

AN ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 POSTERS SYMBOLS: A SEMIOTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A brand-new infection called as COVID-19, or Covid disease 2019, initially occurred in Wuhan, China. Since then, it has spread to various regions of the globe. It is clear that this topic should not be disregarded or taken lightly. The world's economy, educational system, and public health are all significantly damaged by Covid. The World Health Organization (WHO) has proclaimed the COVID-19 pandemic as of March 11, 2020. This study recommended applying semiotic analysis to Coronavirus posters. Twenty-two posters that the WHO distributed were used as study's resources. The information source for this article was descriptive methodology. The researchers applied McGregor's theory to examine the sort of linguistic sign on the posters. After extensive research, the researchers discovered 11 linguistic and 11 non-linguistic signs.

Keywords: Semiotics; linguistic sign; non-linguistic sign

1. INTRODUCTION

One approach to communicating with others and conveying ideas is through a poster. It is a significant figure placed on a street corner as an improvisation and used to effectively call attention to and convey a message. Posters may draw attention and inform people about a good or service they may not be aware of when used properly. Additionally, posters can be employed to attract the target audience's attention. The symbol, therefore, has significance for that reason. People can position themselves where their target audience is most likely to be located, increasing the likelihood of getting a favorable response.

A symbol does not represent itself; rather, it represents something else. It indicates that something more can be learned by observing a sign. Signs can communicate through any of the senses. Semiotic explores the study of signs and symbols as a significant part of communications. Unlike

linguistics, semiotics also studies non-linguistic sign systems. Semiotics that study posters or signs can be divided into two ways, first in linguistic signs and second in non-linguistic signs. While the linguistic sign is a sign with linguistic aspects, such as words and sentences, and a non-linguistic sign is a sign that only imposes a symbol or an icon without the linguistic element attached.

Furthermore, a poster is one of the advertising media with a piece of paper that contain information, messages, and purpose through text and graphic images (symbol or pictures). Posters are valuable specialized devices to spread data rapidly and fabricate mindfulness (Ladd: 2012). They are regularly an exceptionally flexible and modest type of publicizing compared with other advertising mediums. While techniques for dispersion are moderately simple, thought ought to be provided for position areas to guarantee correspondence messages arrive at your main interest group. A poster is normally designed to be displayed vertically on a wall or window and is large enough to be seen and read from a short distance, but posters can also be seen in much smaller sizes, such as postcards and handbills. The poster effectively grabs public attention by presenting the information clearly and fully, making it easier for the reader to understand what the poster wants to say.

Thus, posters are also used to inform and give public awareness of something, for example, a disease. A poster is one of the media that is used to give public awareness since public awareness of infectious diseases plays a crucial role in disease control that a lack of feasible information on contagious diseases leads to reduced detection rates, the disruption of treatment, partiality and stigma. In brief, a poster is one of the advertising media that promotes, informs, and gives awareness or a warning uniquely since it also imposes pictures, graphics, and texts with an eye-catching design that triggers people to see and read from a distance. So people's vision will focus on seeing or reading the messages conveyed through a poster if a poster has such a unique and good design.

Semiotics is one of the linguistic parts and it studies the phenomenon of signs in social life. The existence of sign cannot be separated from human life since human beings use it in their daily lives to communicate to each other. According to Saussure in Chandler, there is a dyadic or two-part model of the sign (2007:5). A sign can be interpreted as a signifier (significant) – the form which the sign takes; and The signified (signifié) - the concept it represents. In other words, semiotics as a social science model to understand the world as a system of relations with a basic unit called "sign." Thus, in every "sign," there are two elements of "signifier" and "signified". The signifier is the acoustic/sound/sentence concept, while the signified is the mental concept. A sign should have a

signifier and a signified. A sign is meaningless and cannot be interpreted without a signifier and signified.

Types of Signs

Some linguists have proposed types of signs. Depending on how the form and meaning are related, a sign can be divided into two; iconic signs and symbolic signs (McGregor:2009). An iconic sign or icon is a sign that has a form that looks like its meaning in some ways. The form of an iconic sign or an icon shows some characteristics of the corresponding concept, for example, the traffic sign. The form of a telephone sign usually does not have any words and only has a marks icon on it. A symbolic sign or a symbol is a sign that the form does not similar to the meaning. For example, the multiple symbolic signs do not relate to the “X”.

There is something common to an iconic sign, symbolic sign, or symbol. There are no sentences or words on any of the two signs below. According to McGregor, iconic and symbolic signs are both non-linguistic. According to that definition, a non-linguistic sign only includes iconic or symbolic signs on it, neither phrases nor words. A sign with words or sentences on it is referred to as a linguistic sign.



Figure 1. Linguistic sign (left) and a non-linguistic sign (right)

The figures above highlighted that the linguistic and non-linguistic signs are different. While there is a linguistic aspect, such as words and numbers, in figure 1, there is no linguistic aspect in the non-linguistics aspect. Similarly, human beings communicate by using signs and configuration of signs (Oktavianus et al., 2017). Symbols used to express all aspects of human life can be divided into two types: linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Linguistic signs form spoken and written language. Non-linguistic signs form body language and non-body language.

In brief, linguistic and non-linguistic signs differ in the aspect used. The linguistic sign is spoken and written. The non-linguistic sign is a body language and non-body language such as pictures. Thus, the picture with linguistic aspects such as words and numbers will be considered linguistic. Similarly, the verbal sign indicates that a sign has a linguistic aspect while the visual sign does not have linguistic aspect.

Indonesia is one of the countries that use linguistic and non-linguistic signs in public spaces. One of the media that used linguistic and non-linguistic signs is Covid-19 posters. It is to give a clear picture of a situation and inform people about the dangers of the virus. Many agencies report the information and communicate through posters during the Covid-19 outbreak including World Health Organization (WHO). Based on the explanation above, the study is interested in researching about semiotic studies toward Covid-19 poster symbols. The study wanted to determine the types of signs in the Covid-19 posters/symbols posted by WHO during this pandemic.

2) METHODS

This qualitative research explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, in this case, about semiotics of Covid-19 posters. The study took posters released by the World Health Organization (WHO) on Facebook as the data since it is an agency of the United Nations that is responsible for international public health. WHO posted over 150 posters about Covid-19 from January 2020 until February 2021. The study was limited to only 22 posters uploaded during the timeline. However, some of the posters have been reposted several times. Some do not have symbols on them, and some are in the form of storytelling. The writer chose this period because it was when the virus got worse and the vaccine was found. The data were limited into posters that have symbols. Then the posters that were reposted several times were analyzed once.

In collecting the data, the study used a purposive sampling technique based on two criteria; First, the poster must be explicit because the resolution of the poster should be high and clear, and second, the poster must have the form of linguistic and non-linguistic. After that, the study analyzed the data by adapting the distributional or Agih method by Sudaryanto.

3) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A sign is divided into two, namely linguistic sign and non-linguistic sign. A non-linguistic sign is a sign with only iconic or symbolic signs, without any sentences or words, while a linguistic sign is a sign with sentences or words on it. The two types are found in the data source about Covid 19 posters posted by the WHO.

1) Linguistic Sign

A linguistic sign is a sign that has sentences or words on the sign. There are 11 (eleven) pieces of posters from the WHO's Facebook account that fit into the linguistic sign category, as analyzed in the following.



Figure 2. Source: WHO uploaded on May 23, 2020

The symbol is a linguistic sign because the symbol does not stand alone without an explanation of what the symbol means. The sentence *eat a healthy diet* indicates that the symbol represents the linguistic sign since the linguistic sign is a sign with sentences or words on it. However, without an explanation of the symbol, the reader cannot catch the meaning based on the pictures of broccoli and carrot as an indicator of healthy life. If there was no linguistic sign, people would even think differently, such as eating carrots and broccoli could strengthen our immune system during the covid-19 pandemic. Then, it can be seen what the author tries to implement since the theory said that non-linguistic sign might emphasize different meanings than the symbol, icon, and pictures presented. That is why the sentence takes a big part of this sign. From the poster above, it can be said that the author wants to implement a healthy diet such as broccoli and carrot (vegetables) can increase the immune system to fight the coronavirus. Based on research, broccoli and carrot are good for leveling up the human immune system.



Figure 3. Source: WHO uploaded on May 23, 2020

It can be seen as a linguistic sign from the same poster with a different symbol posted by WHO. The persuasive statement by WHO as a caption of the symbol *avoid alcohol* shows the symbol itself is a linguistic sign. Although the author has given the sign caption, with the appearance of the cross mark, the reader might catch different meanings of the symbol that the author tries to say. It is known that the cross sign is forbidden to do things all over the world. It is used as a prohibition sign, otherwise there will be consequences for disobeying that. The big X of the cross-mark emoji generally communicates warnings, errors, and undesirability. It is often used as a visual stand-in for No. Furthermore, from the poster above, it can be said that the author wants to say drinking alcohol decreases the immune system. The word *alcohol* is described in the sign as bottle and wine glass, and this is commonly used.



Figure 4. Source: WHO uploaded on May 23, 2020

The persuasive statement placed on the symbol indicates the symbol is a linguistic sign. Without the explanation or statement given by the author, the reader might not get the meaning of the symbol. The symbol of cigarette and ashtray cannot provide a complete picture of what *quit tobacco* is. It should

be a cross mark on the tobacco so the reader might catch the symbol's meaning. However, the statement or caption given by the author has helped the reader to understand what the symbol means. From the poster above, it can be said that the author wants to emphasize smoking decreases the immune system and worsen the respiratory system.



Figure 5. Source: WHO uploaded on May 23, 2020

The same poster with different symbol also shows the linguistic sign. It is because linguistic sign has a word or sentence on the sign. The word *be physically active* shows the linguistic sign. This symbol illustrates a person who runs in which the reader might not understand what the author tries to say without the caption. In other words, the reader might not get the idea of the symbol that the author wants to say. It can be said that the author wants to implement that by being active, someone increases the immune system to fight viruses.



Figure 6. Source: WHO uploaded on July 2, 2020

The post seems like a linguistic sign. A symbol on a poster that the caption *do not wear the mask under the nose* is a linguistic sign. Moreover, without the caption given on the symbol, the reader might not easily understand the meaning of the symbol. Thus, the highlight of viruses can be seen clearly that they almost reach out to the nose of the person; the person almost heals the viruses if the person wears a mask inappropriately.



Figure 7. Source: WHO uploaded on July 3, 2020

The symbol on the poster above shows a linguistic sign. It is because of the statement in the form of sentences on the symbol. The sentences *place the metal piece of stiff edge over your nose* highlighted the meaning of the symbol above. Furthermore, the arrow sign also helps the reader understand the meaning of the symbol the author tries to implement. It can be said that by wearing the mask properly, someone can increase the chance of avoiding viruses.



Figure 8. Source: WHO uploaded on July 2, 2020

The symbol from the poster above shows a linguistic sign. The precaution or the caption helps the reader understand what the author wants to implement. Moreover, the cross signs on the symbol

makes the reader easily understood what the symbol means. It is known that the cross sign is forbidden to do things all over the world. It is used as a prohibition sign, otherwise there will be consequences for disobeying that. From the poster above, the author wants to implement that by sharing a mask increases the possibility of getting viruses.



Figure 9. Source: WHO uploaded on July 11, 2020

The poster above is a linguistic sign since due to there is a caption or explanation for the symbol. The symbol highlighting garbage and a person putting their mask into it indicates that a mask should be discarded after being used. Moreover, the caption helps readers understand more about the symbol in which the person should discard their mask into a closed bin so the virus that might be left on the mask after being used cannot reach people. It can be said that the used mask does not harm others.



Figure 10. Source: WHO uploaded on January 2, 2021

From the poster above, it can be seen a linguistic sign. It is because there is a sentence on the symbol. The symbol highlighting a nurse injecting someone indicates that people need to be vaccinated to beat Covid-19. In other words, this symbol persuades people to be vaccinated to stay healthy. From the poster above, it can be said the author wants to implement that people are immune from the viruses by getting vaccinated.



Figure 11. Source: WHO uploaded on July 22, 2020

From the poster above, it can be seen the linguistic sign with its caption given on the symbol. The precaution says to wash a mask with detergent, and hot water means viruses might gone because of detergent and hot water. Moreover, it can also mean a mask should not be worn over time; if it gets dirty, people must wash it at least once a day.



Figure 12. Source: WHO uploaded on August 31, 2020

From the poster above, it can be seen the linguistic sign. It is because there is caption given on the symbol. The symbol that illustrates a sleeping person with its caption *get enough sleep* indicates that people should be aware of keeping their health by getting enough sleep. In other words, the author wants to emphasize that by getting enough sleep, people are healthy because their immune is increasing.

In brief, a symbol that has sentences or words is linguistic sign. The caption helps the reader catch and easily understand what the author wants to say on the symbol. However, some captions are unnecessary because some symbols are understood without the caption.

2) Non-Linguistic Sign

Non-linguistic sign is a sign with only a symbol without sentences, as described in the following.



Figure 13. Source: WHO uploaded on June 2, 2020

The poster above shows non-linguistic sign since the symbol does not appear with a caption or without sentences or words on it. The reader understands the symbol that illustrates a person who covers his sneeze. That the creator wants to implement that covering a mouth is a must when sneezing. In other words, the author wants to implement that covering their mouth when sneezing help others to avoid being infected by viruses since the viruses are contaminated through the air.

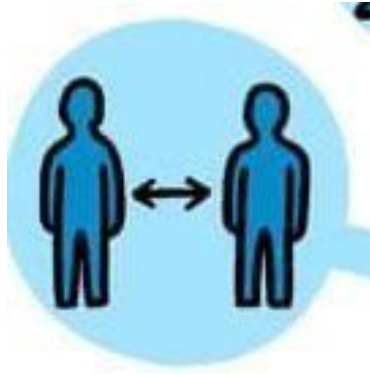


Figure 14. Source: WHO uploaded on September 2, 2020

The poster above shows a non-linguistic sign because the symbol is without a caption or words and sentences. The symbol that illustrates two people with an arrow in the middle indicates that the two people must have space. In other words, the two persons must keep themselves at a distance. It can be said that the author is successful in implementing their idea toward a symbol.



Figure 15. Source: WHO uploaded on May 2, 2020

From the poster above, it can be seen the non-linguistic sign on the poster symbol. The picture that highlighted a disinfectant, viruses, and a door handle indicates that a door handle might contain some viruses so it needs to be disinfectant. In other words, the author wants to say that cleaning people's belongings can help them avoid viruses since they might be left in their belongings after being touched.



Figure 16. Source: WHO uploaded on March 22, 2020

The poster above shows the non-linguistic sign since it is without the sentences or words on the symbol. The symbol that illustrates a person washing their hands indicates that a person must be clean to avoid viruses. In other words, some materials might contain viruses so after touching something, hands should be cleaned. It can be said the creator has succeeded in implementing their ideas.



Figure 17. Source: WHO uploaded on July 23, 2020

The non-linguistic sign can be seen from the poster above. It is because there is no a word or sentence on the poster symbol. However, the untitled poster's symbol that highlights a window with a beautiful view on a sunny day does not give a clear meaning of what the author tries to implement to their reader. Moreover, the untitled poster also does not help the reader grasp what the author wants to implement on their symbol. Possibly, the author wants to implement the idea of opening the window as much as possible during the outbreak to get fresh air.



Figure 18. Source: WHO uploaded on July 22, 2020

No words or sentences are on the poster above, which means it is a non-linguistic sign. The title of the poster *protect your mental health during covid-19* indicates that people need to socialize with others during the virus outbreak to avoid stress. Still, their mobility is limited so they can connect with people through a smart phone. This symbol persuades people to stay connected with their beloved ones to avoid sickness.



Figure 19. Source: WHO uploaded on July 22 2020

It can be seen the non-linguistic sign is highlighted from the poster entitled *protect your mental health* above. There are no sentences or words on the symbol. The symbol that illustrated someone demonstrating something with a slash indicates no hoax information given to public or false rumors. It also means limiting social media use to avoid rumors or hoax to stay healthy, because stress can decrease the immune system.



Figure 20. Source: WHO uploaded on November 24, 2020

It can be seen non-linguistic sign from the poster above. It is because there are no words or sentences on the symbol. The symbol illustrates 5 people with a slash. It means there cannot be people gather together. In other words, there is no crowd allowed. Based on the theory, a slash indicates the prohibition to do so. This symbol has been used many times ago to prohibit people to do their actions, otherwise they get punishment if they disobey that. In other words, this sign is known as prohibition and being used as prohibition sign all over the world.



Figure 21. Source: WHO uploaded on December 20, 2020

Non-linguistic sign can be seen from the poster above. The symbol that highlighted two figures, smoking and drinking, with a red slash, indicates that people are not allowed to drink and smoke. A red slash indicates the prohibition to do so. This symbol has been used many times ago to prohibit people to do their actions, otherwise, they get punishment if they disobey that. In other words, this sign is known as prohibition and being used as a prohibition sign in common. Furthermore, in this

case such smoking and drinking can decrease the immune system so it is not allowed to do so in the outbreak.



Figure 22. Source: WHO uploaded on December 22, 2020

The poster above that illustrates a woman wearing a mask is indicated as a non-linguistic sign since there are no words or sentences on the symbol. This symbol means people must be aware of the virus and wear a mask to protect themselves.



Figure 23. Source: WHO uploaded on July 25, 2020

From the poster above, it can be seen non-linguistic sign. It is because words and sentences are not places on the symbol. The symbol that highlighted the hijab woman touching her face with green dots implemented as viruses and a cross sign indicates that caution of touching part of body since the hands might contain viruses. The cross sign has been used many times ago as the symbol of prohibition, otherwise the people get punishment or risk when disobeying the symbol. In this case, if people disobey the sign, they can get punishment as they get infected by the viruses.

In brief, a non-linguistic sign is a sign without sentences or words and just a symbol. The reader might grasp the concept or idea of the creator by looking at the poster's symbol or title. However, some posters might not have a title so the reader cannot understand what the author wants to say through their poster symbol.

4) CONCLUSION

In everyday human existence, signs are vital. Signs could be found in daily life, particularly when conveying. Composed and verbal correspondence is not required now and then; humans just utilize specific things like images or signs to receive a reasonable message. Symbols are found in Covid-19 posters. It is because of apparent images of circumstance and to illuminate individuals about the risk of the infection. After the examination, the study found two sorts of signs in the Covid-19 poster image. They are 11 linguistic and 11 non-linguistic signs/posters about Covid-19 released by the World Health Organization (WHO).

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