

A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF THE PHILIPPINE BROADSHEET FRONTPAGE COVERS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION

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Abstract

The threat of Covid-19 continues to plague the whole world including the Philippines. Hence, the need of the people to access news information from all media sources such as the broadsheets has never been as primordial as before. Broadsheets are considered aesthetic genre which combined words and pictures to convey news realities. Hence, this study analyzed how language and visual elements delivered meanings about the COVID-19 situation in the country as portrayed in the front covers of selected broadsheets using the Gibbons, Koszary, and Tandi's Non-Literary Reading approach. The study showed that Manila Bulletin and Philippine Daily Inquirer front covers disseminate negative emotions, warnings, and fear that urge the Filipino to be vigilant. However, The Manila Times broadsheet disseminates positive emotion, hope, and encouragement to the Filipinos to get vaccinated. This implies that visual features in multimodal texts are related to the message of the whole, and that visual meaning is becoming the most significant in this multimodal world. Therefore, the researcher recommends this innovative technique for analyzing multimodal text to learn how to interpret the text, visual elements, and understand the message just by looking at the visual surface.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Philippine broadsheet

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INTRODUCTION

During the height of COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 and the eventual declaration of enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) in many nations including the Philippines, there has been a rise in the need to access news and information from different media sources. People are attuned to their gadgets, TV, and radio to keep updates about the spread of COVID-19 virus all across the country. Aside from these visual media, however, newspaper broadsheets can be actually accessed online and still serve as a source of information. But reading for others is difficult because it requires effort that readers have to read from beginning to the end just to make sense from the text, and it is a very linear thing or traditional according to Kalantzis (2020).

On the other hand, broadsheet front covers offer instant information of the

featured story and understanding to the visual meaning that at first glance you seem to immediately understand what the visual implies. This visual meaning is becoming most significant because of the increasing multimodal world where in text and images are being combined to make more powerful communication. Indeed, print media today such as posters, magazines, newspapers, etc. contain visual images and design elements in addition to text, as well as digital media with video, audio, graphic design. And in this multimodal world, it is inappropriate to concentrate solely on the written or spoken element, treating other elements as negligible and as non-linguistic extras. Each element attached in a single communicative act, and their collaborative functions should be considered (Crystal, 2011).

However, readers experience difficulty because of the shift from mono modal to multimodal that is disseminated in digital form (Serafini, 2010). Thus, new skills are needed for production and consumption where readers must learn how to traverse, design, interpret, and evaluate multimodal texts before and beyond collaborative practices. (Anstey and Bull, 2006; Serafini, 2009a, and Unsworth, 2002). Multimodal text is probably a mixture of multiple semiotic modes: written text, spoken language, gesture, spatial, visual images, graphics elements, video and audio clips, hyperlinks and other means of representation, and which necessitate other tactics for navigation and understanding (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996).

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) proposed a method that looks at multiple modes of communication including the text, color, and images, namely Multimodal discourse analysis. It is a technique of discourse analysis that not only looks at how each mode communicates, but how they interrelate with one another to create semiotic meaning, and which entail how this strategy deviates from other branches of discourse analysis such as, rhetorical analysis, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, speech act theory, pragmatics, ethnography of communication, cognitive psychology which most concerns with grammar, syntax, lexis, or in other words, with written and spoken language alone. Unlike multimodal discourse analysis, it studies multiple modes of communication and their collaboration.

Through a multimodal analysis approach, previous scholars were able to analyze multimodal texts with its text portrayal, visual image, the combination of

these, and found out the meaning it presents in an intelligible view. Sawi, I. (2015) studied a newspaper and found out that it is biased. Aazam F, Baig T, Azam Z (2021) analyzed a newspaper's political cartoons and revealed that it disseminates fear. Abed and Al-Munshy (2017) examines front cover of selected Arab women magazines and found out that visuals, such as color, font, distance, shots, etc. are used quite differently to convey a certain discourse that is absolutely contradictory to social standards to provoke equality, and feminism. Many scholars have proven that we can better understand the meaning implied in a multimodal text by analyzing all the modes embodied on it, and how they function together, through multimodal analysis.

In early 2020, indeed, visual media circulated about Covid-19 —which is known as a contagious disease and extremely dangerous (WHO, 2020), so people are closely following what the visual media delineated about the Covid-19 pandemic situation. But most readers only look at the language being expressed and ignore other semiotic modes. However, it is not enough that we only study the language presented in a multimodal text —which also offers other semiotic resources.

A linguist, Michael Foucault (1970) suggested 'discourse analysis' to examine the language beyond the sentence; how the language functions and how meaning is constructed in social, cultural, political, and historical context. Where in, readers/listeners would truly understand written or spoken language by knowing the relation of language to its social context. Significantly, it aims to understand how language is used in real life situations.

However, some linguists tried to look at discourses critically, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) eventually emerged then. CDA is an interdisciplinary method for analyzing language use and its relationship to social context, but specifically intends to divulge ideology and power. It primarily studies how discourses are constructed and how dominance, oppression, inequality, and liberation are enacted in social identities and social relationships (Barlett, 2012; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992b; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

However, the way of communication is not only focused on speaking and writing. There are different modes of communication and are actually often combined to communicate. In linguistic terms, this is called multimodality. Multimodality is an

inter-disciplinary method that recognizes communication and representation to be more than about language (Bezemer, 2012). This implies that the modal resources existing in a culture need to be seen as a coherent, fundamental field, of distinct sources for making meaning.

People's way of communication is not only by using language, but also by interacting with the use of gestures, gaze, facial expression, posture, body movement and changes of position. And in terms of texts and artifacts that people use when they communicate are more than just written language like textbooks, magazines, newspapers, and websites that features are usually a mixture of pictures, color, writing, as well as live animations including motion, music, and the spoken word (Jewitt, 2013, p.1). All of these are modes of communication and combining two or multiple modes in discourse is a way of multimodality. Multimodality affirms that language is just one of many resources for making meaning.

Jewitt (2013) outlines six (6) reasons for, and benefits of multimodality and taking a multimodal approach to look beyond language: (1) *it is holistic*; it looks at all forms of communication such as text, image, audio, space, etc., and its connection to each other as to the meaning of the whole, (2) *it provides a new lens for research*; multimodality provides an all-in research lens that allows technologies and objects that are part of our daily lives that we no longer notice, and the hidden embodied involvement can be seen in a different way., (3) *it is sensitive to notions of power*; the multimodal approach is attuned to investigate power relationships, and how they are greatly reflected through the different types of access people have to means of communication., (4) *as well as difference*; A multimodal understanding of how digital technologies reshape modal skills goes beyond intuitive ideas about what a technology can do, to provide a detailed analysis of digital resources (5) *it helps to identify new semiotic resources*; multimodality can contribute to the identification and progress of new digital resources, and new uses of existing resources - especially in digital settings., (6) *it provides innovative research methods*; multimodality creates a substantial contribution to existing research strategy for data collection and analysis, and domains within social research,. These changes include color, frame, size; new image and captions; the addition of voiceover; new focus depending on the layout;

and comparisons of new elements, likewise, the material affordance and features of different technological platforms that shape what can be done with text.

In the present society, language is no longer limited to texts alone. It has proven that the interplay between graphics and text is more effective in pushing people and helping them make judgements. Therefore, learners must be able to communicate efficiently in this increasingly multimodal world.

Multimodal texts can be paper-based, live, or digital. In this research, however, it focuses on analyzing a multimodal text, specifically, a digital newspaper –a digital version of a printed newspaper. Obviously, the newspaper consists of written text and image which considers it a type of multimodal text

In a multimodal text like a newspaper, portrayal of image is essential as it has vital means to the interpretation of the whole. Aazam F, Baig T, Azam Z (2021) investigates Covid-19 Pakistani newspaper's political cartoons. Qualitative research and a multimodal analysis approach was conducted to analyze the multimodal piece. The study tells that these political cartoons propagate fear and mental illness towards the people.

Melissa Schieble (2014) analyzed images of American Born Chinese through Critical Visual Analysis and found out regarding image syntax and layout portrays the main character as small —powerless. It also implies that we have to critically understand the sophisticated implications of the author about racism against Chinese Americans and others. Indeed, the creators of visuals can organize the modality options to express specific meanings.

Moreover, the front covers of news magazines are an effective multimodal genre that invites readers to buy the magazine not only by attracting their attention but also by assuming a relevant position, especially the cover story. To consider the argument that a front cover can deliver in support of that position, an argumentative reconstruction is required that also needs to seriously consider the way in which verbal and visual modes interact to create meaning. In his research, Tseronis A. (2021) researched the rhetorical and argumentative bearing of the multimodal figure on the covers of *The Economist*, and it focused on defining semiotic arrangements, and establishing the conditions under which these figures can be shown to contribute

meaning that serves the argument delivered on the front cover. The front cover of The Economist invites readers to buy certain issues that the writers featured.

Another, Abed and Al-Munshy (2017) examines front cover of chosen Arab women magazines through a multimodal critical discourse analysis and found out that these magazines seek to create modality to convince readers and viewers of cover stories. Visuals, such as color, font, distance, shots, etc. are used in a different way to convey a specific discourse that is completely contrary to social norms, the actual image of Arab women and their problems, needs, and desires.

This study aims to analyze the Covid-19 pandemic situation depicted in the front covers of Philippine broadsheets employing a multimodal analysis approach. Specifically, it seeks to address the research question:

1. What particular message about Covid-19 pandemic is revealed through the front covers of Philippine broadsheets along with the following features:
 - a. Genre, audience, and purpose
 - b. Structure and style
 - c. Typographical, graphological, and other features of text
 - d. Visual image and layout
 - e. Response to message

METHOD

To conduct this study, qualitative research was used since it studies events in a naturalistic setting. Furthermore, qualitative research is a definite design for getting in depth information about an issue, problem, situation or phenomena. Therefore, through this design the researcher would be able to get in-depth data particularly about Covid-19 pandemic situation. The researcher did a subjective approach to data collection, analysis and evaluation. Specifically, the researcher adapted the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) of Kress Gunther and Van Leeuwen (2006). It provides a systematic and critical way of learning not only language but also various semiotic modes such as image, photograph, color, or graphics, and the

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combination of them to determine semiotic meaning and its relevance to the social context

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Mania Bulletin

Image 1: Manila Bulletin Front Page Cover



1.2 Genre, Audience, and Purpose

Table 1: Manila Bulletin’s Genre, Audience, and Purpos

coveromg Covid-19 pandemic situation	Digital newspaper front page Genre Genre
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spread of the	Audience	Filipino who has concern with the Covid-19 virus and pandemic situation in Philippines
of	Purpose	To inform the Filipino about the update Manila Bulletin regarding Covid-19 Pandemic issues and the safe protocol it implies

The data in Table 1 showed the first step of the non-literary reading approach of Gibbons, et al (2019) which is to identify the genre, audience, and purpose of non-literary text. The outcome genre of Manila Bulletin is an online newspaper covering the situations of the Covid-19 pandemic that overwhelmed the globe. The major target audience of the news are the Filipinos concerned with the widespread virus of Covid in the Philippines. Further, its main purpose is to disseminate important information concerning pandemic issues and safe protocols in the midst of pandemic.

Identifying genre or text type that is exploring is important as this will often denote the purpose of the text and defining a specific target audience affects the way text is constructed.

1.2 Structure and Style

The front page is foregrounded with a headline, 'Ph at critical risk for Covid' which uses emotive language 'critical' to hook the reader. Which would bring reader to have concern to the issue. This negative emotive language conveys negative emotion to the reader. To bring a deeper connection between the text and the reader. To urge the reader to want to know how critical the Philippines has been to Covid.

The style of the text is obviously in a serious tone, so readers would take the matters seriously, as well as the written text 'EMERGENCY', 'Full Capacity', 'Metro Manila facing 'severe outbreak' of infections -OCTA'',

and 'COVID-19 cases breach 3M' were in a serious and critical tone. This tone creates a degree of tension within the reader. It raises their focus because the ideas being offered are essential.

However, the caption '90 M vaccinated Filipinos eyed by June' uses positive language which gives a positive tone to the readers. This indicates that despite the bad news appearing there is still a positive visualization because it shows the assumption of action.

The language structure and style create connection and affection in the reader. In this way the writer can convey the message he wants to convey to the reader or what the writer wants to be the reader's response to the texts reader reads.

1.3 Typographical, Graphological, and other features of text

The font used for 'Ph at critical risk for Covid', 'Metro Manila facing 'severe outbreak' of infections -OCTA', '90 M vaccinated Filipinos eyed by June' and 'COVID-19 cases breach 3M' is *Serif* to indicate that the stated information is trustworthy. Because *Serif* font indicates formality, professionalism, and sophistication that make readers feel more classical, historical, and complacent.

On the other hand, the font used for 'EMERGENCY', 'Full Capacity', and '28,007' is *Sansserif* to make the text clean and clear. It integrates simplicity and being modern which bring the reader feel opportune. If so, the written statements will be convincing for the reader. Also, it is highlighted by making the text in red to capture attention and symbolize danger. And this generates concern in the reader. The mentioned headline and captions used bolding to give emphasis to the text and capture attention. Additionally, the word 'EMERGENCY' is the only word that uses a capitalization to give it more emphasis than other text input.

Moreover, 'COVID-19 cases breach 3M' article is highlighted by a blue background, because blue also symbolizes grief. It portrays that reaching 3 million Covid-19 cases in the country is indeed a miserable

news.

As to the font size, the headlines ‘Ph at critical risk for Covid’ and ‘EMERGENCY’ are bigger than other text to give it more emphasis and draw attention. In terms of graphology, these headlines are positioned at the top of the front-page cover, ensuring that the headlines stand out

1.4 Visual Image and Layout

The hospital is seen as the biggest picture on the front page taking most of the cover to let the masses know that the situation of most hospitals is at full capacity and to signify to the reader that it is the most concern that day.

The photo of the hospital is positioned at the top of the cover along with the biggest headlines which draws attention to the reader. This positioning then encourages the reader to subconsciously connect the headlines with the image. Which gives the reader more connection and understanding to the situation.

The photo of the hospital was taken in a long shot to see the area it covered. So that reader would have a connection to the environment it covers. The hospital included data indicating that it is currently at the full capacity of Covid-19 patients. It also overlaps another picture with data of the high number of new Covid-19 cases in the country to bolster the headline. To make the reader’s connection and attachment deeper to the country’s situation regarding the pandemic.

1.5 Response to Message

In the front page, the first thing that catches attention is the word ‘EMERGENCY’ which makes the reader think about what is the dangerous situation that requires immediate action and would take turns looking at the headline. After reading the headline ‘PH at critical risk for Covid’, it will leave curiosity in the readers how critical the country has been because of

Covid and will give readers the urge to read the data regarding the Covid-19 pandemic situation. Furthermore, the input data brings a shocking and sad reaction to the readers. This fulfills the purpose of the author, which is to inform readers about the issue, to bring readers to read the news story featured, and to elicit an emotional response in the reader.

2. Philippine Daily Inquirer



Image 2: Philippine Daily Inquirer Front Page Cover

2.1 Genre, Audience, and Purpose

Table 2: Manila Bulletin’s Genre, Audience, and Purpos

Genre	Digital newspaper front page covering Covid-19 pandemic situation
spread of	Filipino who has concern with the
Audience	Covid-19 virus and pandemic situation
in the	Philippines
of	To inform the Filipino about the update

Purpose	Manila Bulletin regarding Covid-19 Pandemic issues and the safe protocol it implies
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The data in Table 2 showed the first step of the non-literary reading approach of Gibbons, et al (2019) which is to identify the genre, audience, and purpose of non-literary text. The outcome genre of Philippine Daily Inquirer is an online newspaper covering the situations of the Covid-19 pandemic that overwhelmed the globe. The major target audience of the news are the Filipinos concerned with the widespread virus of Covid in the Philippines. Further, its main purpose is to disseminate important information concerning pandemic issues and safe protocols in the midst of pandemic.

Identifying genre or text type that is exploring is important as this will often denote the purpose of the text and defining a specific target audience affects the way text is constructed.

The language structure and style create connection and affection in the reader. In this way the writer can convey the message he wants to convey to the reader or what the writer wants to be the reader's response to the texts the reader reads

The data in Table 1 showed the first step of the non-literary reading approach of Gibbons, et al (2019) which is to identify the genre, audience, and purpose of non-literary text. The outcome genre of Philippine Daily Inquirer is an online newspaper covering the situations of the Covid-19 pandemic that overwhelmed the globe. The major target audience of the news are the Filipinos concerned with the widespread virus of Covid in the Philippines. Further, its main purpose is to disseminate important information concerning pandemic issues and safe protocols in the midst of pandemic.

Identifying genre or text type that is exploring is important as this will often denote the purpose of the text and defining a specific target

audience affects the way text is constructed.

The language structure and style create connection and affection in the reader. In this way the writer can convey the message he wants to convey to the reader or what the writer wants to be the reader's response to the texts the reader reads.

2.2 Structure and Style

The front page is centered with a headline, "PH NOW AT 'CRITICAL RISK'; COVID CASES REACH 3M" which uses emotive language 'CRITICAL RISK' to hook the reader's attention. Which would bring readers to have concern to the issue. To bring a deeper connection between the text and the reader. To urge the reader to want to know how critical the Philippines has been to Covid. Moreover, these phrases of emotive language have a negative value, and this negative language gives a negative tone to the reader. This tone creates a degree of tension within the reader. It increases their focus because the facts being offered are essential.

2.3 Typographical, Graphological, and other features of text

Sans-serif was the used font for the headline "PH NOW AT 'CRITICAL RISK'; COVID CASES REACH 3M" and 'GENERIC COVID DRUG GETS FDA OK' to make it look clean and modern. Since *Sans-serif* integrates simplicity and being modern which bring the reader feel opportune. It only proves that what is stated in the text is reliable. If so, the written statements will be convincing for the reader. These headlines are designed in capitalized letters and used bolding in order to catch the reader's attention. The headline "PH NOW AT 'CRITICAL RISK'; COVID CASES REACH 3M" is the biggest text among the others, so readers will read it first.

2.4 Visual Image and Layout

The picture of the patient and nurses was designed as the largest image which covered half of the front page and positioned at the top to indicate that this is the priority than the other small image at the bottom. This Covid-19 pandemic situation is given more priority than the economic and political issues below.

The photo was taken in a medium-long shot to capture the three characters and the surroundings. Medium long shots are used to indicate how the subject relates to the environment. Similar to how the patient and nurses relate to the hospital capacity.

Obviously, the attached image is mostly in shade of blue which symbolizes grief and indicates this as a miserable story.

2,5 Response to Message

At first glance, the reader will immediately turn to the picture, followed by the headline placed below it. The illustrations and text are able to leave intense emotions in the readers. Because other than its purpose to inform, the portrayal of its elements is to warn, frighten, to make citizens more wary of the threat of the high spread of Covid-19.

3. The Manila Times

Image 3: The Manila Times Front Page Cover



3.1 Genre, Audience, and Purpose

Table 1: Manila Bulletin’s Genre, Audience, and Purpos

Genre	Digital newspaper front page covering Covid-19 pandemic situation
Audience	Filipino who has concern with the spread of Covid-19 virus and pandemic situation in the Philippines

Purpose	To inform the Filipino about the update of Manila Bulletin regarding Covid-19 Pandemic issues and the safe protocol it implies
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The data in Table 1 showed the first step of non-literary reading approach of Gibbons, et al (2019) which is to identify the genre, audience, and purpose of non-literary text. The outcome genre of The Manila Times is an online newspaper covering the situations of the Covid-19 pandemic that overwhelmed the globe. The major target audience of the news are the Filipinos concerned with the widespread virus of Covid in the Philippines. Further, its main purpose is to disseminate important information concerning pandemic issues and safe protocols in the midst of pandemic.

Identifying genre or text type that is exploring is important as this will often denote the purpose of the text and defining a specific target audience affects the way text is constructed.

3.2 Structure and Style

The front page is centered with a headline, 'Govt ready for Alert Level 4' which uses emotive language, an emotive language that gives a positive value, which in turn gives a positive tone to the reader. In other words, the headline used an optimistic tone which made the reader realize that even though a lot of bad things are happening in the middle of the pandemic. Yet there is a belief that one can be prepared and survive if everyone is united. Logically, to indicate to readers that the country can be prepared if people get vaccinated.

The language structure and style create connection and affection in the reader. In this way the writer can convey the message he wants to convey to the reader or what the writer wants to be the reader's response

to the texts the reader reads.

3.3 Typographical, Graphological, and other features of text

The font style used for the headline is *Sans-serif* which is modern and clean. It integrates simplicity and being modern which bring the reader feel opportune. This signifies that the text embodied is reliable. If so, the written statements will be convincing for the reader. Evidently, the headline is the biggest among the other texts, it uses bolding, and also it is positioned at the center of the frontpage which catches the attention of the reader.

Below the largest image, the caption 'WAITING FOR A SHOT' is capitalized and bold which draws attention. Also, the text is in red color which symbolizes will-power and shows the people's strong determination to wait for a shot or vaccination against the Covid-19 virus.

3.4. Visual Image and Layout

The photo containing a crowd currently waiting for a shot for vaccination was made large, covering almost half of the front page, and positioned at the top of the cover. This entails the image as the most essential feature on the cover. The image color is mostly shades of blue which symbolizes freedom.

The photo was taken in a long shot in order to capture the crowd and the setting. The shot enables the reader to see the crowd interact through their body language, enabling the reader to draw conclusions that the crowd is actually waiting for their shot, such as understanding that they are determined.

3.5 Response to Message

At first glance, the reader will immediately turn to the headline 'Govt ready for Alert Level 4', then the picture placed above it, followed

by the caption 'WAITING FOR A SHOT' below the photograph. This information gives positive mind, hope, and assurance to the Filipino that the government is ready for the threat of alert level 4 of Covid-19.

CONCLUSION

Today, the world is increasingly multimodal wherein texts and visuals are being combined and designed to make powerful communication. Pertinently, the current research investigates how the Philippine broadsheet front covers portrayed visual features to reveal a particular message about COVID-19 pandemic situation. Through the non-literary reading approach of Gibbons et al (2009) grounded on MCDA of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), the researcher successfully analyzed the three (3) Philippine broadsheet front covers and found out that the Manila Bulletin and Philippine Daily Inquirer's images, texts or visual features are designed not only to provide information but also to warn people on the current pandemic situation, to wake up readers, to disseminate negative emotions and fear to the readers that logically enforce Filipino to follow the protocols and to be vigilant on the rising number of daily Covid-19 cases. However, The Manila Times disseminates positive emotion, hope, and encouragement to the Filipino to get vaccinated. Additionally, the front page of the three (3) broadsheets portrayed the Covid-19 pandemic issue as dominant compared to the political and other issues. The three broadsheets strive for the issue to be given more attention and concern.

However, if such broadsheet front covers are just investigated or evaluated with its language alone and neglect the visual elements, the reader will have only limited knowledge and will believe only what is presented in the text publications. But because the researcher has thoroughly used the non-literary reading approach grounded on MCDA, we have realized that in addition to providing information, newspapers also have something to convey and influence in the reader through the visual meaning. This implies that visual features of text and image in multimodal texts are related to the message of the whole. Similar to how Sawi, I. (2015) studied a newspaper and found out that it is biased. Aazam F, Baig T, Azam Z (2021)

analyzed a newspaper's political cartoons and revealed that it disseminates fear. Abed and Al-Munshy (2017) examines front cover of selected Arab women magazines and found out that visuals, such as color, font, distance, shots, etc. are used quite differently to convey a certain discourse that is absolutely contradictory to social standards to provoke equality, and feminism.

This further entails that CDA, and other approaches of discourse analysis are not enough, most specially in this multimodal world it is not possible to focus exclusively on the language. All the elements integrate in a single communicative act, and their functions need to be considered (Crystal, 2011) as it has something to do with the meaning it conveys. Moreover, since reading for others is difficult because it requires effort that readers have to read from beginning to the end just to make sense from the text, and it is a very linear thing or traditional, the non-chronological approach is the demand and modern way of analyzing multimodal text because at first glance the reader can infer the message it conveys (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

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