The Philippine Online News Headlines on COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis

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Abstract

This paper carries on a tentative interpersonal metafunctional analysis of the interpersonal metafunction online news headlines about COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis involved the differences in the mood type distribution, polarity, modality and other lexical characteristics. The findings reveal the dominance of the declarative mood texts tells the particular function of the online news headlines. It's informing the readers, rather than questioning or demanding them. Positive declarative clauses should convey information and convince readers with positive facts. A negative polarity does not imply a negative impression but confirms that a certain issue is inconsistent with what has become apparent. The use of 'must' indicates that the speaker has a firm and strong conviction about a particular issue and that the readers are obliged to take the necessary steps in connection with what is believed. Word choices and the clause structure reflect the context of the texts and not the mood adjuncts or the modal verbal operators. Analysis of the functional structural mood text is very useful for understanding the interpersonal relationships between participants.

Keywords: *mood, interpersonal metafunction, polarity, modality, COVID-19, SFG*

INTRODUCTION

The dawn of social media took the world into digital. It connects people despite the distance, the time, the race and even age. Information around the globe is available 24/7 with the different online platforms which can be accessed through internet and social media accounts.

The Philippines has been named the world's social media capital in the article written by Sanchez (2020), because most social media users have an extraordinarily high usage time of about four hours per day. She also added that some 64 million of the 105 million inhabitants had internet access in 2017.

By 2025 around 90 million Filipinos are expected to become social network users. It reflects the high popularity of social media in the Philippines, given the projected population of around 118 million (Sanchez, 2020).

Llamas (2020) found out that social media users in the Philippines are the most engaged, with an average social time of three hours and 53 minutes per day. The global average for the actual time spent on social media is two hours and twenty-four minutes, reflecting more than one third of our overall Internet time. Moreover, 49 percent of the

world's total population (3.8 billion people) is now using social media, an increase of 321 million or 9 percent compared with 2019.

Journalists from the Netherlands, Ruigrok, Gagestein, and Van Atteveldt (2016), conducted a study which showed that journalists are indeed actively engaged in catering to the logic of social media.

In this modern age of digital journalism, Baez (2018) said social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter play a major role. Because many of these apps, especially Facebook, are used globally, information spreads at a rapid rate. She furthers that this means information that has been skewed in any way, accidentally or intentionally (fake news), is also spreading rapidly. Social media is a powerful and amazing tool, capable of connecting hundreds and thousands of people.

Witnessing a shift from mass media logic to social media logic in the aspects of routines in journalism an in the context of social media channels is evident at this time (van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

In this study, the researcher, explored how the different online news agencies in the Philippines including Inquirer.net, GMA News, ABS-CBN News, Philstar.com, CNN Philippines, Manila Bulletin (mb.com.ph), and the PTV News informed Filipinos on the COVID-19 pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The advent of social media has offered a tremendous potential for news organizations to market their content, broader reach and frame brand image. Social interaction has remained a viable source for news dissemination, whether in the form of conversations or newspaper clippings (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019). They argue that the communication style of those messages is likely to be more interpersonal and subjective based on media logic theory.

Filipinos usually use the social media along with the television, radio and printed newspapers as means for information such as news and current events. It is therefore the news agency must have an accurate and unbiased way of reporting or writing news headline to avoid confusions among readers.

David Crystal (1987, quoted in Sandar Moe, 2014, p.82): Reporting style of newspaper is different from other language types because there are certain basic limitations of using language that are the restrictions of time and space. Data, typically in columns, must be compressed into a limited space. Interest needs to be centered, captured, and sustained using broad type, dramatic headlines, short paragraphs, and concise sentences. The presence of images, the dignity of the recorded facts and the need to maintain public interest can affect the use of vocabulary and grammar in different ways.

The present study intended to define and explain, by means of interpersonal research, how the writers draw up selected headlines in the social media. This paper will discuss how language is used to frame a message systematically. Halliday (1985) points out that in the field of linguistics, language is interpreted as a system of meanings, with forms that allow the sense to be realised.

In Systematic Functional Linguistics, M.A.K. Halliday identifies three language meta-functions. The ideational function is the 'language content function "(Halliday 2007). The role of the interpersonal functions is to build and maintain social relations and to show the role of communicators (Halliday, 2002). There are key elements of significance in the context of the SFL known as metafunction. The conceptual

components in Halliday (1985) are ideation, interpersonal metafunction, and textual metafunction. There are fundamental components of meaning known as metafunction within the context of SFL. The functional elements are an ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and textual metafunction, as stated by Halliday (1985).

Halliday (1994: 68), furthers it is through the interpersonal metafunction that people establish, negotiate and assume their position in social relationship, and it is concerned with clauses as exchange. The inter-personal significance begins with the definition of the basic role of the speech: the provision of information, the provision of goods and services and demanding goods or services (Halliday, 1994).

Thompson (1996) summed the types of metafunction as: 1) we use language to talk about our experience of the world, including the worlds in our own minds, to describe events and states and the entities involved in them. 2) We use language to interact with others, establish and maintain relationships with others, influence their behavior, and speak for ourselves views and eliciting or changing theirs about things in the world. 3) By using languages, we organize our messages in ways that indicate how they fit with the other messages that surround them and the broader context in which we speak or write. 4) Complex-clauses associated with logicosemantic relations to form sequences in the use of languages (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004).

Grammar interpersonally is not a theory but a way; it is our social connections, both of which define the society and our own role, and of the immediate dialogic situation. Grammar is our social relationship. This is the interpersonal metafunction through which language builds up our social collective and thus our personal being (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). In other words, interpersonal roles play a role in the establishment and preservation of social relations and indicate the role of communication participants (Halliday, 2002).

A component is essential for the interpersonal metafunction of the clause as an exchange in English in order to keep contact going. It is called Mood and consists of Subject and Finite (see Thompson 2000:41). As the Halliday quote (1994:76) points out, "the subject provides everything else that it takes to make a proposition, namely something that can be affirmed and denied." The Finite refers to the verbal group's first functional element.

As its name suggests, Systematic Functional Linguistics is a language subdiscipline, offering different models and instruments to analyze all human languages. According to Teich (2003, p. 37), three main elements – the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual meta-function-are defined as the general representative categories for the linguistic descriptions used in SFL. Logical and experiential mode is the ideation metafunction. In the logical mode, "our world experience is taken as channels of the natural-semantic phenomena" (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010, p. 132).

Language resources "to build our experience of the world around us and in ourselves as meaning" are provided in the experiential mode (ibid. 92). The second metafunction, i.e., the metafunction of people, considers language "a means of establishing roles and relationships between the speaker and the addresses" (ibid: p. 126). It is a combination of Bühler's conative and expressive functions and matches the tenor system. The latest metafunction – the textual metafunction is a feasible metafunction, "which provides resources for ideational and interpersonal meaning to be presented in the context of a flux of information within a wording" (ibid.: p. 220).

Within interpersonal metafunction mood and modality are the major systems. Subject and Finite make up Mood. 'The subject is the element in which the clause can be

negotiated,' whereas 'the Finite makes a clause negotiable by coding it as positive or negative in polarity and by basing it either in terms of time (it is/it is not; it was/it was not; it will/it will not) or in terms of modality (it may/it must, etc.)' (Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 2010: 61). There is also the modal complement, adding "the Mood element's meaning: polarity and modality (for example, perhaps, probably, surely), temporality (for instance, already soon, yet) and intensity (for example, degree: hardly, almost, nearly totally, utterly; contrary expectation: even, actually, just, just, simply, only)" (ibid). "The subject provides for a proposal the remainder of it takes: something that can be affirmed or denied by reference to" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, p. 117).

There are other systems, besides the mood system, when discussing clause as exchange, such as polarity and modality. The polarity and modality systems are both realized by Mood elements, either through Finite or a separate mood adjunct. Polarity refers to a 'positive' or 'negative' system. It is 'the resource for evaluating the argument ability value of a clause: yes or no — the validity of a proposition (it is/it is not) or the actualization of a proposal (do/don't)' (Matthiessen, Teruya and Lam, 2010, p. 161). Modality refers to "the judgment of the speaker, or a request of the listener's judgment, on the status of what is said" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 172).

Halliday (2000) states that modality also plays an important role in carrying out the interpersonal metafunction of clauses showing to what degree the proposition is valid. Modality refers to the space between "yes" and "no", showing the speaker's judgments of the probabilities or the obligations involved in what she is saying.

This study focused on the interpersonality to show how journalists make linguistic choices to communicate in very various different ways, with different aims: report or persuade, what is basically the same or similar experiential content. A news writer presumably has the mission to present events in a world which are as objective as possible. The researcher had chosen the country's current situation of COVID-19 pandemic posted and shared in social media for demonstration purposes.

METHOD

The researcher used the descriptive research design method in the analysis of data. Specifically, an analysis based on SFL's interpersonal metafunction was employed with data gathered from the different news agencies in the Philippines focusing on the news headlines related to COVID-19 pandemic.

The theoretical framework for the current study is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) by Halliday. Grammar is considered by SFG in terms of usage and meaning. It takes the perspective of the resource rather than the perspective of the rule; and is designed to display the grammar system as a whole rather than just fragment (Halliday & Mathiessan 2004).

Bankole & Ayoola, (2014, p. 140) states that 'the mood structure indicates how the clause is structured to fulfill the voice functions of the offer, command, statement and question in interaction with the Lexico-grammatic structure of a clause; the statement is made by declarative mood, the question is carried out by interrogative mood and the command is carried out by imperative mood.'

The interpersonal metafunction is a resource for the enactment of social roles and relations between speaker / writer and listener / reader (Matthiessen 1995, p.17). Modality has three values: High, Medium and Low (Xi Wang, 2014).

The researcher attempted to apply SFL's interpersonal metafunction as a systematic tool to observe how this specific linguistic concept might inform readers the way writers constructed news headlines through Interpersonal Metafunction analysis.

This paper analyzed the personal significance of mood and modality for COVID-19 Pandemic online news headlines in the Philippines. In this sense, this research analyzed how language is used to frame a message.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of online news headlines. In determining the modality of COVID-19 Pandemic online news headlines in the Philippines, the data shows that mostly *declarative* sentences were used as the major mood type by news writers with 94 per cent, 4 percent of online news headlines were *interrogative* and only 2 percent was *imperative* and none wrote exclamatory type for a headline. In terms of polarity, 68 percent was *positive* and 32 percent was *negative* statement. Furthermore, 66.66 per cent of the headlines had *low* modal commitment, 29.1 percent and 4.16 percent were *medium* and *high*, respectively.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics of online news headlines*

Source	No. of Headlines	Mood Types				Polarity		Modal Commitment		
		Dec	Int	Imp	Excl	Pos	Neg	Low	Med	High
INQUIRER.NET	6	6	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
GMA News Online	13	13	0	0	0	8	1	7	2	0
ABS – CBN News	10	8	2	0	0	3	1	3	1	0
mb.com.ph	3	3	0	0	0	3	1	2	1	0
philstar.com	4	4	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	1
CNN Philippines	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PTV News	11	10	0	1	0	1	3	3	1	0
TOTAL	50	**47**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**17**	**8**	**16**	**7**	**1**
Percentage	100	**94**	4	2	0	**68**	32	**66.66**	29.1	4.16

Practically most headlines of news are written in declarative form. The function of speech is a statement. It sets out a proposal on what readers should expect from the country's pandemic situation. The news writers mainly employed positive statements to give readers the impression that the pandemic COVID-19 they face is the government's top priority and hope to overcome the pandemic.

The data analysis shows the mood of the clauses that reflect further their functional significance. During the analysis, three types of clausal moods are found: Declarative, Imperative, and Interrogative. Each category demonstrates different forms of interpersonal relationships. Declarative clause mood is definite, powerful and factual in expression; Imperative Mood expresses authority in the same way as Exclamatory. This describes the removal of the topic (agent/doer) and the status and/or power relationships of the participants in the discourse. Interrogative Mood also reflects participants' interpersonal relations with questions that would allow readers to think whether or not statements are trustworthy.

Declarative clauses, particularly on social media sites, that are recommended in news headlines to send messages based on facts and interviews in which readers are responsible also verify the given information. It is also established that declarative main function is to provide information. Positive statements with low level of modal commitment are useful in persuasion. Writers encourage readers through using positive

statement despite the negative situations. However, despite determining the negative polarity in a headline, it is not merely stating a sense of negativity (i.e. Duterte not backing out of Russian COVID-19 vaccination – Roque). This headline emphasized the determination of the agent to undertake a promise. This assures the readers or public that even the president of the country cooperates among others for the vaccination. The dominance in the texts of the declarative mood reveals the specific function of online news headlines. Rather than questioning or demanding them, it is informing the readers.

Moreover, in this headline, WHO says it did not tag PH as leading in COVID-19 case rise, its negative polarity does not signify a negative impression but confirming that a certain issue contradictory to what was become apparent. On one hand, the use of "not" in the news headline, PGH: Rapid tests not for COVID-19 screening, served its purpose. It denotes negativity on the statement. A writer used an interrogative statement for the headline, COVID-19 on frozen chicken wings from Brazil? Custom on alert, to express uncertainty or the news needs further investigation and confirmation. Its purpose is for the readers to be more aware and cautious.

For modal operators, Solidum: Principles of handling disasters must also be applied in COVID-19 management, the use of 'must' indicates that the speaker has a firm and strong conviction on a certain issue and that the readers are obliged to take necessary actions related to what is being believed. This modal implies strong obligation for the readers to do what is suggested.

Headlines such as COVID-19 cases may surge in following weeks if clusters not addressed – experts, 1,000 Filipinos may join clinical trials for Russia's proposed COVID-19 vaccine, Genetic profiles may predict COVID-19 risk, Nursing homes may be safer when workers live-in, Philippine's participation in clinical trials may help overcome doubts vs. Sputnik V – Palace, PRRD may get Russian vaccine shot by May – Palace, and, Duterte says Russia may give COVID-19 vaccine for free, volunteers to receive first injection used the modal 'may' which has a positive polarity and low modal commitment. In the pandemic situation in the Philippines, it suggests the likelihood or probability of what the situation or actual scenario could be. On a positive note, it denotes the possibility of achieving and expressing the intent or goal of the acts or measures given.

Another modal operator used was might for the headline Duterte might get Russia's COVID-19 vaccine shots by May 2021: Palace. Having a low modal commitment with positive polarity, it communicates only when you're not sure about anything now or in the future. Shots by May are not as confident as people expect in the headline.

Sellers ignoring SRP for basic face shields can be fined up to P2 million – DTI, Nograles: 'Very strict' localized lockdowns can be expected if NCR goes back to GCQ, and, DOH on fight vs COVID: Gov't can take care of its people, but we still can't say if we're winning, these used 'can' modal operator with low modal involvement and a positive polarity as well. This operator is used for the purpose of communicating capacity or potential, requesting or offering permission, and demonstrating possibility or impossibility while can't or cannot for its opposite.

Modal operator 'could' was used for the headlines below. It has low modal involvement and has a positive polarity. It is used to communicate potential or past capacity and to make proposals and requests Face masks could be someday help diagnose illness other than coronavirus; certain immune responses may contribute to severe COVID-19, Russia vaccine could be out in the Philippines in November: financer, 'Covid toes or fingers could be symptom of corona virus – experts, and, Vaccine trials could start in October – DOST. As a modal operator, 'will' can be used to talk about the future,

forecast, address decisions and make commitments, offers, requests and threats such as for the headline COVID-19 vaccine will be free for Americans – officials.

There are specific roles and objectives for modal operators and their interaction. The news writers carefully pick these to form statements and convey messages to educate or even reassure the readers.

CONCLUSION

Word choices and the clause structures reflect the context of the texts and not by the modal verbal operators nor mood adjuncts. Functional structural mood text analysis is very useful to understand participants' interpersonal relations.

It is recommended that positive declarative clauses convey information and persuade readers with positive facts. SFL Analysis of mood is a useful strategy and requires further research in different contexts. News headlines are not priority topics for analytical analysis in social media platforms. Further research would do well to study more news headlines online to show how to create the interpersonal significance by choosing each mood type.

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