



## Language of Pandemic: An Impression of Filipino Character

<sup>[1]</sup>Lynn M. Besa, <sup>[2]</sup>Niño P. Maliban, <sup>[3]</sup>Jason A. Romero

<sup>[1]</sup>English Department, <sup>[2]</sup>Social Studies Department, <sup>[3]</sup>Social Studies Department

<sup>[1]</sup>besalynn@yahoo.com, <sup>[2]</sup>npmaliban@rtu.edu.ph, <sup>[3]</sup>jaromero@rtu.edu.ph

College of Education, Rizal Technological University  
Mandaluyong City, Philippines

**Abstract**— *Coronavirus disease-19 undoubtedly changed people's lives and even created a new-normal society restricted by different health protocols. This disease created both possibilities and challenges at the same time. Thus, even the people's language aimed at the pandemic. The communication subjects are mainly related to the virus in social media alone. The emergence of the language of pandemic led the researchers to uncover themes and meanings, language use and style, and characteristics of the netizens based on the language utilized in the online media platforms that will lead to the disclosure of Filipino characters. In the conduct of the study, qualitative content and rhetorical analyses were used to explore the study's objectives. The data are from netizens' social media posts during the height of severe community quarantine implementation in the Philippines. According to the findings, politics, political issues, social concerns, and current events appeared as themes during the pandemic. The languages used were formal, casual, and street manifested through direct statements, rhetorical and direct questions, quotations, and hashtags. Moreover, the Filipino character is shown based on the language utilized, such as critical, judgmental, disrespectful, entitled, self-righteous, reactive, observant, feeling-intellectual, opinionated, and comparing, which eventually unveiled the participants' identity during the time of the pandemic.*

**Index Terms**— *character, content analysis, ECQ, emerging languages, pandemic, social media.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease-19 dramatically impacted people's lives and even produced a new-normal society bounded by numerous health procedures. This outbreak created many objects that will be part of the new-normal living that is being projected in the post-pandemic future. However, before the world can look forward to a post-pandemic future, everything that occurred during and after the pandemic must be thoroughly investigated. And one of the things that happened during the outbreak was the people's use of pandemic language, which has been emblematic of the public's perception of and response to the disease in every pandemic in modern history [1]. During the pandemic, most people's language may be about coronavirus disease-19, but it may also be about their social figures and influencers, their economy, their everyday fashion, politics, and even their government, and their perceptions of all of these may be influenced by the pandemic's different emotions because COVID-19 pandemic is associated with extremely high levels of psychological distress [2]. A strong politician's one comment may be seen by numbers upon millions of individuals in every nation around the globe [3] and these statements can be put into themes and memes that are being crafted, liked, disliked, posted, and reposted following the personality of the netizens who are using and seeing it online.

Time spent via online entertainment is characterized as intake of electronic content or the web which is not linked to conventional data usage; instead, social media provide a

pathway for individuals to associate, interact and engage in conversation with one another through applications such as instant messaging, chatting, social networking sites, and microblogging [4], in which one's personality is displayed through the posted theme or memes.

The interest in the conduct of the study is based on pragmatic and semantic theories, which aimed to aid in decoding, giving meaning, and characterization to the pandemic language. Thus, this study aimed to serve as the foundation for an impression of Filipino personality.

This study proved to investigate and find answers to the following research questions: 1. What were the trending topics in internet media during the epidemic period? 2. How did netizens phrase their posts? and 3. What Filipino character is shown in the web-based media based on the language used? This study adds to laying out a Filipino articulation, which may likewise observe an extended impression of Filipino character being conveyed by a specific personality or gathering of people during the pandemic.

### II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design

This study is essentially a comprehensive review of qualitative research that employs content and rhetorical analysis. Content and Rhetorical Analysis is focused on the

study and analysis of various postings in online media that represent their current sentiments, experience, and overall character. As a result, content and rhetorical analysis will depict and analyze how Filipino netizens react to rising difficulties during the pandemic, as well as the impact of their language usage.

### B. Source of Data

In Luzon, there was the quantification of the ECQ being adopted. The first took effect on March 17, 2020, and lasted through May 31, 2020. On March 16, the Philippines' government, led by President Rodrigo Duterte, declared Metro Manila a "community quarantine." It was in place over Luzon from March 17 to April 30, and it stayed in effect in high-risk regions until May 31. During May, as prohibitions were eased, the IATF-EID created new degrees such as "modified enhanced community quarantine" (MECQ) and "general community quarantine" (GCQ), until all prohibitions under ECQ and MECQ were lowered to GCQ and "modified general community quarantine" (MGCQ) on June 1. The major source of data is netizens' social media posts. It covers the period from April to May 2020, when the government enforced the Enhanced Community Quarantine following the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases Resolution.

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

Different postings and shared posts on Facebook and Twitter were text analyzed for this study, especially the instances of ECQ declaration, complete lockdowns, MECQ, GCQ, and MGCQ. The researchers generated a screenshot post made by netizens throughout the execution of the aforementioned community quarantine on their respective social media. The researchers ensured that the study subjects were well-protected. Before obtaining data, the author took precautions to conceal the participants' names and other identifying information and maintained tight secrecy. Content and Rhetorical Analysis were performed on the data. One of the many qualitative methodologies for analyzing and interpreting data that are currently available is qualitative content analysis. It is a systematic and objective method of assessing and measuring occurrences. Information is changed over into ideas that portray the examination attributes by spreading out orders, beginnings, a framework, cycles, and plans or subjects as a fundamental for powerful material assessment.

According to [5] and [6], the study topic defines what to assess and generate. In qualitative content analysis, the generalization process is when concepts are created. Certain components of technique are typically easy to express, but this also implies a researcher's vision instinctual reaction, which might be difficult for others to understand [5]-[7].

Rhetorical analysis, on the other hand, employs critical reading skills to "break down" a text. Separate the "parts" from the "whole" of the text under consideration. The rhetorical analysis describes how an author writes rather than what they write. To do so, scholars should look at the author's methods for accomplishing his or her goal or purpose in writing the piece. The content and rhetorical analysis in this

study focused on the netizen's identity as evidenced in their language usage posted on social media accounts in reaction to their circumstances in the pandemic, especially the adoption of Enhanced Community Quarantine.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Moving themes posted in online media during the Enhanced Community Quarantine

The table below illustrates that throughout the execution of ECQ, twenty-four (24) topics appeared on social media. It might be said that the bulk of these topics is tied to individuals, notably government leaders such as the President, Vice-President, senators, mayors, and those at the barangay level, as well as television celebrities.

Emerging Themes During ECQ
Role/ service of Mayor Vico Sotto and Mayor Isko Moreno
Ousting of Duterte
Vice-President Leni Robredo Taking Over the Presidency
Failed Government
Role of LGU in Time of Pandemic
Koko Pimentel
Joy Belmonte
Investigation of NBI to Vico Sotto
Statement of Duterte on "Shoot them Dead those who violate the ECQ Guidelines)
Arresting of all individuals who will not follow the ECQ Guidelines
Command Responsibility of barangay Captain and mayors
Removal of Corrupt LGU (relative to Ayuda)
Managerial and Leadership skills of the government officials
Role of the citizens in the country/ discipline
Transparency of the Barangay in the Distribution of the food packages (ayuda)
President Duterte's donating his one-month salary to fight Covid 19
Extension of community quarantine
Search for the possible ways to provide ayuda
Call to the middle class to provide assistance (ayuda)
Tax payers reaction of the distribution of ayuda
Mental health issues brought by the quarantine
ABS-CBN Issue
Kim Chui
Philippine sovereignty
"lugaw" (porridge issue)
Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ)
Kim Chui
Hunger and corruption

The findings show that the leading subject on various social media platforms during the ECQ includes government officials. On the other hand, celebrities who become viral as a result of particular situations in which they are involved become a topic of discussion on various social media platforms. In general, the topics may be divided into three (3) categories: **politics and political issues, social concerns, and current events.**

Despite the coronavirus outbreak, netizens have been expressing empathy on social networking platforms, but optimism has been declining, according to research. As seen by their social network remarks, many have been empathetic yet also alarmed. Individuals tend to herd, making judgments based on the activities of others in a social setting and the present status of the country [8]. Peer judgments of social standards, on the other hand, may influence a person's tendency to engage in certain behavior. Both helpful and destructive behavior may spread through social networks.

Furthermore, it occurs in a fragmented organizational structure, providing political systems with fewer crisis-response levers to pull and more parties to work with,

spanning from the business sector to local governments and individuals. Handling such disasters and addressing their economic effects necessitates active government action to safeguard the survival of healthcare systems, education, the survival of enterprises and employees, and the financial independence markets. To keep up the challenging political, social, and economic balance of implementing pandemic containment measures while maintaining key services, political leadership at the center is necessary.

### Language Used by the Netizens during Pandemic

Language is a major mode of communication. Language expresses significantly more than its words reflect, and it shapes how we think, experience, and interact with others. Indeed, language serves as the foundation for interpersonal and societal connections on some levels. The use of language forms serves as the foundation for interpersonal and social communication, in which character is portrayed through social interaction. The study of Besa [9] about the youth's language, for example, unveiled that the language used in their written communication reflected their nature as Generation Z.

In the study, it is evident that netizens' posts are classified as follows:

#### A. Medium of Communication

The posts are written in five (5) kinds: **(1) English**, **(2) Filipino**, and **(3) Code-switched** such as: *Matutulad lang din kay President Digong sina Mayor Isko at mayor Sotto if they run for presidency or vice presidency... Can someone get this girl a jacket? Natumbok mo girl! OK lang comprehension skills, dapat ganito mag-isip. Kawawa naman ang president. He looks tired...Neutrality only helps the oppressor. Wag na tayong magpaligoy-ligoy, hara-harapan na tayong ginagago. Use your voice.* **(4) Regional language** such as *Unsay natabang...buta ka? Sir? Maam dili tnan naga reklamo sa shoot to kill statement. Nakasabot ko and I understood to where it was stated kay nag tawaw ko. Di ko bugo. Ang ginapaglaban lang nko kay unta walay magcorrupy. Kasabot? Kung migrant gani mo, make sure maback upon ninyog taru g nga logic ha. Dili kay sakyan lang Ninyo ang sitwasyon...and* **(5) Emerging language** like: *hanash, tangahanga, chaaaar char and kuda*

To minimize disinformation that may trigger negative emotional states, communication is crucial in distributing information to the public, especially during the COVID-19 outbreak. The word used to describe virus outbreaks usually has both positive and negative connotations. As a result, word choice is crucial in ensuring that the information is understandable and relevant. English has long played an important role as an "international language" [10] for the diffusion of knowledge across the world [11]. Even though English is widely used as a channel of exchange, the question of whether it is powerful enough to prevent disinformation and false narratives from spreading lingers, particularly among non-English speakers. This condition led to misinformation being spread as a result of the linguistic impediment and a scarcity of resources to reputable information, causing tension and provoking certain emotions.

To stress their regional identities, non-Tagalog ethnolinguistic communities often opt to retain the native languages in most linguistic circumstances in the public domain, including national and local government health communication programs [12]. This study provides evidence that language change and creativity are fundamental properties of language that reflect worldwide sociocultural developments.

#### B. Kinds of Language

It could be gleaned that the posts of the netizens vary according to a degree. Some posts are **formal** such as *The Covid-19 pandemic is the litmus test for all mayors. Those who had their constituents arrested for every little infraction have shown their authoritarian nature. Those who take offense at their constituents' criticisms do not deserve their vote in 2022.*

*No matter how right you know your ideology is, how you treat other people, especially those who disagree with you, is an indication of your character...*

On the other hand, some posts sound **casual**. Posts like: *Oops. Bato-bato sa langit, tamaan illogical, Araling Panlipunan Teacher ka pero DDS ka. Kawawa mga estudyante mo. Twister na lipunan ang tinuturo mo. Dapat ka ring ma-oust.*

*Grabe tong quarantine na to puro kami pagkain. Unfriend and blocked niyo na ko, Galet kayo sakin. Yung shoot to kill para lang sa mga may gagawing 'di maganda. 'Di naman sinabing pag lumabas ka ng pinto Ninyo babarilin ka na, Ano to crossfire?OA ang mga P\*tangina eh. Kung DDS ka pa din, Congrats sayo...*

Observe that some posts are also composed of **street language** such as *hoy, PDuts, yuck, ayyoops, ebas*. Furthermore, the posts also contain **cursing languages** such as *bobo, hayop ka, ginag\*go mo, #f\*ckDuterte, and t\*ngina*.

Data show that the type of language used by netizens reveals their personality. Natural language has been fundamental to the study of personality from its origin, according to [13]. Lexical methods for personality component analysis examine the individuals' use to describe others to identify a limited number of mostly independent personality qualities. Thus, language usage reveals the characteristics of the language user.

#### C. Language Styles

The posts are found to be: (1) **direct statements** like "Yes, I want Duterte to resign now...", "our future President and Vice president of the Philippines (Isko Moreno and Vico Sotto)", "wala kang alam kundi dahas", "...Huwag kang pabuhay buong buhay mo....", (2) **rhetorical and direct questions** like: *Asan kayo ngayon? So, you agree? You think he's a murderer? So hindi na pwede punahin ang pagkakamali at pagpuro reklamo ang natatangap hinde bai big sabihin nun may nakikita or nadadama na problema talaga?* (3) **quotations** such as *Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent- Isaac Asimov, Leadership is based on inspiration, not domination; on cooperation, not*

intimidation-William Arthur Wood, *A public that speaks is a nation that wins, People should not be afraid of their government. Government should be afraid of their people* and (4) **hashtags** such as #IstandWithThePresident#Ctto, #OustDuterteNow, #ProtectVicoatAllCost, #StopFightingPeople, #WalangPipiliin, #YellowMagic, #Philippines#Filipinos, #MayNagagawaDinAngPagrereklamo

The researchers discovered that language users expressed themselves using direct statements, rhetorical questions, quotes, and hashtags as kinds of language styles. Communicative ethno-styles are inescapable, and they refer to a typical language user and his or her communicative conduct in interpersonal interactions in everyday contexts [14].

#### D. Point of View

It is worth noting that the postings are written from three separate perspectives. Some pieces are written in the first person using "ko," "we," and "tayo,"; while others are written in the second person using "ikaw"; and in the third person using "kayo".

The usage of the first-person point of view demonstrates that netizens accept full responsibility for the words made, assuming a participatory role [15]. On the contrary, the use of the second person by netizens indicates a direct appeal to readers, and the use of the third person by netizens resolves an impersonal, objective, and detached statement of the netizens' thoughts.

#### E. Tone

The tone expresses the writer's mindset towards the viewer and the subject of the communication. It may be found in a variety of facets of communication. The writer's tone of communication reflects on the message, and it determines how the reader sees it.

The following tones were identified in the posts: *rude, explaining, defending, justifying, agreeing/validating, sarcastic, advocating, demanding, philosophical, logical, complaining, summoning/ appealing, advising, and self-reflective.*

The bulk of the uncovered tones is negative, with only explanatory and self-reflective tones being positive. This indicates that netizens' attitudes about subjects or themes are often unfavorable, which ultimately conveys their personality as language users.

#### F. Purpose

A piece of writing's purpose is its objective or intent. Language is generally used to express oneself. As a result, it was possible to deduce that the posts were mainly designed to communicate the netizens' overflowing feelings as a result of the quarantine. The tweets specifically indicated support for the President, disdain, and discontent with the President's response to Covid-19, mockery of the government's management or leadership techniques in dealing with the epidemic, description of current situations, and self-reflection.

Language is a social phenomenon that consists of a set of diverse signals that aid in conveying and expressing the total of a person's thoughts about their surroundings. When utilizing a language, the core functions are interrelated and are implemented to varying degrees [16].

#### Filipino character as shown in the language utilization in the web-based media

The Filipino character shown based on the language utilized are: **Critical, judgmental, disrespectful, entitled, self-righteous, reactive, observant, feeling-intellectual, opinionated, and comparing.**

The moving topics and language utilized in the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak revealed many qualities of Filipino netizens who are renowned across the world as active social media users who spent more than four hours on social media platforms [17].

The Filipino characteristics reflected in postings written, reposted, shared, commented on, and disseminated by netizens on various online platforms are a representation of Filipino identity during the epidemic.

Being "critical" is one of the Filipino personalities that emerged based on the moving themes that depicted a type of character that expresses uttermost critical criticism of certain activities, particularly governmental actions, and choices during the pandemic.

#### CONCLUSION

Language is not only a mode of expression but a reflection of character. The language used in communication projects the speaker's or writer's personality. According to the analysis, netizens' posts are often classified as political, social, or current events. The type, nature, point of view, tone, and objectives of the postings all influence how they construct their posts. On the one hand, their use of language revealed their personalities unveiled during the ECQ implementation. Such characters were found to be: critical, judgmental, rude, entitled, self-righteous, reactive, attentive, feeling-intellectual, opinionated, and comparing natural among Filipino netizens. Thus, this study revealed that one's identity is mirrored in the language utilized. The netizens use of formal, and casual languages were articulated through direct statements, rhetorical and direct questions, quotations and hastags.

Based on the findings, it could be gleaned that the way language users articulate their messages discloses their characters. As such, the study recommends that the pragmatics of language be emphasized in the classroom since it impacts the meaning attached to the message. Hence, language and social science courses must stress the influence of language use.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Discenza, Catherine et al. 2021. The Use of Colloquial Language In Pandemics: Parallelism across 100 Years. 2021. [Online] Available: <https://influenzapandemicresearch.weebly.com/home/the-use-of-colloquial-language-in-pandemics-parallelism-across-100-years>
- [2] McIntyre, Dr. Roger S. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mental health in the general population: A systematic review. 2020. [Online] Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7413844/>
- [3] Nature Microbiology. Language matters in a pandemic. 2020. [Online] Available: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41564-020-00812-9>
- [4] Correa, Teresa et al. Personality and Social Media Use. 2013. [Online] Available: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280304894\\_Personality\\_and\\_Social\\_Media\\_Use](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280304894_Personality_and_Social_Media_Use)
- [5] Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62, 107-115.
- [6] Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- [7] Graneheim, U., & Lundman, B. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: Concepts, procedures, and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today*, 24, 105-112.
- [8] Kameda, T. & Hastie, R. (2015). Herd behavior. In Scott, R. A. & Kosslyn, S. M. (Eds), *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0157>.
- [9] Besa, L. 2016. Youth, Their Language and Ideologies. *International Journal of Languages, Literature, and Linguistics*, Vol. 2, No. 3. Pp. 141-145.
- [10] Seidlhofer, B. 2005. English as a lingua franca. *ELT journal*, 59(4), 339-341.
- [11] Guillén, M.F., 2001. Is globalization civilizing, destructive, or feeble? A critique of five key debates in the social science literature. *Annual review of sociology*, 27(1), pp.235-260.
- [12] Demeterio FPA, Liwanag LAL. The Language Policies and Practices of Philippines and Thailand: Insights and Lessons for Language Planning. *Silliman J* 2014; 25(2): 19-59.
- [13] Ireland, M. E., & Mehl, M. R. (2014). Natural language use as a marker. In T. M. Holtgraves (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Social Psychology* (pp. 201–237). Oxford University Press.
- [14] Larina, T. (2015). Culture-Specific Communicative Styles as a Framework for Interpreting Linguistic and Cultural Idiosyncrasies, *International Review of Pragmatics*, 7(2), 195-215. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/18773109-00702003>
- [15] Besa, L. 2019. Power and Identity Projection in the Pearl. *International Journal of Languages, Literature, and Linguistics*, Vol. 5, No. 1. Pp. 6-14. Brooks, Paige. Does Your Personality Trait Affect?
- [16] Korneeva, A, Kosacheva, T and Parpura, O. 2019. Functions of language in the social context. SHS Web of Conferences. CILDIAH - 2019. pp.1-5 <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20196900064>.
- [17] Statista Research Department. (2021, September 16). Retrieved from Statista: <https://www.statista.com/topics/6759/social-media-usage-in-the-philippines/>

## AUTHORS PROFILE



**Lynn M. Besa** is a graduate of Ph. D Linguistics major in Applied Linguistics from Philippine Normal University. She is a Professor and the Head of the English Department at Rizal Technological University. She has published numerous research papers in reputable journals which focus mostly on Linguistics, Literature, and Education. At present, she teaches both in the undergraduate and graduate school programs where she handles several specializations, education, and research courses.



**Niño P. Maliban** finished his Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in History and Master of Arts in Educational Management at Rizal Technological University. At present, he is pursuing his Doctorate in Educational Management at Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He is a prolific faculty of the Social Studies Department, College of Education at Rizal Technological University. His 16 years of experience in the academe acquired him both academic and empirical knowledge in different fields of Social Sciences. He is also an active geopolitical analyst.



**Jason A. Romero** is a graduate of Master of Arts in Education Major in Social Studies from La Consolacion University Philippines, Malolos Bulacan. He also earned 36 units in Master of Arts in Education Major in Social Science Education at The National Teachers College Manila, Philippines. He has finished the Diploma in Theater Arts at the Asian Institute of Maritime Studies' School of Heritage Education and an International Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management at Saint James University, Pennsylvania, USA. He is an active member of the Philippine Historical Association, LEAD Philippines, and International Organization of Educators and Researchers Inc. He teaches Social Studies and Theater Arts courses at the tertiary level. At present, he is the Faculty Coordinator of the College of Education - Pasig Campus at Rizal Technological University.