

# A Semiotic Analysis of Nonverbal Linguistic Signals Used On Billboard Posters as a Means of Creating Public Awareness During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Douala

Ngonjo Victor Fuh

University of Maroua, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature (Cameroon)

Email: victorfuhn76@gmail.com

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04133>

Published July 26, 2024

**Citation:** Fuh N.V. (2024) A Semiotic Analysis of Nonverbal Linguistic Signals Used On Billboard Posters as a Means of Creating Public Awareness During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Douala, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies* 5(4),10-26, 2024

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines the use of nonverbal linguistic signals on billboard posters during the Covid-19 pandemic in Douala. It has been noticed that nonverbal signals such as sweating, wearing a nose mask, washing of hands with clean running water and soap and standing two metres apart from each other and the use of colours such as white and red among others play an important role in the way human beings communicate especially during a period of crisis. Although it is nonverbal, this means of communication acts more than the verbal one. This work focuses on nonverbal linguistic features used on billboard posters in the city of Douala as a means of creating public awareness in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic so that the contamination and mortality rate can be reduced. This study is of great value because it demonstrates how people should live during a pandemic era without being contaminated. This research uses a qualitative research design. The researcher culled some pictures that were pasted on billboards during the crisis (2020-2021) on the streets of Douala. Insight was drawn from Barthes (1964) theory of semiotics. The findings indicated that people washed their hands with clean running water and soap, they wore masks, arrows were used to show how people should stand with others in public, colours such as red was used to show how dangerous this virus is and the white colour was also used to indicate that people need to be clean during this period so that they can minimise the chances of being contaminated. Capitalisation was used either in red or black to attract the attention of the public to the messages written on the billboards. The researcher concludes that people should develop the culture of reading public notices especially billboard posters during epidemics and pandemics so that they can save their lives.*

**KEYWORDS:** Billboards, pictures, creating, public awareness, Covid-19 pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

According to Wernli, *et al.*, (2023), the world in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has experienced several systemic events with global repercussions including jihadist terrorism and the war on terror

(2001), the global financial and economic crisis (2008), the Covid-19 pandemic (2020), the current broader impact of the Russian aggression against Ukraine on energy, food, and security (2022), and the war between Israel and Hamas terrorists (2023). It is worth noting that the world woke up towards the end of the first quarter of 2020 to experience a terrible pandemic unprecedented in recent memory (Fuh, 2023:1). Cucinotta and Vanelli (2020, p.157), assert that the coronavirus outbreak started in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and became a global pandemic on March 11, 2020, as declared by the World Health Organisation. Some world leaders like Donald Trump rhetorically called the disease an “invisible” enemy. This China virus struck the entire world so hard that governments all over the globe took draconian measures to curb it from spreading to other countries. Due to the ravaging nature of this invisible monster, The World Health Organisation, WHO (2020) came up with some preventive measures in other to create public awareness about the dangers this virus poses which governments worldwide also adopted. Some of these public awareness measures include:

1. Limiting of large gatherings.
2. Limiting activities that involve physical contact and only allowing sports that allow for physical distancing.
3. Limiting the number of people at funerals, baptisms, weddings, birthday parties and cultural ceremonies.
4. Drivers and passengers should avoid using non-medical masks or cloth face covering.
5. Passengers should sit apart from each other such as using every other seat on buses and taxis.
6. People should stay at home and only go out if need be.
7. People should report to a nearby hospital when they feel sick.
8. Hands should be constantly washed with clean water and soap. They should be sanitised.
9. Objects and surfaces, such as toys, phones, toilets, door handles, etc. should be cleaned and disinfected.
10. Keep two metres away from each other outside of your home.
11. Avoid greetings that include physical contact, such as handshakes.
12. If you start to develop symptoms of Covid-19, isolate yourself from others and contact your health care provider or local public health authority.
13. Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.
14. Cough and sneeze into a tissue or the bend of your arm.
15. Wash your hands often with soap and clean water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser containing at least 60% alcohol.

It is worth mentioning here that while this pandemic was claiming the lives of people throughout the world, governments throughout the world laid down the above rules in their countries on how their populations should live, so as to limit its spread. For example, on Tuesday, 17 March 2020, President Paul Biya instructed the holding of a ministerial consultation (Cameroon’s Government’s Response Strategy to the Covid-19 Pandemic to assess the situation and identify appropriate actions to be implemented. The outcome of this meeting was the implementation, by the Cameroon Government, of several different

containment measures. These include hand hygiene, social distancing, travel restrictions on visitors arriving from high-risk countries, quarantine for nationals returning from high-risk locations, and closure of schools and certain types of workplaces (Ghogomu, 2022, p. 2). It is worth noting that posters and brochures were prepared by many organisations on all issues related to protection from Covid-19 pandemic and were widely used all over the world in general and in different towns and cities in Cameroon in particular. In Cameroon, the government went beyond these measures by using visual tools such as posters and videos from the World Health Organisation and other similar health organisations, to demonstrate to the population, the correct application of hand hygiene. The posters distributed in the different parts of Cameroon and more especially in the city of Douala carried information in different forms educating the population in this city in particular and Cameroonians at large on how to conduct themselves during this crucial period. This work stems from the fact that the use of nonverbal signals such as sweating, wearing of nose mask, washing the hands with running water, how to stand in public, how to sneeze and the use of white and red colours on billboard posters among others play an important role in the dissemination of information. They extend and give further explanations where words are limited and so become effective than verbal ones. Billboard posters play an important role in disseminating information. This explains why the city of Douala is dotted with billboards especially in major road junctions, on the streets and in markets just to name but these. Of all the media that are used in informing people like the radio, the television, newspapers and journals to name but these, billboard posters stand out as the best means of informing the population during the coronavirus pandemic because they are placed in strategic positions where the population can easily see. Furthermore, they carry images that are attractive and other art work thereby easing the understanding of the message or messages on the part of the population; be they literate or illiterate. It is worth mentioning that not everybody has that time to read, (if you want a Cameroonian to read, put the reading material in a bottle of beer), listen to the radio, or watch news on the television because they are too busy or because they are not literate. Furthermore, not everybody is fortunate to have access to the social media. For this reason, billboard posters become a very good means through which information can be disseminated to the public. This study aims at investigating the use of and the meanings of nonverbal signals on billboard posters during the coronavirus pandemic in the city of Douala in from 2020-2021. This study would be useful to scholars, the educational and health milieu and the society as a whole since it could enlarge and widen their knowledge of the relevant use of nonverbal signals during a health crisis. Following the main aim of this work, the following objectives were addressed:

To look at the meaning and significance of colours.

To examine the use of nose mask, water and soap.

To explore facial expressions.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

What are the types of nonverbal signals used on billboard posters during the Covid-19 pandemic in Douala?

How effective and significant are the used signals on billboard posters?

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Some studies have been conducted on the use of signs and symbols in different fields of study such as advertisement, literature and education among others as discussed in the literature below. Some erudite have conducted studies on a semiotic analysis from a poetic point of view (Asrifan & Dewi, 2023) and found that the green-white stick symbolises the long journey of life, the stranger symbolises life's uncertainty, the rich curse symbolises life's priceless, and the sky symbolises unpredictable future life. All the symbolised words in the poem have meaning that is strongly related to the essence of life. Other scholars also looked at this topic from another genre of literature, which is the novel (Gistrama & Prastiwi, 2020; Mansyur, 2010 & Ridwan, 2012) while using different methods and theories. For example, while Gistrama and Prastiwi (ibid) used the theory of semiotic analysis of literature, the course of the sign, meaning, metaphor, and symbolism, Mansyur (ibid) used the Peircean theory and Ridwan (ibid) used Roland Barthes's theory. These studies also showed varied results. Gistrama and Prastiwi (ibid) demonstrated that the literary study deals with this topic of the novel illustration, that the sign, colour, and typography mean a lot for the novel illustration. Mansyur (ibid) also revealed that dream is like a mirror of someone's life. Eddie can understand about his life when he met the first person in his dream which was the Blue Man. He teaches Eddie that there is no random act in life, there is a balance to it all. Like one winter another grows, birth and death are a part of a whole. Furthermore, sacrifices are part of life and cannot be separated from life as this happens in every human life. Although Eddie's captain shot him, he kept his promise by not living him behind. He sacrificed his life so that Eddie and two other soldiers were able to live. Ridwan's (ibid) study also found that there were two parts of semiotic theory in the novel *Poison*. They are signifier and signified. There are also nineteen signifiers and signifieds in this novel. The researcher found that the meaning of poison in the novel based on the signifieds and signifiers is conspiracy.

In the same line of thought, (Manoy, 2009; Bahri, 2009; Pratiwi, *et al.*, 2022), also conducted studies on semiotics in novels with the aim to find out the code and kinds of semiotic codes that are dominant and also the characteristics of the witch and why the character became a witch in the film. While Manoy (ibid) used Ferdinand De Saussure's theory to analyse the corpus, Bahari (ibid) used Barthes's theory. Furthermore, Manoy's (ibid) study revealed five codes in the novel; hermeneutics, semics, symbolic, proairetic and gnonic code. The researcher also concludes that gronic is the least used code in the novel while symbolic code is the highest used one. On the other hand, Bahari's (ibid) study also reveal eight characteristics of the witch: woman, powerful, evil, authority, fierce, savage, cruel, and inadvertently. Also, Pratiwi, *et al.*, study, hitched on Charles Sanders Peirce's work, indicated that the signs found in the webtoon True Beauty are representamen (legisign), object (icon), and interpretant (rheme). The above studies are similar to the present one in that they both deal with the study of signs and symbols. However, this study is different from the ones above in that it examines signs, symbols, colours and objects that were used during the Covid-19 pandemic on the streets of Douala to caution, advise and sensitise the population of Douala in particular and Cameroonians as a whole on how to live during the pandemic without being contaminated.

Other researchers have also conducted studies on semiotic signs and symbols in advertisements as a marketing strategy (Wijayanto & Iswari, 2021; Tsotra, *et al*; 2004; Rifa'I, 2010; Syahdini, 2019; Sugiharti, 2018 & Hasanah, 2010). These erudite used different methods and theories to conduct and analyse their studies, while obtaining different results. For example, Wijayanto and Iswari (*ibid*) in their study showed that denotatively, adolescent children are usually eager to achieve dreams, especially school children. Connotationally, with the passion they have, they quickly sweat and need replacement fluids to keep their bodies fresh and replace their lost body fluids as they pursue dreams and ideas through their talents. On the other hand, Tsotra (*ibid*) found that alternative visual categories are relevant to different groups. Furthermore, semiotics can help internet marketers develop appropriate communication strategies and design communication channels with a certain degree of cultural sensitivity. Overall, techniques such as semiotics influence and can improve the impact and effectiveness of currently used promotional strategies. Rifa'I (*ibid*) also found that each of the sign of Coca-Cola's advertisements has a system and formed by pictorials, texts, and contexts. These elements contribute a meaning in denotation and connotation meaning. Furthermore, Sugiharti's (*ibid*) study also illustrates that a beautiful woman is one who has white skin as Korean women. This product offers beauty to persuade Indonesian women. Syahdini's (*ibid*) investigation found that the connotation in this advertisement is affected by the concept of beauty in France. The study further showed that beauty is shaped by society, the aspects of beauty that are attached to French women, and also the preference of French women about makeup and the products they prefer. Women in France do not spend money to buy many makeup products, but less makeup with expensive price and high quality. However, the products advertised do not only show the natural makeup looks, but also the colourful, luxury, and pierce makeup. Finally, Hasanah (*ibid*) indicated in his study that the *Dagadu* T-shirt uses a traditional theme about Jogja. More so, there is a relation between linguistic and pictorial symbols in *dagadu* design. These features are an attempt to inform the audience about culture in Jogja. Just like the above studies conducted on the use of signs and symbols in novels, the works of these critics who looked at the use of signs and symbols in advertisement are similar to the present study because they dwell on the use of signs and their significations. However, they differ in terms of context, analysis and findings. That is, these authors did not mention the use of objects such a cross and colours such as the red and white colour, just to mention but these.

Another area of research where signs and symbols have been investigated into is the film industry (Nisa, 2017; Pauzan, 2018 & Witte, 2006). Nisa's (*ibid*) aim is to explain Cattleya Orchid forms of signs that appear during the scenes in the *Colombiana* (2011) film, while that of Pauzan (*ibid*) is to explore the kinds of signs that are expressed and the meaning of three important elements of signs including icons, indexes, and symbols. Furthermore, while Witte (*ibid*) uses textual analysis and cultural studies to interpret collected data, Pauzan (*ibid*) uses the semiotic theory of Peirce and Nisa (*ibid*) uses Roland Barthes's theory of denotative and connotative meaning. These researchers also arrived at different conclusions. Nisa (*ibid*) found that each sign reflects Cataleya's self-identity as the main character of this film, while Pauzan (*ibid*) indicated that nine kinds of signs were used in the film. They are: qualising, sining, legising, icon, index, symbol, rhyme, decisign, and argument, and Witte (*ibid*) revealed twelve categories that contributed to the four axial codes of Self, Beyond Self, Critical Connections,

and Representations of Literacy. The four axial codes contributed to three different themes that emerged in the representations of literacy in popular school film: internal versus external forces, traditional versus nontraditional pedagogy, and traditional representations of literacy versus new literacies. These studies are similar to this one in that they talk about the use of signs but differ in terms of context, analysis and findings.

Research on semiotics has also been conducted on cartoons in the educational milieu. For example,

Kuzu (2016) conducted a study on semiotics from an educational perspective with the aim of determining how a writing lecture activity based semiotic analysis theory affects students' writing skills. The author uses cartoon caricatures as visual texts for analysis and found that textual analysis based on the semiotic theory was more effective for the writing skills of students than the traditional writing method with respect to three areas of evaluation: understanding the subject, accessing the message, and multidimensional interpretation. Adham (2012) peruses the iconic representation of women in the Middle Eastern media in order to determine how various semiotic resources have been utilised in conveying specific messages to a given audience. Using the framework of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) for the reading of visual images, the researcher found that different messages emitted via the medium of advertising, may induce the viewer into adopting a particular course of action, in addition to inciting feelings of aspiration and longing in them. Finally, the messages unearthed in the wake of this study seem to suggest that the Arabian media is dominated by the presence of two different advertising agendas.

Some researchers have equally conducted studies on semiotic analysis of memes in different areas of life. For example, Mikhaeil and Baskerville (2019); Almucharomah, Sahayu and Triono (2023) investigated on semiotic analysis to analyse Covid-19 meme. To them, the increasing use of social media has spawned new phenomena among social media users and one of these is the creativity in making memes. The researchers tried to describe the facts behind the creation of the Covid-19 meme circulating on social media. The signifiers found in the Covid-19 meme include snippets of famous movie and game scenes. On the other hand, Murtaisah, (2020) also conducted a study of meme for women. This author examines the meaning of the signs in the meme images and explained the semiosis process. The researcher uses a descriptive analysis method to describe, explain, and analyse the meaning of signs and the semiosis process using Charles Sanders Peirce's theory. The study reveals that images (icons) and the language used in the memes (symbols) direct the meaning and interpretation of the signs. It could be concluded that each meme has different signs, meanings, and interpretations. Some researchers have focused their attention on semiotic analysis of pain (see Kugelmann, 2003; Priel, Rabinowitz & Pels, 1991; Quintner, *et al.*, 2003; Rydahl-Hansen, 2005; Rydahl-Hansen & Eriksen, 2009). They showed that a twist of the face of a patient, a sad look and tears is an indication that this patient is in pains.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 has led to diverse literature on the pandemic in different fields of study such as education, religion, communication, health, marketing, and

politics to name but these. Some researchers have conducted studies on the use of the social media such as WhatsApp as a medium of instruction during the pandemic (Febriani, 2020; Khan, 2020; Mulyono & Suryoputro, 2020a; Mulyono & Suryoputro, 2020b; Dhawan, 2020; Ananto & Ningsih, 2020; Mulyono, *et al.*, 2021). These researchers demonstrated how social media was used to teach students in schools although these learners didn't go to school because of the lockdown in all sectors of life. Furthermore, some scholars also looked at the impact of this pandemic on students' performance (Joseph, 2023; Aucejo *et al.*, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Hashemi, & Adu-Gyamfi, 2021; Elsalem *et al.*, 2020; Gonzalez *et al.*, 2020; Elhadary *et al.*, 2020; Kuhfeld *et al.*, 2020; Owusu-Fordjour *et al.*, 2020; UNESCO, 2020a; Henaku, 2020; Lederer *et al.*, 2020; Rwigema, 2021; El-Said, 2021; Aristovnik *et al.*, 2020; Coker *et al.*, 2020; & Nyinondi & Mwakapina, 2023) and found that Covid-19 restraint positively influenced students' performance and assisted teachers in improving student's learning strategies. These studies also demonstrated that anxiety, social problems and internet connection had a negative effect on both teacher and student motivation. Some erudite have also written on Covid-19 from a health perspective ((Qiu *et al.*, 2020; Horesh & Brown, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Elmer, *et al.*, 2020; Kaleem, *et al.*, 2020) and others from the point of fear ((Kernan, 2019; Sahu, 2020; Mahyoob, 2020; Green, *et al.*, 2021; Engzell, *et al.*, 2021).

From the above literature review, it could be said that although much has been documented on the Covid-19 pandemic in different spheres of life, very little has been written on the use of billboard posters as a means of creating public awareness during the Covid-19 pandemic which is the focus of this paper. This study is therefore a departure from what other scholars haven't panned on this pandemic.

Barthes's (1964) theory of semiotics is at the basis of this study. The term semiotics mean different things to different authors. Semiotics as a discipline is simply the analysis of signs or the study of the function of sign systems (Cobley & Janz, 1999). According to Eco (1976), semiotics concerns everything that can be perceived as a sign. Semiotics is a science or method to analyse signs (Sobur, 2003). From the above definitions, it could be said that semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. It is a branch of linguistics to study signs, learn everything related to the sign and its meaning. Therefore, it attracted Ferdinand de Saussure to aver that semiotics has two inseparable sides as the two sides of dichotomies opposition as the *signifier*, *significant*, and *signified*, *signifie*, speaking (*parole*) and the common language (*langue*), the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic, and also the diachronic and the synchronic. Saussure describes the two inseparable sides as a sheet of paper which is cut by a scissors. To him, there is no sound without thought and also there is no thought without sound. The inseparability of the signified (mental concept) and the signifier (material aspect) leads Saussure to offer the following figure 1.

The relation between the signified and the signifier (signification) is completing and supporting each other. It is like the two sides of a coin where the signified is on the one side and the signifier on the other side.

Barthes developed significant-signifie theory from Saussure to be a theory of grammar and its connotation meaning. The significant term was changed to be expression (E) and the signifie changed to be content (C). According to Barthes's theory, every ideological sign is either a denotative or a connotative sign system. To Barthes, connotation is the "tone" of a text, the manner which has been decorated." In the final analysis, the signified of a "connotative sign" is for Barthes the "fragment of an ideology," the signified, in turn, a "rhetoric," both going back to a "real system" via metalanguage obviously even here no differences made between communication and indication. Thus, for him anything which furnishes meaning becomes a sign, and any group of sign becomes a system, although neither the existence of an intention to communicate, not of a complete sign inventory, nor of combination of rules or opposing features, is proven. A denotative sign which is a strictly descriptive system is the result of the signifier image and the signified concept combining. In other words, the apple is the signifier and healthy is the signified. Besides, a connotative sign is one that has lost its historical meaning. This could be due to a number of things: changes in culture or terminology, an event, or even just evolution. Barthes' framework helped us to identify those non-verbal linguistic signals used on billboard posters during the Covid-19 pandemic in Cameroon and what they mean in the context of this health crisis. Glance from the above theory shows that the study of semiotic lays on signifier, signified, sign and symbol. They are understood through connotative or denotative meaning. This theory helped the researcher to analyse non-verbal billboard posters during the Covid-19 pandemic in Douala.

### **Data Collection**

Data (from 2020-2021) was collected from billboard posters placed at major road junctions in the city of Douala like Ndokoti, Feu Rouge Bessengue, Rond Point, Douche, and Ange Raphael. A total of five billboard posters were collected and each of them showed how people were expected to conduct themselves during this pandemic. This researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select billboard posters that bear semiotic signs and symbols, colours and objects which suit the study and analysed the data using the qualitative method.

### **Data Analysis**

This section focuses on the analysis of the data. According to Olayinka et al (2005:77), data are "the symbols, numbers and alphabetical characters used to describe one or more attributes such as age, sex, volume, growth rates, temperature, etc. of an entity." The analysis of this study is hitched on Barthes theory of semiotics plus the typology of symbols from Jouve's point of view (2000). This method permitted the researcher to identify those elements used on billboard posters in the city of Douala as a means of creating public awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Figure 2.* Pictures showing how the citizens of Douala should live during the Covid-2019 pandemic

Picture taken at Rond Point Douala on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020

The first thing that catches one's attention on this billboard poster is the use of capital letters. For example, "**STOP COVID-19.**" This is to draw the attention of the target population to the subject matter discussed here. Furthermore, the disease itself is depicted in letter "o" with horns in the word stop. This is to show how serious and dangerous it is. In addition, the opening sentence is written using the red colour. Again, this is to show how dangerous this monster is- COVID-19. More so, "**STOP COVID-19**" is an order. Therefore, the public of Douala is told to stop the disease by wearing a nose mask and washing their hands regularly with clean water as depicted in this picture. Noticed in these messages is the use of the pronoun "your." Commenting on the use of words in alcohol advertisements, Gonzalez, Sarah and Wesley (2002) portrayed that the use of pronouns such as "you" in advertisements is important in that it addresses the reader, it creates a direct connection between reader and advertiser and appeals to the reader's emotions. In the context of this work, words especially "your" as used in the above picture appeals to the emotions of the public in relation to the pandemic discussed here.

*Figure 3.* People showing how the inhabitants of Douala should live during the Covid-19 pandemic

Picture taken at Feu Rogue Bessengue on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, 2020

The first thing that attracts the attention of the public to this billboard poster are the sentences:

**GET VACCINATED  
STOP COVID-19!!!**

The first sentence is an imperative sentence (command). This sentence is used to urge the people to be vaccinated against Covid-19. Furthermore, this sentence is capitalised. This is done to draw the attention of the public to the subject discussed here which is Covid-19. This sentence is also written in red. This is to show how dangerous this monster is. The second sentence is a command and an exclamation. The author exclaims that people need to stop the spread of this disease. This sentence which is also capitalised is to captivate the attention of the public. This sentence is written in black to show how dangerous the disease is. The billboard poster also carries information concerning how people should comport themselves during this period. The public is advised to wash their hands with running water as seen on the poster. They should keep a safe distance of 2 metres as depicted on the poster and they should wear their masks as seen with this woman in this picture. It should be said that the dominant colour used on this poster is red. This is done to warn the public of the danger they will face if they contract this pandemic.

*Figure 4.* Hygiene against viruses. Picture taken at Ange Raphael on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020  
The billboard poster outlines measures to be taken by the population of Douala so that they should not be infected by this pandemic. They are advised to:

1. *Wash their hands regularly with soap* as seen in the picture above where someone is washing the hands with running water.

2. *Keep their hands away from their faces as seen above.* This person is touching the face which is not correct because his/her hand might be dirty. For this reason, this person's head has been circled using the red colour, a symbol of danger.
3. *Cough into their arms and turn away from other people.*
4. *Keep rooms well ventilated.*

It is worth noting that four types of colours have been used on this poster: red which stands for danger, white which symbolises cleanliness and perfection, black which signifies evil and blue which stands for purity. This art work is used to appeal to the public on what to do and not to do during this difficult moment.

*Figure 5. How to prevent the illness coronavirus (Covid-19)*

Picture taken at the Deido Road Junction on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, 2021

The first thing that catches one's eyes on this billboard is the text "*COMMENT PREVENIR LA MALADIE A CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)*", (how to prevent the illness Covid-19). This message is an instruction to the population of Douala. Furthermore, the text is written in black and red. This is to charm the attention of the public to this message. The name of the disease is written in red. This is to depict its dangerous nature so that the public can take the preventive measures outlined on this billboard poster seriously. The board also carries images of people, showing what to do and not to do during this pandemic. For example, the first picture shows someone washing the hands with water. This is followed by a text under the person's hands which reads "*Lavez-vous frequemment les main.*" (Wash your hands frequently.) Furthermore, this notion of washing the hands is reinforced in Figure 2, 3 and 4. The population is also advised to wash their hands with soap. This picture is therefore a reminder to the population on what to do. They need to always wash their hands so as not to be infected with the coronavirus. The second picture shows a person with the mouth covered with a tissue as he coughs. Also, a man is shown sneezing with his elbow covering his mouth as seen in this text, "*Se couvrir le nez et la bouche avec un mouchoir jetable ou utiliser le pli du coude lorsqu'on tousse ou eternue*" (Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue or use the elbow of your hand when coughing or sneezing.). A person is shown in the third picture cleaning a door as seen in this text, "*Nettoyer et desinfecter quotidiennement les surface frequemment touchees (tables, poignets de porte, etc.)*" (Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily (tables, door handles, etc.)). Picture four shows two persons embracing each other. That is, a man and a woman. The man shown in the picture is infected. This is justified by the colour of his head which is red and an x marked against the two of them. This picture is accompanied by this text, "*Eviter tout contact avec une personne presentant les symptomes de la grippe et respecter une distance entre vous et les autres (1 metre au moins).*" (Avoid any contact with persons showing symptoms of flu and respect the distance between you and other people (at least one meter.)) This message is also a command/order telling the people what not to do. The last picture shows someone marked with a cross and accompanied by the text "*Eviter de toucher votre visage (yeax, nez, bouche, etc.) avec vos mains non lavees.*" (Avoid touching the face (eyes, nose, mouth, etc.) with un washed hands. This is also a command or an order. This is also another reminder. It reminds the public of not touching the face with the hands which might be dirty as it can make them to be infected with the pandemic.

*Figure 6.* A person infected by the Covid-19 pandemic and how it is transmitted  
Picture taken at the Ndokoti Road Junction on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2021

The first thing that draws the attention of someone to this billboard poster is this man. The picture demonstrates that he is an infected coronavirus patient. This is accompanied by symptoms of the disease such as: difficulties in breathing, fever, running nose and headache. Again, this man's twisted and pale face, white eyes and the sweat on his face shows that he is a Covid-19 patient. This explains why after this picture, there is a text which urges those who manifest the above symptoms to call the number 1510 free of charge. Furthermore, the picture also states how the disease is transmitted. For example, from animal to man, from man to man, by means of transportation and through contaminated objects to name but these. Furthermore, the photo shows that we should cook meat and other things we eat very well before we consume them.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the types of nonverbal linguistic signals used on billboard posters during the Covid-19 pandemic in Douala. The analysis revealed that pictures were used to sensitise the inhabitants of the city of Douala on how to cough, sneeze, greet someone, how to sit with someone in public, how to wash the hands with clean water, soap and use a sanitizer to disinfect the hands, not to touch the face with dirty hands, to clean surfaces regularly like door handles, to wear a nose mask and not to embrace someone, among others. More so, pictures were used to show how an infected patient looks like. The nose is running, he sweats, the face is pale and twisted and the person has fever. There is the use of texts to inform the public on what to do and what not to do. Some of these texts are capitalised. The use of capitalisation is to draw the attention of the public to this pandemic. There is also the use of colours such as white which stands for purity and cleanliness, red which represent danger-the dangerous nature of the coronavirus and black which symbolises the evil pandemic. The study also reveals the use of objects such as crosses and red circles around the heads of infected patients. These symbols were used to further show how dangerous the pandemic is. This study is similar to that of Ghogomou (2022) in that it looks at preventive measures that were put in place to minimise the spread of Covid-19. However, the two studies differ in terms of analysis and results.

Furthermore, this study also differs from that of Apuge and Abba (2023), Warda (2023), Nkwain (2023) and Fuh, and Fonki, (2023b). Apuge and Abba (ibid) revealed in their study that stakeholders conceptualised Covid-19 as follows: Covid-19 is a war, Covid-19 is a pandemic, Covid-19 is an alien, Covid-19 is a foreign virus and Covid-19 is a thing among others. Warda's (ibid) study also demonstrates that in the Grand North Cameroon, serial greetings accompanied by specific gestures constituted greeting norms before the advent of the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, namastes, attention-like standing (with right hand on chest/heart), bowing with folded hands, self-hand shaking, simple hand-on-chest, etc. are new greeting strategies directed to H's negative face, and forearm crossing, foot shake, closed hands or back of the hands knocking are gestures that accompany greetings directed to H's positive face. Nkwain (ibid) found that reactions were either positive, negative, or neutral and were shrouded in a myriad of relatively productive and linguistic and stylistic resources inter alia,

sarcasm, hyperbole, metaphors, etc. through which users successfully expressed feelings of doubt, fear and mistrust. Lastly, Fuh, and Fonki (ibid) indicated that nonverbal linguistic signals were used to express peace and the end of the crisis through dialogue. Furthermore, these signs showed that Anglophone Cameroonians are tired of their precarious condition, and as such, they brand boards that carry messages of peace to sensitise the world about what is happening in the North West and South West Regions.

### **6.Implication to Research and Practice**

Human beings live in a world that is characterised by economic, social and political crises. It has been noticed that whenever there is a crisis in any part of the world, language is used verbally or nonverbally in different communication channels to inform the public on what to do and not to do. During the covid-19 pandemic in Douala, language was used on billboard posters to inform the public on how to conduct themselves during this period. This study is of great value to linguists in that it shows types of signs and symbols that were used during this period. It also identifies the significance of these signs and symbols. In other words, the study broadens their understanding on the valuable use of signs and symbols during a pandemic. Furthermore, the study is also valuable to the public in that it teaches them simple practical things they should do and what not to do during a pandemic or epidemic so as to limit the rate of contamination and death rate too.

### **CONCLUSION**

As announced in the introduction of this paper, the world as a whole and the city of Douala in particular experienced a deadly disease in the first quarter of 2020, a disease which it had never experienced since creation. The entire world was in a total lock down. It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. In the midst of this pandemic, world leaders came up with different measures and strategies on how they could better educate and create awareness in their various populations concerning the effects of this disease. One of the measures put in place by these leaders (in the city of Douala) was the use of billboard posters. We have shown in this work that billboard posters stand out as the best medium among other media like the radio, the television, newspapers and journals to be used during pandemics in order to create awareness in the population because of varied reasons. First, these billboard posters carry pictures, symbols, colours, images, writings and drawings which facilitate understanding of the intended message. Secondly, many people can understand the message or messages on these billboards. That is, the literate and the illiterate. Third, where the text messages cannot be understood, pictures come in to complement them. Fourth, billboard posters are always placed in busy spots and road junctions. This is important because they catch the attention of many people. Fifth, billboard posters are always attractive. As such, they attract the attention of passers-by. Lastly, billboard posters are not expensive in terms of publicity as compared to other media like the radio, television, newspapers and journals which have a limited following. It is therefore an established fact that in the context of this work, billboard posters have been used by the powers that be in the city of Douala to limit the spread of COVID-19.

### Future Research

Human beings use signs and symbols on billboard posters every blessed day on the streets of Douala for different purposes. This study has examined the use of signs and symbols on billboard posters as a means of creating public awareness during the covid-19 pandemic. It has also shown the significance of these signs and symbols in the context of this study. This study limited itself only to the city of Douala. However, researchers can still conduct research on the use of signs and symbols on billboards posters in the other regions of Cameroon so as to draw a logical conclusion on the role they play during the pandemic in creating public awareness. Furthermore, a contrastive study could be carried out on the use of verbal and nonverbal communication in cautioning the population during this pandemic. Lastly, researchers can also investigate on the syntax of covid-19.

### References

- Adham, S.A. (2012). *A semiotic analysis of the iconic representation of women in the Middle Eastern Media (Unpublished Masters Dissertation)*. University of Birmingham.
- Almucharomah, S. K., Sahayu, W. and Triono, S. (2023). Using semiotic analysis to analyse the purpose of creating covid-19 meme. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 11(1), 27-36.
- Ananto, P. and Ningsih, S. (2020). Incorporation of smartphones and social media to promote mobile learning in an Indonesian vocational higher education setting. *Int. J. Interact. Mobile Technol*, 14 (1), 66-81.
- Apuge, M. E. and Abba. (2023). Conceptualisation of Covid-19 metaphors in the printed word in English. In C. A. Tabe, N. J. Sam (Eds.). *Responding to Global Challenges: Voices in Language and Literature*, (54-70). Denver, Colorado: Spears Books.
- Aristovnik, A. Keržič, D., Ravšelj, D., Tomaževič, N. and Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on life of higher education students: A global perspective. *Sustainability*,12(20), 8438.
- Asrifan, A. and Dewi, A. C. (2023). A semiotic analysis of Robert Frost's poem love and a question based on Charles Sander Peirce's Triangle Theory. *International Research Journal on Advanced Engineering Hub (IRIAEH)*, 1(01), 6-18.
- Aucejo, E. M., French, J., Araya, M. P. U. and Zafar, B. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on student experiences and expectations: Evidence from a survey. *Journal of Public Economics*, 191, 104271.
- Bahri, B. N. (2009). *Semiotic analysis on witch: The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S Lewis* (UnpublishedThesis). UIN Alauddin Makassar.
- Barthes, R. (1964). *Elements of semiology*. New York: HILL and WANG.
- Cobley, P. and Janz, L. (1999). *Introducing Semiotics*. United Kingdom: ICON BOOKS UK.
- Coker, M., Folayan, M. O., Michelow, I. C., Oladokun, R. E., Torbunde, N. and Sam-Agudu, N. A. (2020). Things must not fall apart: The ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in sub-Saharan Africa. *Pediatric Research*, 1–9.
- Cucinotta, D. and Vanelli, M. (2020). World Health Organisation declares Covid-19 a pandemic. *Acta Biomedica, Mattioli*, 91 (1), 157-160.
- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning. A panacea in the time of Covid-19 crisis. *J. Educ. Technol. Syst*, 49(1)5-22.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elhadary, T., Elhaty, I. A., Mohamed, A. A. and Alawna, M. (2020). Evaluation of academic performance of science

- and social science students in Turkish Universities during covid-19 crisis. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(11), 1740–1751.
- Elmer, T., Mephram, K. and Stadtfeld, C. (2020). Students under Lockdown: Comparisons of students' Social Networks and Mental Health before and during the COVID-19 Crisis in Switzerland. *PLOS ONE*, 15, e0236337.
- El-Said, G. R. (2021). How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect higher education learning experience? An empirical investigation of learners' academic performance at a university in a developing country. *Advances in Human-Computer Interaction*, 2021:1-10.
- Elsalem, L., Al-Azzam, N., Jum'ah, A. A., Obeidat, N., Sindiani, A. M. and Kheirallah, K. A. (2020). Stress and behavioral changes with remote E-exams during the Covid-19 pandemic: A cross-sectional study among undergraduates of medical sciences. *Annals of Medicine and Surgery*, 60, 271–279.
- Engzell, P., Frey, A. and Verhagen, M. D. (2021). Learning Loss Due to School Closures during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118, e2022376118.
- Febriani, S. R. (2020). Implementation of Arabic learning during Covid-19 emergency in Indonesia: hots, mots, or lots? *ALSINATUNA*, 5(2):117-129.
- Fuh, N. V. and Fonki, A. F. (2023b). A semiotic analysis of nonverbal linguistic signals used on social media during the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. *ATRAS*, 4(2), 24-42.
- Fuh, N. V. (2023d). An analysis of the communication strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic: The case of Apostolic Faith Church West and Central Africa. In C. A. Tabe, N. J. Sam (Eds.). *Responding to Global Challenges: Voices in Language and Literature*, (71-83). Denver, Colorado: Spears Books.
- Gistrama, I. and Prastiwi, Y. (2020). A semiotic analysis of the novel illustration on Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban by J. K. Rowling. *International Journal of Culture and Art Studies*, 4(2), 27-37.
- Ghogomou, S. M. (2020). COVID-19: Prevention and control measures in Cameroon. *REVUE DE L'ACADEMIE DES SCIENCES DU CAMEROUN*, 18 : 537-547.
- Gonzalez, S. Sarah, O. and Wesley, W. (2002). Language and advertising. Class project: Smooth Advertising. The language of alcohol advertising. London: Pitman.
- Gonzalez, T., De La Rubia, M. A., Hincz, K. P., ComasLopez, M., Subirats, L., Fort, S., Sacha, G. M. and Xie, H. (2020). Influence of COVID-19 confinement on students' performance in higher education. *PloS one*, 15(10), e0239490.
- Green, Z. A., Noor, U., Ahmed, F. and Himayat, L. (2021). Validation of the Fear of COVID-19 Scale in a Sample of Pakistan's University Students and Future Directions. *Psychological Reports*, 1, 1-24.
- Hashemi, A. and Adu-Gyamfi, S. (2021). Effects of COVID-19 on the academic performance of Afghan students and their level of satisfaction with online teaching. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 8(1), 1933684.
- Hasanah, A. (2010). *A semiotic analysis on Dagadu T-shirt (Unpublished Thesis)*. Islamic State University (UIN), Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.
- Henaku, E. A. (2020). COVID-19 online learning experience of college students: The case of Ghana. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Advanced Technology*, 1(2), 54–62.
- Horesh, D. and Brown, A. D. (2020). Traumatic stress in the age of COVID-19: A call to close critical gaps and adapt to new realities. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 12, 331-335.

- Joseph, O. A. (2023) The impact of COVID-19 on students' academic performance: The case of the university of Ghana business school, *Cogent Education*, 10:1-13.
- Jouve, M. (2000). *Publicite et Communication d'Entreprise: Theories et Pratique*. [Publicity and Communication of Enterprise: Theories and Practice]. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Rome Breal.
- Kaleem, M., Talha, M., Nazir, R. and Hafeez, R. (2020). Perception and the associated apprehension stemming from novel COVID-19 among Pakistani students. *Pakistan Armed Forces Medical Journal*, 70, S552-S559.
- Kernan, W. D. (2019). Health-related impediments to learning among dental and oral surgery students. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 47, 32-44.
- Khan, T. M. (2020). Use of social media and WhatsApp to conduct learning activities during the Covid-19 lockdown in Pakistan. *Int. J. Pharm. Pract*, 90(1),10-29.
- Kress, G. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading Images*. (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Kugelmann, R. (2003). Pain as symptom, pain as sign. *In Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine*, 7:29-50.
- Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E. and Liu, J. (2020). Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement. *Educational Researcher*, 49(8), 549–565.
- Kuzu, S. T. (2016). The impact of a semiotic analysis theory-based writing activity on students' writing skills. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 63:37-54.
- Lederer, A. M., Hoban, M. T., Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S. and Eisenberg, D. (2020). More than inconvenienced: The unique needs of US college students during the CoViD-19 pandemic. *Health Education & Behavior*, 48(1), 14–19.
- Manoy, W. (2009). *Semiotic in the novel Angel and Demons (Unpublished Thesis)*. UIN Alauddin Makassar.
- Mansyur, M. (2010). *A semiotic analysis of the novel: The Five People You Met Heaven (Unpublished Thesis)*. Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta.
- Mikhaeil, C., A. and Baskerville, R. L. (2019). Using Semiotics to Analyze Representational Complexity in Social Media. *Information and Organisation*, 29(4): 100-271.
- Mulyono, H. Suryoputro, G. (2020a). The use of social media platform to promote authentic learning environment in higher education setting. *Sci. Educ. Today*, 10(2),105-123.
- Mulyono, H. Suryoputro, G. (2020b). The use of social media platform to promote authentic learning environment in higher education setting. *Sci. Educ. Today*, 10(2),105-123.
- Mulyono, H. Suryoputro, G. and Jamil, S.R. (2021). The application of WhatsApp to support online Learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *PMC*, 7(8): e07853.
- Murtaisah, D. (2020). *Semiotics analysis of meme for woman at @9gaggirly Instagram account (Unpublished Thesis)*. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
- Nisa, K. N. (2017). *Cattleya Orchid Signs in Colombiana (2011) Film (unpublished Thesis)*. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta: Jakarta.
- Nkwain, J. (2023). Linguistic undertones of (Mis)apprehension, (Mis)trust, pandemic and assurance. In C. A. Tabe,

- N. J. Sam (Eds.). *Responding to Global Challenges: Voices in Language and Literature*, (84-107). Denver, Colorado: Spears Books.
- Nyinondi, O.S. and Mwakapina, J. W. (2023). Perspectives of students, teachers and parents on the WhatsApp platform remedy for Covid-19 learning restrictions in Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(3), 246-255.
- Olayinka, A. I., Taiwo, V. O., Raji Oyelade, A. and Farai, I. P. (2005). *Methodology of Basic and Applied Research*. Ibadan: Dabfol Printers.
- Owusu-Fordjour, C., Koomson, C. K. and Hanson, D. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on learning: The perspective of the Ghanaian student. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 7, 88-101.
- Pauzan, A.A. (2018). A Semiotic Analysis of the John Wick 1 Film Using Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotic Theory (Unpublished Thesis). Alauddin State Islamic University of Makassar.
- Peirce, C. S. (1931-1935). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. (Vol.1-6) Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Pokhrel, S. and Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133-141.
- Pratiwi, C. Muchtar, M. and Perangin-Angin, A. B. (2022). A visual semiotic analysis on Webtoon True Beauty. *International Journal of English and Applied Linguistics*, 2(1), 1-7.
- Priel, B. Rabinowitz, B. and Pels, R. J. (1991). A semiotic perspective on chronic pain: Implications for the interaction between patient and physician. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 64: 65-71.
- Qiu, J., Shen, B., Zhao, M., Wang, Z., Xie, B. and Xu, Y. (2020). A nationwide survey of psychological distress among Chinese people in the COVID-19 epidemic: Implications and policy recommendations. *General Psychiatry*, 33, e100213.
- Quintner, J. Buchanan, D. Cohen, M. and Taylor, A. (2003). Signification and pain: A semiotic reading of Fibromyalgia. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 24:345-54.
- Ridwan, I. N. (2013). *Analysis semiotic in the novel Poison by Sara Poole (Unpublished Thesis)*. UIN Alauddin Makassar.
- Rifa'I, B. (2010). *A semiotic analysis on Coca-Cola's commercial advertisements (Unpublished Thesis)*. Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.
- Rwigema, P. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on the education sector. The case of Rwanda. *The Strategic Journal of Business & Change Management*, 8(1), 150-169.
- Rydahl-Hansen, S. (2005). Hospitalised patients experience suffering in life with incurable cancer. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Science*, 19:213-222.
- Rydahl-Hansen, S. and Eriksen, T. R. (2009). How are verbal cues and signs of suffering expressed and acknowledged within palliative nursing? *Vard i Norden/ Nordic Journal of Nursing Research and Clinical Studies*, 29(3), 42-46.
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12, e7541.
- Saussure, D. F. (1915). *Course in general linguistics* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Hill Book Company.
- Sobur, A. (2003). *Semiotika komunikasi*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosydakarya.

- Son, C., Hegde, S., Smith, A., Wang, X. and Sasangohar, F. (2020). Effects of COVID-19 on college students' mental health in the United States: Interview survey study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22, e21279.
- Sugiharti, D. R. (2018). Beauty construction on pond's white beauty Gita Gutawa version: Semiotic analysis of advertisement. *Advances in Social Sciences Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)*, 228: 384-388.
- Syahdini, R.Z. (2019). *Semiotic analysis of L'oreal Paris advertisement (Unpublished Thesis)*. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
- Tsotra, D. Janson, M. and Cecez-Keemanovic, D. (2004). Marketing on the internet: A semiotic analysis. *Proceedings of the Tenth American Conference on Information Systems, New York, August 2004*, 1-11.
- UNESCO, (2020a, March 4). Education from disruption to recovery: COVID-19 impact on education. <https://en.unesco.org/COVID19/educationresponse>.
- Warda, F. (2023). The pragmatics of greeting and face management in the Covid-19 era in Northern Cameroon. In C. A. Tabe, N. J. Sam (Eds.). *Responding to Global Challenges: Voices in Language and Literature*, (39-53). Denver, Colorado: Spears Books.
- Wernli, D. Bottcher, L. Vanackere, F. Kaspiarovich, Y. Masood, M. and Levrat, N. (2023). Understanding and governing global systemic crises in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: A complexity perspective. *Global Policy*, 14(2), 207-228.
- Wijayanto, C. S. and Iswari, F. (2021). Semiotics analysis of Roland Barthes' theory on Pocari Sweat's "Sweat for Dream" advertisement. *Cultural Syndrome*, 3(2), 100-108.
- Witte, S. M. (2006). *What you need Eddie, is another remedial reading class: A semiotic analysis of representations of literacy in popular school film (Unpublish Ph.D. Thesis)*. Kansas State University.
- World Health Organisation. (2020). Covid-19 press briefing. Geneva.
- Yakin, H. S. M. and Totu, A. (2014). The Semiotic Perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A Brief Comparative Study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 155, 4-8.