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

Abstract

The present study aims to compare the discourse analysis of COVID-19 in the representations of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Offices. It applied the model of Machin and Mayr (2012), with its visual and linguistic toolkits, to four multimodal representations of COVID-19 from the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and three from the South-East Asia Regional Office. It utilized the comparative method. The results revealed that the individuals involved were represented in various capacities, including breadwinners, healthcare workers, nurses, and heroes. They were shown as offering their lives to protect others. However, they were portrayed as needing help and as being victims of discrimination. Comparatively, the topics represented by the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean focused mainly on smiling and taking care of others to stop the pandemic, while the representations of the South-East Asia Regional Office included stopping discrimination and highlighting unity. Furthermore, WHO, with its suboffices, was represented as the leading global health authority, especially in declaring pandemics and their treatment mechanisms. Finally, the threat was represented as terrifying in some cases, so people should have smiley eyes and wear masks not to let it slip through the cracks.

Keywords: Comparative MCDA, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia Regional Office, Covid-19, Machin and Mayr (2012)

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تحليل خطاب نقدي متعدد الوسائل مقارنة لتناول منظمة الصحة العالمية لكوفيد-19

مستخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى مقارنة تناول خطاب كوفيد-19 في تمثيلات المكاتب الإقليمية لمنظمة الصحة العالمية. طبقت الدراسة نموذج ماشين وماير (Machin and Mayr (2012) على عينة من أربع تمثيلات متعددة الوسائل لكوفيد-19 من المكتب الإقليمي لمنظمة الصحة العالمية لشرق المتوسط وثلاث من المكتب الإقليمي لجنوب شرق آسيا، واعتمدت على المنهج المقارن. 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، لكنهم يحتاجون أن نقدم لهم رعاية كافية لوقف التمييز ضدهم. من ناحية المقارنة، تناولت موضوعات المكتب الإقليمي لمنظمة الصحة العالمية لشرق المتوسط اتخاذ إجراءات وقائية للتصدي للجائحة، وزادت عليها تمثيلات المكتب الإقليمي لجنوب شرق آسيا في وجوب الحد من التمييز والوحدة، لذلك لابد أن يضحك الناس من عيونهم لا أفواههم التي يرتدون عليها كمادات طبية، ويتخذون كثيرًا من الإجراءات الوقائية الأخرى.

الكلمات الرئيسية: تحليل خطاب نقدي متعدد الوسائل مقارنة، المكتب الإقليمي لمنظمة الصحة العالمية لشرق المتوسط،

المكتب الإقليمي لجنوب شرق آسيا كوفيد-19، ماشين وماير (2012)

A Comparative Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of WHO 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, Covid-19 #Takeresponsibility: A multimodal discourse analysis of select NCDC's online public health advertising campaign, 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 Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office during the COVID-19 pandemic. It 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's COVID-19 officially published images from the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office. It detects and compares 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 Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office, has not been comprehensively and critically studied. Therefore, the present study applies MCDA to the representations of pandemics by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office, 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 compares the representations of COVID-19, which has affected the entire world and caused millions of casualties, using MCDA. It leverages MCDA to scrutinize the interplay between verbal and nonverbal elements, including imagery, color schemes, spatial arrangement, and gestures, in the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office's COVID-19 discourse; accordingly, how global health authorities construct meaning and promote guidelines under pandemics could be understood.

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.

Agreeing with the literature, the present study adopted an MCDA to investigate the theme of COVID-19, like other studies, such as Gill and Lennon (2022), which investigated UK efforts to raise awareness of COVID-19, and Camelia (2020), which analyzed the Facebook posts of the Ministry of Health in Romania and the online users' comments, but it explored the WHO's representation of this issue. However, other studies made use of MCDA to investigate other themes, such as selling herbal weight loss pills (Morgan, 2021).

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). In the current context of COVID-19, MCDA, in line with CDA, helps reveal power relations in discourse, such as the belief that doctors have the power to provide the necessary care (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, 2016). 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. 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 comparative study. It applies the toolkits of Machin and Mayr (2012) to seven samples collected from two WHO regional offices from 2020 to 2023. The samples collected should be officially published online, representative of COVID-19, multimodal, concise, and within the defined timeframe. The two offices selected are representative, covering a wide area, with comparable conditions. The following steps were adopted in analyzing data: (1) Analyzing the data collected from the official website and accounts of WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office according to the linguistic toolkit of Machin and Mayr (2012), (2) analyzing the data according to the visual toolkit of Machin and Mayr (2012), (3) comparing the results, and (4) drawing conclusions based on the analysis.

5. Analysis

Representations of the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

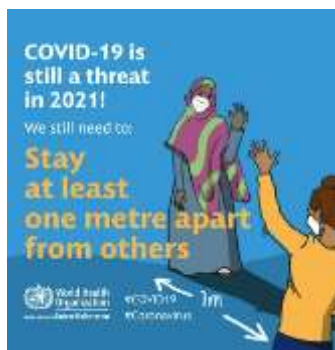


Source:

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



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



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



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

Representations of the South-East Asia Regional Office



Source: https://www.who.int/images/default-source/searo---images/emergencies/covid19/how-to-protect/stigma-images-health-care-girlfinal.jpg?sfvrsn=28cc9c8f_2



Source : https://www.who.int/images/default-source/searo---images/emergencies/covid19/how-to-protect/stigma-and-discrimination/stigma-discrimination-post-01.jpg?sfvrsn=7c37166f_2



Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1922086994588598&set=a.514495888681056>

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.

Table (2): Frequency of the linguistic and visual toolkits in the data of the South-East Asia Regional Office

Toolkit	Example 5		Example 6		Example 7	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Linguistic toolkit						
Nominalization	2	7.69	2	8.33	2	10
Presupposition	3	11.53	3	12.5	1	5
Representing people	9	34.61	8	33.33	7	35
Abstraction	3	11.53	3	12.5	3	15
Visual toolkit						
Iconography	1	3.84	2	8.33	1	5
Settings	1	3.84	1	4.16	1	5
Salience	3	11.53	2	8.33	2	10
Gaze	1	3.84	0	0	0	0
Pose	1	3.84	1	4.16	1	5
Distance	1	3.84	1	4.16	1	5
Angle	1	3.84	1	4.16	1	5
Total	26	100	24	100	20	100

Table (2) illustrates that the items of the linguistic and visual toolkits are used differently: (26) times in example five, (24) times in example six, and (20) times in example seven. 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 of the visual toolkit is salience. This finding highlighted the effectiveness of the visual tools in the context of the pandemic, thereby reducing cognitive load and facilitating timely, evidence-based decisions.

6. Discussion

Concerning the representations of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, 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 important because it abstracts the items used, especially when it comes to life, the world, and employment. This finding is important because life cannot be imagined without it.

Presupposition is also 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 overlooked, especially honorifics, which are not crucial in representing the pandemic, because people are shown to act against COVID-19 without being distinguished by using 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.

In the South-East Asia Regional Office, nominalization is equally represented in all examples. It is depicted twice in all examples. The use of nominalization is significant because it abstracts the items used, especially when it comes to significant human values, such as care, compassion, and humanity. It also stresses the need to stop discrimination because the virus does not discriminate and affects all. Additionally, it urges the viewers to support the medical staff. These findings highlight the discriminatory actions against the medical staff in the region.

Presupposition is also significant. Presupposition illustrates the significance of the threat that the world faces. It also demonstrates the spread of discriminatory actions against healthcare workers and the need to act collectively. Presupposition suggests the need to offer solidarity and fulfill shared responsibility. It urges people to unite and face the threat as one person.

Representing people is the highest of all examples in terms of the linguistic toolkit. It is depicted (9) times in example five, (8) times in example six, and (7) times in example seven. 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. Aggregation is noted by the use of collective pronouns, which stresses the need for unity and solidarity.

Abstraction is represented equally. It abstracts various universal terms, such as compassion, humanity, and discrimination, which are highly abstract concepts with no concrete details provided. It allows the message to be universally applicable and emotionally resonant without specifying the details of particular actions to be taken.

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 the need to manifest solidarity, care, unity, and to stop discrimination. Furthermore, individual and collective actions are to be taken to help stop the pandemic, which is often represented as a threat, and stop discrimination, which brings highly adverse consequences, especially during times of pandemic.

The visual toolkit, except for salience, is represented almost equally in all examples. The most frequently used item is salience, which makes use of color-coded items, a combination of colors, and bold, large fonts. Like the previous examples, the WHO logo, accompanied by its suboffice and hashtags (#COVID19 and #Coronavirus), lends institutional authority and links the message to global health discourse. The prominence of salience over other attributes suggests that the visual representations were optimized for perceptual clarity and emphasis, ensuring that key trade-offs and dominant options were immediately discernible.

Pose, distance, and angle are represented. However, gaze is sometimes missed because of the lack of participants, who are replaced by drawings. 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. Angle is important here because it always stresses the need to unite. In example 7, the image shows that the fists are presented frontally and equally, symbolizing equality and shared purpose.

The visual toolkit plays a vital role in delivering and reinforcing the message, as it helps make the message more memorable. Unity is highly represented with fists of the same height but different colors to denote diversity. In line with Camelia (2020), the study showed that the shift from urgency to action and an appropriate message tailoring are essential, especially in cases of pandemic. In addition, using colors is not of less importance because it demonstrates the ongoing threat of the pandemic.

The results of the study agreed with Gill and Lennon (2022) that portraying a good pandemic subject as one who makes ‘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. Similarly, those offering their lives should not be attacked nor discriminated against.

7. Conclusion

The present study aimed to compare the representations of COVID-19 in the discourse of

the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean and the South-East Asia Regional Office. 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. 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, nurses, or heroes. They were also shown as offering their lives to protect us. However, they were depicted as a group in need of support and calling for an end to 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. Despite the importance of the study, its limited dataset (7 samples from two regional offices only) may hinder the generalizability of results. Therefore, future studies should include larger datasets and include more offices. Additionally, they may compare the WHO offices with other international authorities or local entities.

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