public health. The mask is amber, which indicates that a system is stable; threats exist, but the situation is unclear (Prinea, Culwick, & Endlich, 2021). In this case, the mask served as a universal warning to continue wearing masks until the situation was resolved, which was unclear, yet it was unclear when it would come to an end. The mask is a central icon, immediately recognizable as a symbol of public health during the pandemic era. Moreover, the WHO logo at the bottom adds institutional authority and credibility to the message.
- Salience: The color contrast of the amber mask stands out against the dark background. It draws immediate attention to protective equipment, i.e., a mask, that should always be adhered to. Moreover, the bold, white, all-caps text is highly salient, ensuring the message is not missed.
- Gaze: The subject (a healthcare woman) looks directly at the viewer, emphasizing that the message is intended for you (the receiver/s) only. This direct gaze would create engagement and a sense of connection, reinforcing the personal appeal of the message.
- Pose: The subject is shown in a neutral, upright pose, suggesting seriousness and approachability. The visible part of body language (i.e., the mouth is masked, and the eyes are smiling) is open and non-threatening, aligning with the message of community-mindedness and personal responsibility.
- Distance: The image is framed at a medium-close distance, with a focus on the upper body. This distance is intimate and fosters a sense of identification. However, it is not so close to invading personal space. Therefore, it creates a balance between personal appeal and public messaging.
- Angel: The angel is at eye level; it positions the viewer as an equal to the subject. From this perspective, the image supports the idea of shared responsibility and mutual understanding between the audience and its subject.

Critically speaking, using the power of hashtags reduces the urgency of stopping the pandemic to simple actions that can go viral online. No sick individuals in the background triggers hope and ambition. The organization promotes the power of knowledge and solidarity, as well as its authority, because it presents itself as responsible for framing the problem and presenting an evidence-based solution. Additionally, using the imperative form positions the audience as morally responsible for their actions. It shows WHO's role as a hegemonic actor in global health policy and depoliticizes mask mandates, which are

framed as common sense.

In summary, the analysis of this image, showing mother-like facial expressions, reveals that this image effectively combines linguistic and visual elements to convey a persuasive and authoritative public health message.

Example (3)

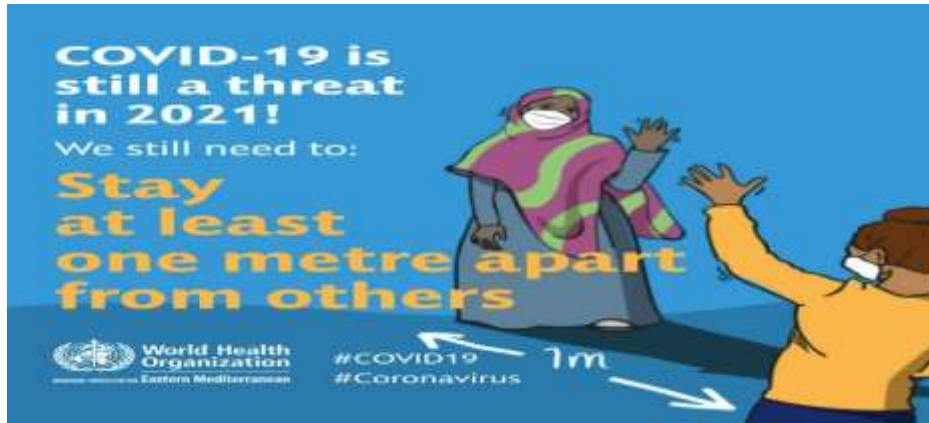


Figure 3: Two ladies wearing masks and greeting each other at a 1-meter distance between them

Source: https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/coronavirus/covid_19_social_distancing_en.jpg?ua=1

1. Linguistic toolkit

The caption reads: COVID-19 is still a threat in 2021!// We still need to: Stay at least one meter apart from others// #COVID19 #Coronavirus

- Nominalization: The phrase "COVID-19 is still a **threat** in 2021!" nominalizes the disease as a "threat," turning an ongoing process (it moves at a viral spread, illness) into a static, ever-present entity. Similarly, "social distancing" is nominalized as implied by "stay at least **one meter apart**", which nominalizes the behavior, making it a general rule rather than an individual action, especially with the use of "we" in the previous line.
- Presupposition: Several presuppositions are highlighted in the text. It presupposes the dangers caused by COVID-19, which persists as an ongoing threat ("**still a threat in 2021!**"). Moreover, social distancing is presupposed. The audience already knows about social distancing, but it is a reminder that we should continue to keep apart ("**We still need to...Stay at least one meter apart**"). This message presupposes ongoing obligations rather than providing new information.
- Representing people: Two ladies are represented, maintaining a one-meter distance, as indicated by the distance and text.

- Personalization and impersonalization: The pronoun "we" personalizes the message, including the participants and the audience, denoting a shared community of responsibility. The use of "others" impersonalizes those outside the self, making the rule universally applicable. In this text, *others* is not used for an enemy, but for everyone else worldwide.
- Individualization vs. collectivization: Using the pronoun "we" collectivizes the audience, stressing collective action and shared responsibility, which is reinforced by the visual depiction of two distinct individuals, showing both individual and collective participation.
- Specification and genericization: A generic language is employed (others), which applies the rule broadly without specifying particular people or groups, thus universalizing the message.
- Objectivation: The message "stay at least one meter apart from others" objectifies the behavior, turning it into an external requirement rather than a personal choice; it is not a one-to-one instruction, but a universally recognized instruction.
- Anonymization: The participants do not show any identified signs of belonging to a certain group or nation, supporting the generic, universal message.
- Aggregation: Despite the lack of numbers, the use of "we" and "others" aggregates individuals into broader social groups, reinforcing the idea of a universal collective action.
- Pronoun vs. Noun: The use of "we" versus "others" deviously draws a distinction between the self/ selves (we) and the broader public (others). However, this division is not meant to be adversarial; it is used to promote inclusion. It divides people into two interchangeable groups that could apply to anyone worldwide.
- Suppression: Only the positive actions needed are highlighted, with no mention of the adverse consequences of not following the message.
 - Abstraction: The text includes some terms, such as "threat", and directives, e.g., "stay ... apart", which are abstract in nature because they lack specific details about the nature of the risk or the scientific rationale behind them, making the message universally recognizable, accessible, and internalizable.

2. Visual toolkit

The figure depicts two women wearing masks, greeting each other, but they are 1 meter apart. They deliver a message about the dangers of COVID-19 and the need to maintain social distancing.

- Iconography: The image features recognizable symbols of the pandemic: Two people, one wearing a headscarf, both wearing masks, greeting each other from a distance. The "1m" marker on the ground visually reinforces the social distancing rule. The WHO logo, accompanied by its suboffice and hashtags (#COVID19 and #Coronavirus), lends institutional authority and links the message to global health discourse.
- Settings: The background is flat, undifferentiated blue, which avoids distraction and keeps focus on the figures and the message. Moreover, it does not provide any indication for the country, or even the region, which suggests universality; this rule applies everywhere.
- Salience: Salience is created through color and size: the directive "Stay at least one meter apart from others" is in large, bold, amber text, contrasting with the blue background. The figures are centrally placed and visually prominent. Additionally, the information about COVID-19 is in white, as a typical sign. However, using amber in the warning message indicates that the threat still exists.
- Gaze: Both participants are depicted facing each other, with their hands raised in greeting, but maintaining a neutral gaze away from the viewer. This gaze creates a sense of interaction between them, modeling the recommended behavior that should be carried out by all, rather than directly addressing the audience.
- Pose: Both participants are in open, welcoming poses, with raised hands suggesting a friendly greeting and smiling eyes that replace physical contact. This safe social interaction highlights that social connection can persist despite physical distancing.
- Distance: The image visually enacts the "one meter apart" rule, with a clear gap and a labeled distance marker (1 m with arrows at both sides) between the two people, which makes the rule memorable and recognizable.

Angle: The angle is somewhat elevated, which allows the audience to see both individuals and the space between them clearly. This neutral, observational angle reinforces the instructional nature of the image.

Using the visual and linguistic techniques highlighted in the image stresses the authoritative message about ongoing social distancing. Using this language stresses the power and authority of the WHO that frames the pandemic and presents solutions. It also promotes evidence-based action, as research continues to show that the pandemic remains a threat even after a long time.

Example (4)

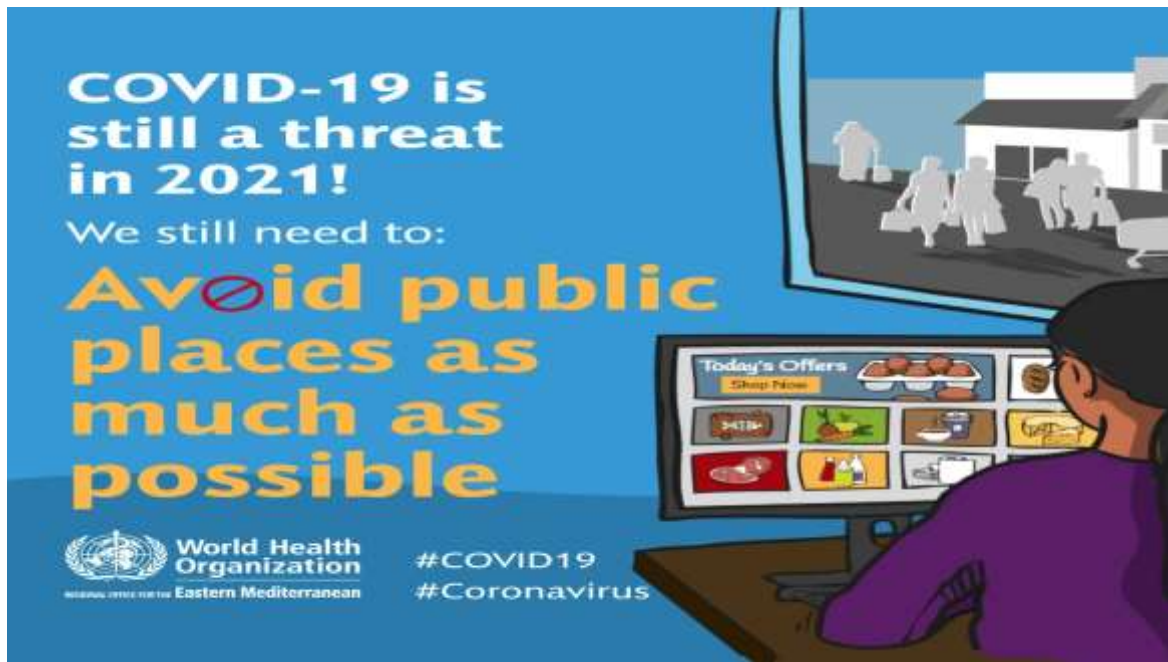


Figure 4: A woman navigating an online store to get groceries, with a grey image of real-world shopping

Source: https://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/coronavirus/covid_19_avoid_public_places_en.jpg?ua=1&ua=1

1. Linguistic toolkit

The caption reads: COVID-19 is still a threat in 2021!// We still need to: Avoid public places as much as possible// #COVID19 #Coronavirus

- Nominalization: The phrase "COVID-19 is still a **threat** in 2021!" nominalizes the disease as a "threat," turning an ongoing process (it moves at a viral spread, illness) into a static, ever-present entity. Similarly, "public places" are nominalized as implied by "Avoid public places as much as possible", which nominalizes the behavior, making it a general rule rather than an individual action, especially with the use of "we" in the previous line.
- Presupposition: The text presupposes many issues. It presupposes the dangers caused by COVID-19, which persists as an ongoing threat ("**still a threat in 2021!**"). Moreover, avoiding public places and staying home are presupposed. **Avoid public places as much as possible** is a message that presupposes ongoing obligations rather than providing new information. It highlights the responsibility we should assume to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

- Representing people: A lady searching online is represented, reminding the audience of the importance of staying home and avoiding public places, as indicated by the distance and text.
- Personalization and impersonalization: The pronoun "we" personalizes the message, including the participants and the audience, denoting a shared community of responsibility. It highlights the necessity of fulfilling our role.
- Individualization vs. collectivization: Using the pronoun "we" collectivizes the audience, stressing collective action and shared responsibility, which is reinforced by the visual depiction of the lady staying home, as she does her role and calls us to do ours, showing both individual and collective participation.
- Specification and genericization: The visual shows a single lady at a computer, which individualizes the action of staying home. However, the text addresses the general public "we", which collectivizes the message.
- Nomination or functionalization: No personal names or titles are used. People, either the lady navigating online or those in the smaller image of the memory, are depicted by their activity, i.e., shopping online in the case of the city or offline in the case of those in the memory.
- Objectivation: The message uses "**public places and possible**" to objectify the behavior, turning it into an external requirement rather than a personal choice. It does not specify places or people to broaden its scope.
- Anonymization: The participant does not show any identified signs of belonging to a certain group or nation, supporting the generic, universal message.
- Aggregation: The use of "we" cunningly highlights that the message applies to all people worldwide, which aggregates individuals into a collective group with shared responsibility.
- Suppression: Only the positive actions needed are highlighted, with no mention of the adverse consequences of not following the message.
- Abstraction: The text includes some terms, such as "threat", and directives, e.g., "avoid public places", which are abstract in nature because they lack specific details about the nature of the risk or the scientific rationale behind them, making the message universally recognizable, accessible, and internalizable.

2. Visual toolkit

The figure depicts a woman staying home and navigating online to get her groceries, as shown on the computer screen. She remembers past days of going to markets to get home

supplies with others. She shares a message about the dangers of COVID-19 and the importance of avoiding public places whenever possible.

- Iconography: The image features recognizable symbols of the pandemic, such as people staying home and ordering their needs online to limit public contact. It carefully stresses the importance of the message by avoiding public places, replacing the "o" in "avoid" with a crossed sign of warning in red to warn people not to go to these places. The WHO logo, accompanied by its suboffice and hashtags (#COVID19 and #Coronavirus), lends institutional authority and links the message to global health discourse.
- Settings: The setting is a domestic interior, with the individual at a desk and navigating online, reinforcing the message to stay home. The external scene is generic, representing any public space.
- Salience: Salience is created through color and size: the directive "**Avoid public places as much as possible**" is in large, bold, amber text, contrasting with the blue background. The information about COVID-19 is in white, as a typical sign. However, using amber in the warning message indicates that the threat still exists. Using the symbol instead of the "o" letter in avoid is highly important as a warning message.
- Gaze: The individual in the image is shown from behind, with no direct gaze at the viewer. This de-personalizes the message, encouraging viewers to imagine themselves in the same position and model the recommended behavior that should be carried out by all, rather than directly addressing the audience.
- Pose: The lady's pose is relaxed and focused on the screen, modeling the recommended behavior (online shopping) as safe and usual.
- Distance: The image visually enacts the "staying home and avoiding public places" rules, with a clear gap between the near computer screen and the far image/ screen of people in public places, which makes the rule memorable and recognizable.
- Angle: The angle is somewhat elevated, which allows the audience to imagine themselves in the viewer's position. This neutral, observational angle reinforces the need to avoid public places and stay home.

Using the visual and linguistic techniques highlighted in the image stresses the authoritative message about the need to avoid public places. They promote evidence-based action, as research continues to show that the pandemic remains a threat even after a long time.

5. Results

In order to answer the questions of the study, the data are tabulated and quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed below.

Table (1): Frequency of the linguistic and visual toolkits in the data of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office

Toolkit	Example 1		Example 2		Example 3		Example 4	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Linguistic toolkit								
Nominalization	1	6.66	1	6.66	2	8.33	2	8.69
Presupposition	1	6.66	2	13.33	2	8.33	2	8.69
Representing people	4	26.66	3	20	9	37.5	8	34.78
Abstraction	1	6.66	1	6.66	2	8.33	2	8.69
Visual toolkit								
Iconography	2	13.33	2	13.33	2	8.33	2	8.69
Settings	1	6.66	1	6.66	1	4.16	1	3.47
Salience	1	6.66	1	6.66	2	8.33	2	8.69
Gaze	1	6.66	1	6.66	1	4.16	1	3.47
Pose	1	6.66	1	6.66	1	4.16	1	3.47
Distance	1	6.66	1	6.66	1	4.16	1	3.47
Angle	1	6.66	1	6.66	1	4.16	1	3.47
Total	15	100	15	100	24	100	23	100

Table (1) illustrates that the items of the linguistic and visual toolkits are used equally (15) times in examples one and two, (24) times in example three, and (23) times in example four. Representing people is the highest in all examples because of the subitems included. However, not all subitems are depicted in all examples. Additionally, the highest level of the visual toolkit is iconography, which focuses on how varying elements in an image, e.g., settings and objects, can signify discourse in a manner that is probably unclear.

Nominalization is not equally represented in all examples. While it is found only once in the first two examples, which depict one figure each, it is doubled in the third and fourth examples. The use of nominalization is highly important because it abstracts the items used, especially when it comes to life, world, and employment. This finding is important because life cannot be imagined without.

Presupposition is no less significant. All examples contain presuppositions of

important collective actions and/ or entities. Presupposition illustrates the significance of the threat and the need to act collectively. In examples 2-4, presupposition is doubled. In contrast, it is the lowest in example 1. In all examples, presupposition suggests that even the simplest individual actions can have profound social implications and contribute to saving the world.

Representing people is the highest of all examples in terms of the linguistic toolkit. It includes several subitems, namely personalization and impersonalization, individualization versus collectivization, specification and genericization, nomination or functionalization, use of honorifics, objectivation, anonymization, aggregation, and pronoun versus noun. However, not all subitems are represented equally. Some of them are sometimes missed, especially honorifics, which are not highly important in the representation of the pandemic because people are shown to act against COVID-19, without being distinguished by the use of honorifics.

Abstraction is represented less in the first two examples. It abstracts complex social and economic aspects and processes of public health, life, and employment into simple concepts denoted by “eye smile” and “#maskup”. In the last two, abstraction is more dominant because it abstracts threat, fight, and the need to take greater actions than just wearing masks, such as avoiding public places and keeping a safe distance, making the message universally recognizable, accessible, and internalizable.

The linguistic toolkit used in the examples helps deliver the message universally and fast. With the collaboration of several items and subitems employed, it promotes individual and collective actions to be taken to help stop the pandemic, which is often represented as a threat, even implicitly, as denoted by consequences.

The visual toolkit is represented almost equally in all examples. The most frequently used item is iconography, which is highlighted by people, viruses, and logos. For example, the WHO logo, accompanied by its suboffice and hashtags (#COVID19 and #Coronavirus), lends institutional authority and links the message to global health discourse.

Gaze, pose, distance, and angle are equally represented. The participants and viewers are both involved in the representation. Of course, the items are not depicted with the same power, but they suggest significant implications. Only one distance is drawn (1 meter) because the example stresses the need to maintain a safe distance from others. Sometimes, the gaze is directed at the viewer, especially in the first two examples, because the participants rely on the eye smile to deliver the message.

The visual toolkit plays a vital role in delivering and reinforcing the message, as it

helps make the message more memorable. When a person is told to wear a mask, they may remember. On the contrary, when a person is told visually to wear masks and use smiley eyes only, it could last longer. The use of visuals, along with the linguistic toolkit in the examples, proves successful in delivering the message.

6. Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the representations of COVID-19 in the discourse of the WHO EMRO. It made use of the linguistic and visual toolkits introduced in Machin and Mayr 2012. The representations included the pandemic itself, the people involved, and human values. In other words, COVID-19 was always represented as a threat and an ongoing threat in some cases. This threat was represented as terrifying in some cases, so people should have smiley eyes and wear masks, along with other protective measures. In other cases, the pandemic was portrayed as a terrified force, urging people not to let it slip through the cracks and act as heroes. The virus variants were also depicted. The people involved were represented in different forms. They were referred to as breadwinners, healthcare workers, or heroes. They were also shown as offering their lives to protect us. However, they were depicted as a group needing support and calling for people to stop discrimination against them. Several human values were represented in relation to the pandemic. For instance, care was highly stressed because all people needed to be offered care and protection, either for themselves, for their surroundings, or for those who provide them with care and protection, i.e., healthcare providers. Unity was intensively deployed, either by words or visually. Colors were important in the representations. They helped deliver the message smoothly to be memorable and universally acknowledged. Using dark colors, especially orange and red, highlighted the ongoing threat of the pandemic. The grey background also complemented the scene, particularly when the foreground was amber, as a sign of the blurred status that needed attention, care, and following the instructions. Nominalization was significant and did a considerable part of the job. It made several items, such as life, employment, and threat, abstract, which denoted status. Nominalization urged the need to act collectively to stop the pandemic.

The findings promoted unity and solidarity because we all should be united. Furthermore, the representations of the pandemic ignore local and regional conflicts and policies and promote holistic evidence-based responses. Using hashtags with logos also enhances media literacy among people who trust the authority of the WHO. Consequently, WHO is entrusted with the procedures and actions taken for future crises.

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