

Unraveling the Rainbow: Language and Identity in the LGBTQIA+ Memetic Linguistic Landscape

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the language and identity of the LGBTQIA+ community within the memetic linguistic landscape and their perceptions of LGBTQIA+ signs and symbols about inclusivity and exclusivity. The study employed a qualitative research design to analyze 50 LGBTQIA+ memes from the internet and interviewed eight LGBTQIA+ members using interview guide questions for the focus group discussion. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar Analysis, the findings reveal that the analyzed memes' representational, interactional, and compositional meta-semiotic tasks were evident. These memes effectively present as objects of contemplation and narrate the lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community. By employing Peirce's Triadic model, which examines the interplay of the representamen, object, and interpretant in meaning-making categories, the study revealed that LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identities in the memetic linguistic landscape through unity and community empowerment, fear of coming out, and social commentaries on LGBTQIA+ issues. Focusing on LGBTQIA+ perceptions of how semiotic elements play a significant role in conveying messages of inclusivity and exclusivity, three themes emerged from the thematic analysis: symbol of existence and identity, unity for activism and advocacy, and manifestation of acceptance and awareness. Based on the research findings, semiotics emerges as a powerful tool that can unravel nuanced meanings and offer practical solutions, advocating specifically for equality, respect, and inclusivity regardless of gender diversities. In line with the research findings, the implications directly impact policymakers, educational institutions, meme creators, and the LGBTQIA+ community, enlightening them about the potential of semiotics in promoting equality and inclusivity.

Keywords: applied linguistics, semiotics, visual grammar analysis, triadic model, memes, LGBTQIA+ community, Philippines

1. Introduction

Identity is shaped by individuals' choice of words and communication styles, which are not neutral. They are tied to specific social groups and cultural identities, reflecting the ideologies and values of those groups. As a result, language becomes a vital tool through which people express their belonging to specific communities and differentiate themselves from others (Oyebanji, 2022). Thus, language is not merely a collection of words; it encompasses cultural beliefs, lifestyles, ideas, and perspectives that shape the roles and identities of individuals within society.

In this linguistic context, the problematic issue faced by LGBTQIA+ is the widespread use of derogatory terms, which normalizes discriminatory language where such expressions are accepted, perpetuates stereotypes, and contributes to a culture of intolerance (Borkens & Exner, 2023). Moreover, revealing one's identity can become a challenging process for the LGBTQIA+ community (Kuhzwayo, 2021). These negative perceptions can lead to discrimination, bias, and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, creating a hostile environment for the LGBTQIA+ community.

In the Philippines, problems of societal marginalization arise from a lack of understanding and inclusivity of Filipino queer language, highlighting the need for broader linguistic recognition and acceptance across social groups (Ulla, Macareg, & Ferrera, 2024). The misinterpretation of queer language contributes to the marginalization of LGBTQIA+ individuals. When their unique linguistic expressions are misunderstood or dismissed, it reinforces societal prejudices and alienates them further.

Understanding a person's language and identity through memes is one of the most prevalent semiotic modes in online linguistics. Memes are texts or pictures encompassing specific issues and events that ignite active discourse since they rapidly spread on social media (Almucharomah, Sahayu, & Triono, 2023). Among the various memes widely circulating on social media are LGBTQIA+ memes. Analyzing their semiotic elements helps elucidate how these memes influence the identities of the LGBTQIA+ community within the memetic linguistic landscape.

Over the years, semiotics has offered a theoretical framework enabling researchers to uncover the complexities of symbols, signs, and meanings embedded within various forms of communication. Semiotics provides the tools to analyze and interpret the intricate web of signs that influence and shape our daily experiences (Jagarlapoodi, 2023). Additionally, it clarifies how people produce, transmit, and receive meaning by analyzing and interpreting the external world. Thus, employing semiotics to analyze the critical modes presented in the memes provides a robust framework for understanding how the LGBTQIA+ community expresses its identities through memes.

Several linguists have navigated the significance of the semiotic process in analyzing images. In particular, Kress and van Leeuwen specifically developed a framework for analyzing visual communication through a social semiotic lens, known as visual grammar analysis, rooted in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (Muhassin, 2021). However, this analysis extends Halliday's linguistic principles to visual communication, providing tools to decode the meanings embedded in visual texts. Their framework considers how color, composition, and spatial arrangement function as semiotic resources, much like words and sentences in spoken or written language.

Visual grammar analysis has historically concentrated on the explicit and implied meanings of depicted objects such as individuals, places, and objects while primarily addressing compositional aspects through formal considerations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). However, in their framework, they argued that visual composition is a kind of grammar that combines objects, people, and places to create meaningful wholes. This theory is significant in analyzing the meta-semiotic tasks depicted in analyzing the LGBTQIA+ memes found in the online linguistic landscape. The semiotic analysis of each corpus unravels the hidden meaning and symbolism depicted in the LGBTQIA+ memes.

Peirce's Semiotic theory (1991) is a significant framework for image interpretation and meaning-making. This theory posits that an object possesses a logical influence, determining something as a sign. This

sign, in turn, becomes a determinant or influencer, shaping an interpretation or interpretant—essentially another sign. This process unfolds iteratively, creating a chain of interpretants that cascade through the layers of meaning.

The research addresses the LGBTQIA+ community, which struggles to reveal its identities. The analysis can raise linguistic awareness in society that internet memes can contribute to forming LGBTQIA+ identities in the digital sphere. This linguistic investigation plays a pivotal role in promoting inclusive language practices. Understanding the impact of derogatory terms and the influence of language on perceptions allows linguists to contribute to efforts to create linguistic environments that foster respect and understanding.

On a broader note, educational institutions, particularly the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (C.H.E.D.), can utilize this study to integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusivity into teaching methods for secondary and tertiary educators. In particular, this involves collaborative workshops and training programs, developing inclusive teaching resources, and advocating for policies and guidelines that support LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in educational settings (McGuire, Anderson, & Michaels, (2022). These interventions can be piloted in partnership with schools and universities to assess their effectiveness in improving school environment, reducing discrimination, and supporting the well-being of LGBTQIA+ students and staff.

The results may enrich academic literature and support the legalization of the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression (S.O.G.I.E.) bill in the Philippines. The realization of this can be achieved through an active engagement with the policymakers, specifically in the Local Government Unit (L.G.U.), to present research findings, advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights provisions in the S.O.G.I.E. bill, and raise awareness about the importance of addressing LGBTQIA+ issues while gaining support for policy reform efforts.

Drawing back from the previous linguistic studies, the researchers have mainly explored the LGBTQIA+ tweets as the corpora in the analysis of the study, while analyzing the LGBTQIA+ memes as the corpora in unveiling symbolisms of the LGBTQIA+ community was rarely explored by the researchers. Moreover, research studies on memes were mostly political memes, while exploring the meta-semiotic tasks of LGBTQIA+ memes has not been given much attention in light of the increasing presence of LGBTQIA+ individuals who actively employ memes as a means of shaping one's identities on online linguistic landscapes. Hence, these are the research gaps that the researcher hopes to fill in.

Based on the contentions above, the researcher needs to conduct a research study to raise awareness of how semiotic elements of LGBTQIA+ memes can unveil hidden meanings of inclusivity and exclusivity behind symbolisms. In addition, the researcher urgently needs to undertake this research study to examine how LGBTQIA+ memes' symbols, language, and visual components support the continuous process of community building and self-definition while shedding light on the various identities that comprise the LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Indeed, this linguistic study provides a valuable lens through which linguists can investigate identity dynamics, cultural expression, and the broader effects of LGBTQIA+ memes in offline and online contexts.

1.1 Literature Review

Visual grammar analysis offers three meta-semiotic tasks: representational, interactional, and compositional meta-functions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). First, representational meaning entails creating meaning using representations of persons, things, situations, or events. This analysis involves narrative and conceptual representations.

Narrative representation examines how narratives are created and conveyed through signs, symbols, texts, and sounds. It involves representing objects and illustrating their relationships within the natural world

beyond the representational system. When a vector connects participants, it illustrates their engagement in actions with or for each other. Additionally, as a defining characteristic of narrative processes, a vector is typically represented by elements in images that create an oblique line, often a prominent diagonal (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The second meta-semiotic task is the interactional meta-semiotic task. To analyze the interpersonal metafunction, which includes the represented and interactive participants, one must consider the actions of participants when creating and viewing an image.

The third meta-semiotic task is compositional analysis. It includes framing, informational value, salience, and visual modality. Framing refers to the ability to depict individual elements of a composition as separate entities or as a cohesive whole. It entails examining the decisions made regarding the delimitation of individuals, things, and actions within the visual field and how these decisions affect the semiotic message (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The role of a component within the composition depends on its position —whether it is in the upper or lower (ideal-real structure), right or left (given-new structure), or top or bottom (center-margin structure) areas of the image or page (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The positioning of a component is referred to as its informational value.

In Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar analysis framework, "salience" refers to how prominently or visibly specific elements appear within a multimodal or visual text. It describes how much a mode stands out and captures attention, influencing how viewers perceive and interpret the text. Hence, analyzing salience is essential for understanding how visual communication conveys meaning.

Visual modality has two categories: low and high. Low modality shows objects or people as unreal, while high modality depicts them as realistic (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Visual markers often create a direct and recognizable connection with the viewer, making the depicted objects or people appear familiar and relatable.

The utilization of multiple meta-semiotic tasks of internet memes, both implicit and explicit messages, is depicted. Hence, this research offers a significant illustration of applying visual grammar analysis to explore the meta-semiotic functions of internet memes, akin to the method applied in studying LGBTQIA+ memes.

From a broader perspective, semiotic analysis goes beyond revealing the layers of meanings of symbols; it also unravels how a particular community shapes its identities in the memetic linguistic landscape. Pierce's triadic model serves as the theoretical foundation of the research study to determine how the LGBTQIA+ community shapes its identities through the semiotic elements depicted in LGBTQIA+ memes.

According to Peirce (1991), the triadic model is composed of the three elements that make up a sign, namely the representamen (signifier), interpretant (signified), and object (referent). The representamen is the signifier or the form that the sign presents. It serves as the medium in which the sign conveys details about the object. The representamen can express itself through words, pictures, sounds, or other meaningful sensory stimuli. The interpretant is the mental or cognitive reaction when someone comes across a sign. In other words, this is an interpreter's effect or understanding after coming into contact with the sign. Lastly, the object refers to what the sign signifies. It could be an actual, physical object, a notion, an idea, or any other intended meaning of the sign.

Triadic model helps analyze how symbols, memes, and language construct and negotiate identities about LGBTQIA+ identity formation within the memetic linguistic landscape. It explores how these signs interact with cultural, intertextual, and linguistic contexts to influence identity expression and community dynamics. The triadic analysis offers insights into the complexities of identity construction using memetic contents.

Peirce's categorization of signs is pivotal in this research study's linguistic investigation. According to Peirce, the three categories of signs include the icon, index, and symbol. The icon refers to the images or a sign that resemble or imitate the physical qualities or attributes of the object. It iconically represents ideas,

emotions, or cultural references. An index establishes a direct, causal connection or correlation with its referent and is thus called an index. The connection relies on physical proximity, cause-and-effect, or association. Lastly, a symbol represents its referent through an arbitrary convention or agreement within a cultural or social context. The link between the sign and its referent does not depend on intrinsic resemblance or direct causation.

In the context of the research study, the iconic signs serve as visual shorthands for identity markers, allowing individuals to express and assert aspects of their identity visually. Icons evoke immediate recognition and association, which reinforces identity through visual representation. Indexical signs, on the other hand, points are signs that have a direct or causal connection to their objects. Indexes point to specific experiences, contexts, or meaningful relationships within a particular identity framework. Lastly, symbolic signs represent objects through convention or agreement within a community. Symbols carry culturally agreed-upon meanings that represent values.

The memes' iconic, indexical, and symbolic meanings provide different modes through which signs represent and convey meaning. The analysis leads to how LGBTQIA+ people shape their identities in various meaning categories. Thus, by combining Pierce's triadic model and categorization of signs, it offers a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how LGBTQIA+ individuals utilize symbolic, indexical, and iconic signs in the memetic linguistic landscape to construct, communicate, and negotiate their identities.

Understanding the identity of LGBTQIA+ in the memetic linguistic landscape can be examined through various meaning categories, just like in the study of Alif (2023). The researcher explored how Facebook memes shape religious identities through Peirce's triadic model. The study illuminates the innovative ways online communities employ textual and visual cues to construct identities through memes creatively. The findings signified how online communities creatively use memes to construct identities through semiotic methods. Thus, this exemplifies the appropriateness of a similar approach that utilizes Peirce's triadic model in unveiling multiple semiotic elements in shaping the identity of the LGBTQIA+ in the memetic linguistic landscape.

Investigating how LGBTQIA+ shape their identities in the online linguistic landscape offers a significant insight toward understanding human diversity. The study of Oyebanji (2022) examined how Nigerian L.G.B.T. individuals shaped their identities online through language on Twitter, particularly within a homophobic society where same-sex sexuality is taboo. By analyzing the #EndHomophobiaInNigeria discourse, the research reveals that L.G.B.T. individuals use language to assert themselves as a rights-deserving, community-oriented, and resilient group, thereby crafting their identities in the digital space.

The study underscores the significance of examining tweets to unravel the challenges that LGBTQIA+ individuals encounter in achieving social inclusivity, particularly in Nigeria, where heteronormativity exists. Thus, linguists should consider the linguistic analysis of social media corpora to uncover underlying social issues affecting the LGBTQIA+ community.

Another linguistic study on how queer males in Nigeria assert their identities, paying particular attention to the language surrounding the concepts of "coming out" and "reaching out," was examined by Onanuga (2021). The researcher utilized the Nigerian tweets as the corpus in this linguistic study. The result revealed that queer males in Nigeria use digital platforms to express their sexualities and form purposeful identities, which they express through both in-group and out-group advocacy.

The study above suggests that linguistic studies should consider how language use changes in digital environments, particularly in specific sociocultural contexts like Nigeria. It highlights how language is essential for expressing sexual identity and shaping purposeful identities, including in advocacy initiatives. Hence, linguistic studies should examine how individuals use language to navigate and negotiate their identities in both personal and advocacy contexts, especially within the constraints and affordances of digital communication.

Without a doubt, the utilization of social media among the LGBTQIA+ community has become an

outlet for emotion to express their identities. The research study of Buss, Le, and Haimson (2022) found that transgender individuals manage their identity on social media by selectively choosing their posts, connections, and interactions. Moreover, managing social media for transgender individuals extends beyond personal identity formation to include selecting and interacting with content from others within their networks.

The research conducted by Buss et.al., (2022) suggests that social media is crucial, particularly for the transgender community. It emphasizes how social media can support diversity, build community, and aid in greater public awareness and change, enabling individual empowerment and identity expression. Thus, conducting a research study on the language and identity of the LGBTQIA+ community within the online linguistic landscape offers an avenue to unravel linguistic elements used in conveying messages.

Investigating the language of the LGBTQIA+ community paves the way to understanding how they communicate in society. The study by Ulla, et.al., (2024) examined the subtle distinctions and patterns in Filipino queer language, focusing on problems of misunderstanding and the need for more inclusivity. Content analysis of Facebook and Twitter posts revealed distinct features of Filipino queer language, including affixation, appropriation, and neologism. These findings highlight its vibrancy, adaptability, and crucial role in self-expression and promoting linguistic inclusivity within the LGBTQIA+ community.

From a broader perspective, several researchers explored how the LGBTQIA+ community uses signs and symbols to express themselves. In particular, Collar (2021) explored how LGBTQIA+ individuals use temporary tattoos and symbols at pride events for self-expression. Interviews revealed that such body art fosters social acceptance despite experiences of isolation and discrimination, highlighting the significance of symbolism in representing the LGBTQIA+ community.

1.2 Research Questions

This research study aims to explore the language and identity of the LGBTQIA+ community within the memetic landscape and their perceptions of LGBTQIA+ signs and symbols about inclusivity and exclusivity. Specifically, this linguistic study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the meta-semiotic tasks depicted in the LGBTQIA+ memes used to reveal the layers of meaning and symbolism?
2. How do LGBTQIA+ shape the identities of LGBTQIA+ in the memetic linguistic landscape?
3. How do semiotic elements play a significant role in conveying messages of inclusivity and exclusivity within the LGBTQIA+ community?

2. Method

2.1. Study Participants

The study employed both primary and secondary data, with the primary data consisting of a focus group discussion involving eight LGBTQIA+ members aged 18 and above who actively shared LGBTQIA+-related memes. This unique approach, inspired by Creswell and Creswell (2017), emphasized that an FGD can be composed of at least six to eight participants, and a facilitator conducts a non-governing interview. For the secondary data, the researcher extracted 50 LGBTQIA+ memes from the online linguistic landscape.

2.2 Materials and Instrument

Upon crafting the research materials and instrument for the study, the researcher formulated interview guide questions required for the focus group discussion. The researcher brought a video tape recorder, journal notebooks, and informed consent during the interview. After developing the interview guide questions, a panel of experts reviewed and validated them to ensure the research instrument's credibility and reliability.

2.3. Research Design and Procedure

The researcher utilized a qualitative research design for data analysis, which involves a process of understanding informed by various methodological approaches to explore and address social or human issues (Cresswell, 2013). In particular, the researcher utilized content analysis to analyze the secondary data. This approach systematically categorizes and interprets raw data to identify meaningful patterns and themes (Creswell, 2015).

In analyzing the primary data, the researcher utilized a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) involving members of the LGBTQIA+ community to gain insights into how semiotic elements significantly influence the communication of inclusivity and exclusivity within the community. Focus groups are informal conversations with a small group centered on a specific topic or set of issues (Wilkinson, 2020). This research methodology is suitable for the current linguistic investigation as it unveils the shared experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community depicted in the memetic linguistic landscape.

Utilizing the visual grammar analysis and triadic model was significant in achieving the first two research questions. In the third research question, the researcher employed thematic analysis. The first research question discussed the meta-semiotic tasks depicted in the LGBTQIA+ memes used to reveal the layers of meaning and symbolism. The researcher used Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar analysis to answer this. Their framework argued that visual composition is a grammar that combines objects, people, and places to create meaningful wholes. Hence, this theory is significant in analyzing the meta-semiotic tasks depicted in the analysis of the LGBTQIA+ memes found in the online linguistic landscape.

The second research question's analysis aimed to investigate how LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identities within the memetic linguistic landscape. To answer this, the researcher employed Peirce's triadic model and categorization of signs. This analysis explored how textual and visual elements in memes construct and negotiate identities through dynamic interactions of representamen, objects, and interpretant signs within LGBTQIA+ memes. The analysis led to an understanding of how LGBTQIA+ shape their identities based on various meaning categories.

Examining how these previously mentioned components interact within the framework of identity expression was necessary for applying this model to the analysis of the second research question. Hence, by analyzing LGBTQIA+ memes through this framework, the researcher can better understand how symbols and representations were used to convey complex aspects of identity. It allows for a deeper exploration of the symbolic meanings embedded in the memes. Lastly, to address the third research question, which aimed to investigate the role of semiotic elements in communicating messages of inclusivity and exclusivity within the LGBTQIA+ community, the researcher applied thematic analysis. This method for analyzing data involves interpreting information to assign codes and develop themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Researcher impartially characterized and grouped components found in memes, such as linguistic traits, themes, visual symbols, and humor styles. This method worked well for capturing various content without giving it any interpretation. Within this linguistic investigation, the researcher extracted 50 LGBTQIA+ memes found in the online linguistic landscape, categorized the memes based on Peirce's categorization of signs, and profoundly analyzed the data based on the previously discussed frameworks.

The purpose of descriptive FGD is to collect in-depth data and descriptions regarding participants'

viewpoints, attitudes, and experiences related to a particular subject. The research participants shared their ideas and personal experiences about the subject matter with detailed and thorough descriptions. Additionally, the researcher collected the participants' insights at a specific point in time, giving a glimpse into their viewpoints. This method worked well for comprehending prevailing beliefs or viewpoints.

Following the informed consent protocol, the researcher initiated the process by thoroughly explaining the study's objectives to the research participants. It involved discussing potential risks and benefits, emphasizing voluntary participation, ensuring confidentiality, and clarifying that participants could withdraw without penalties (Muzorewa, 2024). After receiving the material, participants asked questions and sought clarification. Consent was documented by completing a consent form, with participants asked to sign if they completely understood the information and were willing to participate voluntarily. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained continuous communication with participants, confirmed their right to withdraw permission, and addressed emerging concerns.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Meta-semiotic Tasks Depicted in the LGBTQIA+ Memes Used in Revealing the Layers of Meaning and Symbolisms

Based on the research findings, the three meta-semiotic tasks were evident in the analyzed memes. From the perspective of the representational meta-semiotic task, the research findings revealed that memes have high value in the narrative process, particularly the reactional non-transactional process, compared to action and conceptual processes. This means that memes are effective means of visually encoding real-life experiences or events that can be channelled through narration.

A reactional, non-transactional process is a process in which the action has no goal or intent to aim at anything. Presented below are examples of memes that employ non-transactional reactional processes.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

In Figure 1, an animated character, depicted as a lesbian, wears a skull mask and points a finger at someone. Above the image is a remark from the parents that says, "We're sending you to an all-girls school," and below the image is the participant's caption, "Joke's on you, I'm into that shit." The participant's sneering gaze and pointing finger form a vector directed toward an unknown object. The participant, being the lesbian daughter, serves as the Reactor. The undetermined presence of the object implies curiosity, which leads to further exploration by the viewers.

Figure 2 depicts a close-up image of an animated character who seems stressed and anxious. The participant's eyelids form a vector directed toward an unknown object. It invites viewers to enter the participant's world by igniting their interest and encouraging engagement with the image.

In Figure 3, there is only one participant: the image of the man who is sarcastically smirking. The man's gaze forms a vector directly aimed at an unknown object. The man served as the Reactor in the scene. The assumption is that the man is reacting to someone's stance on gay marriage, provoked by the verbal cue at the top that says, 'Oh, so you don't support gay marriage?' It signals a reaction to a particular issue. The participant, presumed to be gay, then rebuts, 'Tell me more about how it directly affects your life.' This remark emphasizes the man's attitude and implies confidence or sarcasm in response to the inferred statement about not supporting gay marriage.

Figure 4 depicts the image of the represented participant, a gay version of Barack Obama, who calls someone. We can presume that he is talking to his mom on the phone, asking permission for his friends to sleep over. His mom only agreed if there were no boys. The viewer can infer that the mom is entirely aware of his son's identity based on her response, "That's fine, but no boys." The exclamation point denotes firmness and assertion of her decision. The fingers on Barack Obama's left hand formed a vector that created the movement of the fingers to hold the phone and call someone. In the meme presented above, the actor is Barack Obama, and the goal is unknown. Although we might assume the goal is the mom, the meme does not depict her presence.

In the interactional phase, the analysis focused on three components: the gaze, the size of frames, and the angles. The study revealed that "offer images" outweigh "demand images" regarding gaze. Offer images suggest that the producer of the memes is primarily interested in delivering information to viewers without actively seeking direct engagement. However, offering images also respects the audience's interpretive abilities, allowing them to contemplate and interpret the represented participants' message without direct interaction. This empowerment of the audience is a key aspect of offering images, as shown in the following examples:



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

The gaze of the represented participants in Figure 5 suggests an offer. The participant's lack of eye contact with the viewer prompts contemplation on issues concerning lesbian individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community.

The participants' absence of eye contact with the viewers in Figure 6 allows them to evaluate the image and its message without feeling obligated to respond or interact directly with the meme. This interpretation implies that the producers invite viewers to introspect on the inner struggles faced by the LGBTQIA+ community when making decisions, particularly the decision to come out, where they might face condemnation and discrimination by society.

Figures 7 and 8 present the participants' diverse challenges in coming out. The absence of the participants' direct engagement with the viewers implies that the producer intends the viewer to interpret and infer meaning from the visual and verbal elements depicted in the meme without requiring direct interaction or engagement.

Regarding the sizing of frames, the data revealed that medium close shot dominates among other sizes of frames. The medium close shot, which captures visibility from the waist to the head, also represents a far personal distance. This shot lets the viewers focus on the participant's facial expressions, gestures, and body language. Below are examples of memes captured in medium close shot:



Figure 9



Figure 1



Figure 4

The field of vision of the image in Figure 9 implies that the producer wants to capture the paper note that says, "NOT MARRIED BUT WILLING TO BE." This caption accentuates the overall message of the meme. The frame's size also suggests more personal interactions with the audience while maintaining a sense of privacy.

Figure 1 highlights the participant's sneering gaze and pointing finger, drawing attention to her defiant or humorous response to her parents' remark about sending her to an all-girls school. Despite the participant's relatively close view, the far social distance framing keeps the observer emotionally detached from the depicted scene. This positioning invites viewers to observe the participant's reaction from a distance rather than being personally immersed in her emotions.

The meme in Figure 4 demands the audience to get involved with the participant's world. It signifies an intent to elevate LGBTQIA+ voices and viewpoints, challenging invisibility and marginalization within mainstream media and culture.

In the context of the memes' angles, the horizontal frontal angle revealed as the most prominent. The horizontal frontal angle invites the viewers to get involved in the participants' world. Shown below are examples of memes depicted in the horizontal frontal angles:



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

In Figure 10, the angle suggests that the experience of the transgender person whose parents do not accept him resonates with an LGBTQIA+ audience, especially transgender individuals. It allows the audience to empathize with the represented participant.

By putting the audience at eye level with the subject depicted in Figure 11, the producer creates a sense of connection and empathy, encouraging people from all walks of life, including the LGBTQIA+ community, to see themselves mirrored and acknowledged. This viewpoint promotes a better awareness of different experiences and perspectives, fostering a more inclusive dialogue and representation within the broader societal narrative.

The producer in Figure 12 wants the viewers to get involved in the participants' world. The meme implies that the content is not isolated from reality but reflects a real-world situation or phenomenon in which people are directly or indirectly involved. In this scenario, the meme is most likely referring to intersex rights and the cruel practice of performing medically unnecessary sex-assigning procedures on intersex children without their consent.

The angle in Figure13 signifies that the viewed content is not detached from reality from everyday life. Instead, it remains inextricably linked to the reality in which humans live. The meme highlights the presence of LGBTQIA+ people within corporate settings, emphasizing that their experiences are part of the shared reality. Acknowledging that the subject matter is "part of our world," the meme invites viewers to reflect on their roles in promoting LGBTQIA+ acceptance and inclusion in society.

From the vantage point of the compositional meta-semiotic task, the data are analyzed based on the meme's framing, information value, salience, and visual modality. To begin with, the "connection framing" outweighs the "disconnection framing." Based on the result of the study, the connection framing was achieved by employing similarities and rhyming patterns in color and form, as well as through vectors that connect various components. Illustrated below are memes depicting "connection framing:"



Figure 2



Figure 14

The memes in Figures 2 and 14 show coherence and relevance, where the links between text and image can ignite the audience's interest and inspire active engagement in meme culture. The meme's modes illustrate interconnectedness that directly links to the represented participants.

In terms of the memes' informational value, the study reveals that the memes portray their components in both "Ideal" and "Real" placements. The "ideal" information provides an emotive appeal and is placed on top, while the "real" information contains specific or practical information at the bottom. The memes with "Ideal" and "Real" information value were shown below:



Figure 15



Figure 16

"Are you straight or gay?"
Bisexuals:



Figure 17

Illustrated in Figure 15 is the caption on top, "trying to hide your gay in front of family like," and the image below with a label that says, "Well, a big hetero hello to all of you," signifies "Ideal" and "Real" respectively. This information value suggests that the order of significance of the information is depicted from top to bottom.

The first element in Figure 16, depicting the baby bisexual's struggle to conceal his true identity, signifies the "Ideal." The compositional component suggests that it consists of essential notions that evoke emotive feelings. On the other hand, the second element, where the veteran bisexual sternly looks at someone while pointing his finger, denotes the 'Real' or practical information.

Presented in Figure 17 is the caption on top of the image that says, "Are you straight or gay?" and the image below with another label that says, "Well yes, but no signifies "Ideal" and "Real," respectively. The caption's placement at the top suggests that it tends to make emotive appeals or elicit emotional responses from the spectator. It implies that the question about sexual orientation could appeal to societal standards or idealized conceptions of sexuality.

When it comes to the memes' salience, the study revealed that the use of rainbow colors and the utilization of bolder fonts and bigger text sizes serve as the semiotic modes that stood out and drew the viewers' attention, which acts as an integral part of interpreting the message. These are evident based on the examples below:



Figure 18



Figure 19

Presented above are memes depicting the rainbow pride flag and symbols. In Figure 18, the importance of the LGBTQIA+ pride flag and its colors underscore its multifaceted relevance, which includes expressing one's identity, increasing visibility, raising educational knowledge, and generating emotional connection.

The meme in Figure 19 celebrates LGBTQIA+ pride and identity, particularly during Pride Month. It represents unity, solidarity, and the progress made in the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights and acceptance while also acknowledging the ongoing challenges and work that lie ahead.

Lastly, the study revealed that most memes are present in high modalities. High visual modality signifies that the objects or people appear realistic, or the producer of the memes used authentic images of human beings with full saturation, a diverse range of colors, and maximal degrees of brightness. Higher visual modalities suggest that visuals play a predominant role in shaping meaning. Presented below are examples of memes that have high visual modalities.



Figure 20

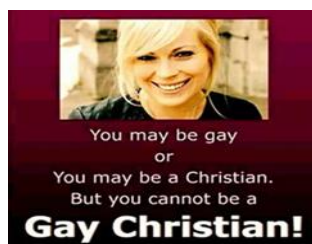


Figure 21



Figure 22

Analyzing the meta-semiotic tasks of each LGBTQIA+ meme through the lens of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar Analysis reveals significant insights into visual communication. In semiotics, the multimodal framework, regardless of what corpora to employ, can unveil hidden meanings and symbolisms through the interplay of the textual and visual cues that various researchers explored.

In particular, the semiotic study by Al-Dala'ien, Al-Daher, Al-Shboul, and Al-Rousan (2023) examined how Arab social media users expressed political views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict between March and June 2021 despite restrictive social networking policies. Analyzing 55 written and 47 visual posts from Facebook accounts of selected Arab caricaturists and activists, the researchers employed Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic approach. The study's results highlight the overlooked aspects of visual communication in the Arab world and offer new insights into how people understand signs and symbols. It shows how images combined with words can reveal important social and political messages.

The study above implies that Visual Grammar Analysis is an effective tool for uncovering the implicit messages and symbolic meanings within visual posts on social media. The findings support the current semiotic study, which uses Visual Grammar Analysis to reveal deeper meanings and symbolism in LGBTQIA+ memes, mainly how society represents them.

Moreover, Bilal, Asghar, Nawaz, and Zaman (2021) conducted a study analyzing the verbal and visual language in advertisements by educational institutions to understand their persuasive techniques. It examined six advertisements from three Punjab-based educational institution chains using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework. The findings supported the theory of visual grammar, demonstrating that non-verbal language in ads can convey multiple layers of meaning and significantly influence perceptions, often favoring one perspective while ignoring others.

Building upon the research findings from the studies above, it was evident that employing visual grammar in analyzing various corpora can unveil more profound layers of meaning and symbolism. Previous research predominantly focused on analyzing corpora from platforms like Facebook and promotional materials such as flyers and videos. However, it is essential to note that researchers have yet to explore the visual grammar of LGBTQIA+ memes. Thus, the current semiotic study effectively addressed this gap by delving into the nuanced visual language of LGBTQIA+ memes, enriching people's understanding of their effectiveness in communicating narratives.

3.2 Identity Shaping in the LGBTQIA+ Memetic Linguistic Landscape

Drawing from Peirce's triadic model and categorization of signs, these serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing how LGBTQIA+ shapes their identity in the memetic linguistic landscape. This model provides a systematic way to dissect and understand signs and their meanings, which is integral to understanding the diverse semiotic resources.

Carefully examining the dynamic interplay between the representamen, object, and interpretant of the memes, as well as the types of signs, aids in determining the meaning categories of the memes. It reveals how meme creators holistically portrayed LGBTQIA+ memes using diverse semiotic resources.

The iconic signs serve as visual shorthand for identity markers, which allows individuals to express and assert aspects of their identity visually. Icons evoke immediate recognition and association, which reinforces identity through visual representation. On the other hand, indexical signs are signs that have a direct or causal connection to their objects. Indexes point to specific experiences, contexts, or meaningful relationships within a particular identity framework. Lastly, symbolic signs represent objects through convention or agreement within a community. Symbols carry culturally agreed-upon meanings that represent values.

Building on the study of Alif (2023) on the Islamic memes on Facebook, which explored how these memes convey religious identities through semiotic analysis, the research employed qualitative content

analysis of 62 memes using Peirce's triadic model and framework of icon, index, and symbol. The findings signified how online communities creatively use memes to construct identities through semiotic methods. The current study, employing the same framework as the research above, unveiled three meaning categories: symbolic, contextual, and intertextual.




By carefully analyzing the interplay between representamen, object, and interpretant in memes, the study reveals essential themes: unity and community empowerment, fear of coming out, and social commentaries on LGBTQIA+ issues. These themes are significant for understanding how LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identities in the memetic linguistic landscape.

Symbolic meanings in LGBTQIA+ memes emerged using specific signs or symbols representing aspects of LGBTQIA+ identity. These symbols communicate cultural values and social struggles, creating a shared understanding within the community.

Below are examples of memes with symbolic meanings within the LGBTQIA+ memetic language. These memes were thoroughly analyzed using Peirce's triadic model, which explores the relationship between the sign (meme), the object it represents, and the audience's interpretation, revealing how LGBTQIA+ shapes their identity in the memetic linguistic landscape. The results of the study indicate that the employment of the rainbow pride flag, rainbow-colored background and shapes, and gender identity terms such as "bisexual" are used to signal markers of LGBTQIA+ identity.

Shown in Table 1 are the core ideas based on the Triadic analysis, specifically focusing on the symbolic meanings found within the memes. Through careful analysis, a significant theme of unity and community empowerment emerged, which plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of LGBTQIA+ individuals. This theme is an identity marker, illustrating how the LGBTQIA+ community uses symbolic meaning within the memetic linguistic landscape to assert and express their collective identity. The core ideas were analyzed by examining the objects represented in the memes and the iconic signs embedded within them. These symbols and signs convey meaning and reinforce the community's shared values and experiences, further solidifying their identity within a broader social context.

Table 1. Identity Shaping Through Symbolic Meaning in Memetic Linguistic Landscape

Essential Theme	Core Ideas	Memes
Unity and Community Empowerment	An act of expressing one's right to equality regardless of gender identity.	
	The celebration and affirmation of LGBTQIA+ pride and identity.	
	The individual's self-identity, personal values, beliefs, and true nature.	

The LGBTQIA+ community and the associated concepts of unity, diversity, and pride.



The ongoing internal struggle and self-doubt of a bisexual as he navigates his identity, particularly in terms of sexual orientation.



By breaking Peirce's triadic components, it unveils the meme's meaning-making process through the interaction of the relationship between the representamen, the object, and the interpretant. The research findings reveal how the sign vehicle, object, and interpretant interact to convey a message of LGBTQIA+ pride and identity affirmation evident in the memes presented above. The model helps elucidate the complex signification and meaning-making process of representing LGBTQIA+ experiences and advocacy within visual culture.

The triadic relationship of the semiotic elements of memes, represented as symbolic signs, reveals how unity and community empowerment play a significant role in shaping their identities. The result of the triadic analysis corroborated the research study of Jati (2023), who examined how cultural identity and community media shape individual identities in the context of rapid globalization, emphasizing the role of cultural activists in preserving heritage. Findings highlight the importance of cultural resilience for community welfare and identity formation. The research findings signify how cultural identity and community media shape individual identities amidst rapid globalization, highlighting the pivotal role of cultural activists in preserving heritage. In the context of this research, the essential theme aligned with the previously mentioned study that fostering unity and community empowerment among LGBTQIA+ individuals was crucial in shaping collective identities.

Jia, Du, and Zhao (2024) explored how LGBTQIA+ individuals utilized online forums to seek information and make sense of identity transitions. Analyzing 992 forum posts through qualitative content analysis identifies three stages of transition (awareness, exploration, living with a new identity) and three types of peer interactions (cognitive, affective, situational). The findings revealed that online forums are pivotal for LGBTQIA+ individuals, serving as vital spaces for self-reflection, skill development, and navigating identity transitions. Indeed, these platforms provide essential support for shaping and affirming identities within the LGBTQIA+ community, contributing to a broader understanding of how social media influences identity formation and empowerment.





Shifting to another meaning category which is the memes' contextual meaning, it was revealed that the LGBTQIA+ shapes their identity through fear of coming out which is a highly relatable experience among the LGBTQIA+ community. Contextual meanings in LGBTQIA+ memes emerge from references to shared experiences, cultural contexts, or social issues relevant to the community. They also highlight societal norms or pressing social issues relevant to the community.

Table 2 shows the core ideas based on the triadic analysis, specifically focusing on the contextual meanings found within the memes. Through careful analysis, a significant theme of fear of coming out emerged, which played a crucial role in shaping the identity of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The emergence of

indexical signs, which mainly refer to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and are highly relatable, played an integral role in shaping their identities in the memetic linguistic landscape.

The core ideas were analyzed by examining the objects represented in the memes and the indexical signs embedded within them. These indexical signs are crucial indicators linking the memes to specific cultural contexts and experiences within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Table 2. Identity Shaping Through Contextual Meaning in Memetic Linguistic Landscape

Essential Theme	Core Ideas	Memes
Fear of Coming Out	A conversation between parents and their lesbian daughter about sending her to an all-girls school.	<p>Parents: We're sending you to an all-girls school Their lesbian daughter:</p> 
	The emotional state of anxiety and sadness experienced by the individuals portrayed in the animated image.	
	The act of panicking when caught up in an unexpected situation.	<p>13 year old closeted me when my parents asked to borrow my phone</p> 
	The desire for self-expression and authenticity.	
	An act of portraying oneself as something other than one's true identity.	<p>Do you have any acting experience?</p> <p>Me: I acted like I was straight for 18 years</p> 

Concealing one's identity is not an easy process. Overcoming this requires courage and readiness to face the possible risks and threats that may arise when coming out. It is a common experience shared by the LGBTQIA+ community. In the context of this research study, the complex interaction of critical elements in the triadic analysis and the relationship between indexical signs and their contextual meaning reveals that the fear of coming out may significantly shape LGBTQIA+ identity. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community often face significant challenges and hardships during the coming out process (Zavala & Water, 2021.)

Cerezo, Cummings, Holmes, and Williams (2020) conducted qualitative research using constructivist grounded theory with 20 participants to examine how intersectionality affects identity formation among sexual and gender-expansive Latinx and African American women. The findings reveal that family and cultural influences shape identity formation, the freedom to explore one's identity, the negotiation of insider/outsider status, and identity integration as a form of resistance. Similar to the research findings of the study above, the fear of coming out also significantly influences the identity formation of LGBTQIA+ individuals. In particular, family and cultural expectations, one of the identified themes in the previous study, exert a significant influence, especially in shaping individuals' decisions and experiences related to coming out. The freedom to explore one's identity emerges as crucial, allowing individuals to navigate and define their authentic selves amidst societal pressures and stereotypes.

Familial rejections, especially during the coming-out process, play a crucial role as LGBTQIA+ individuals navigate their gender identities. In particular, Taylor and Neppel (2023) researched how family dynamics impact the sexual identity development of emerging LGBTQ adults. Using 338 participants from a Midwestern university, it examined the effects of parental rejection and sexuality-specific family support. The findings reveal that parental rejection increases identity struggles, while family support enhances affirmed identity. It implies the crucial role of family support in positive sexual identity development. The previously cited research study provides valuable insights into how family dynamics, particularly parental rejection and support, influence identity struggles and affirmation, which are closely related to the fear of coming out.

Lastly, the employment of social media pop culture, current events, and the intersection of religious aspects have contributed to the memes' intertextual meaning. This meaning-making process is crucial in analyzing how LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identity in the memetic linguistic landscape, reinforcing shared values and challenging societal norms. The memes offer a nuanced commentary on LGBTQIA+ experiences by weaving these elements together. They also highlight how cultural and societal dynamics influence the representation and perception of LGBTQIA+ identities.

Presented in Table 3 are the core ideas based on the Triadic analysis, specifically focusing on the intertextual meanings found within the memes. Through careful analysis, a significant theme of social commentaries on LGBTQIA+ issues emerged, which plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The core ideas were analyzed by examining the objects represented in the memes and the multiple utilization of signs embedded within the memes.

Table 3. Identity Shaping Through Intertextual Meaning in Memetic Linguistic Landscape

Essential Theme	Core Ideas	Memes
Social Commentaries on LGBTQIA+ issues	An act of questioning one's identity on the issue of gay marriage.	
	The act of donating blood, but except for gay people.	
	An annoyed facial expression of Drake on the biblical mandate to be generous and compassionate to immigrants and those in need, emphasizing a contrast between conduct and moral instruction.	
	The societal or cultural belief or norm that suggests incompatibility between being gay and being Christian.	

The interplay between the sign vehicle and its object signifies exclusion against the LGBTQIA+ community. Therefore, when religious groups advocate that the existence of gay individuals is invalid and reject their inclusion in society, it can lead to detrimental severe feelings for the LGBTQIA+ community. For instance, when religious groups advocate that the existence of gay individuals is invalid and exclude them from society, it can lead to a profound sense of marginalization.

By unpacking the components of Peirce's triadic analysis and utilizing various signs, the meme shapes the LGBTQIA+ community's identity by challenging heteronormative issues raised by religious groups. It also promotes a deeper understanding and acceptance of the diversity of human sexual identities, as well as the complexity of navigating faith and sexuality.

The research findings align based on the research study of Coley (2020). The researcher investigated how LGBTQIA+ individuals at Christian colleges navigate their religious and sexual identities through 77 interviews with LGBTQ activists, applying Goffman's theories to identify influencing factors. Findings revealed how social commentaries from activist groups and their audiences influence identity formation.

In the context of the current research study, social commentaries, particularly those related to

religion, contribute significantly to the identity formation of LGBTQIA+ individuals. These commentaries can either challenge or reinforce existing norms and stereotypes, impacting how individuals perceive and integrate their sexual and religious identities.

Another research study on how social media shapes queer adolescent identities in young adult literature, focusing on the novel "#IsaacAndAidenAreOverParty" and its Critical Commentary, was investigated by Worrall (2023). Qualitative analysis examines the portrayal of social media and its dual impacts on identity development. The review emphasizes how societal attitudes and online commentaries profoundly shape the queer identities of young LGBTQIA+ individuals, highlighting the crucial role of online spaces in navigating social challenges. The previous study corroborates with the theme, showing how social commentaries on LGBTQIA+ issues significantly influence how LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identities. The research implies that social media plays a crucial role in shaping LGBTQIA+ identities, indicating its influence in reflecting and shaping societal attitudes through online discourse.

3.3. LGBTQIA+ People's Perceptions on How Semiotic Elements Play a Significant Role in Conveying Messages of Inclusivity and Exclusivity

In investigating how semiotic elements play a significant role in conveying messages of inclusivity and exclusivity, three themes emerged based on the responses of the research participants. These symbolize existence and identity, unity for activism and advocacy, and manifestation of acceptance and awareness.

Table 4 shows the themes used to illustrate how semiotic elements are integral to conveying messages of exclusivity and inclusivity within the LGBTQIA+ community. They reinforce group identity and solidarity and communicate their members' diverse and intersectional experiences.

Table 4. Essential Themes and Core Ideas

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Symbol of Existence and Unity	<p>RP-06: I always see on social media or from foreigners that they use different symbols for restrooms, not just the typical male and female symbols.</p> <p>RP-06: So, using the symbol is one way to promote our pride and express that we exist.</p> <p>RP-04: One thing that makes me feel genuinely included is the presence of gender-neutral symbols in specific public spaces where transgender individuals can feel safe.</p> <p>RP-02: So, each letter in LGBTQIA+ represents a different identity, and each of these identities has its flag.</p> <p>RP-03: So, each identity has its own symbol, and everyone knows and is aware of it.</p>
Unity for Activism and Advocacy	<p>RP-06: So, for me, you can feel it when someone acknowledges the flag, like when they say, 'Raise your flag, right?' It makes us proud.</p> <p>RP-01: For me, symbols are a huge help for the L.G.B.T.Q. Community.</p> <p>RP-07: While we are distributing the relief goods, we are also raising the rainbow flag.</p>

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RP-02: Those symbols can help us spread the information that being gay is different from being bisexual, and being lesbian is different as well.

RP-03: For example, it means a lot when we are addressed correctly at the mall as 'Ma'am' if that's our preference.

RP-04: It will inform others about the specific differences in each individual's gender identity.

RP-05: Basic information is essential to raising awareness among those who need to be made aware of the proper labels to use.

Symbols of Existence and Unity

Various pride flags represent the LGBTQIA+ community, each symbolizing a different identity. The representation of each pride symbol helps society recognize them more easily. Semiotically, the LGBTQIA+ symbols can be a symbol of existence and identity. These symbols serve as representations of their own identities, just like the contention made by Psyche when she explained that:

So, each letter in LGBTQIA+ represents a different identity, each with its flag. For example, lesbians have their specific flag, allowing them to identify themselves. Similarly, the trans community has a blue and pink flag. These flags are essential because they allow individuals to express their identity. However, the rainbow flag serves as the general symbol for the LGBTQIA+ community (RP-03).

Adding more visual cues that represent the LGBTQIA+ community apart from the conventional male and female stick figures in comfort rooms can promote inclusivity and comfort to all people, regardless of gender. Moreover, since it is part of the human need to urinate, the legislation on gender-neutral comfort rooms and visual cues should be given utmost significance. This is supported based on the remarks of Minerva:

Moreover, that is where we should start. If we seek visual cues or icons, why not begin with the most basic human need? (RP-04).

From a broader perspective, the employment of gender-neutral comfort rooms in public spaces has broader implications beyond just restroom accessibility. The visual cues serve as powerful means of challenging issues of heteronormativity and exclusivity against the LGBTQIA+ community. Athena also made the same contention as she pointed out the positive impact of these visual cues in promoting gender inclusivity:

We should promote gender-neutral restrooms for men, women, and transgender (RP-06).

Considering the contentions made by the research participants, one can conclude that the visual representations of each gender identity serve as effective visual cues that further signify recognition of the diversity of gender identities, with each identity distinct from the others. These symbols made them feel their identities and uniqueness were acknowledged, recognized, and validated.

The study by McGuire, et. al., (2022) supports the previously mentioned contentions of the research participants on the significance of employing gender-neutral symbols for comfort rooms. Their study explored the transgender youth's experiences with bathroom access in North America, highlighting challenges with

both gender-neutral and gender-segregated facilities. The findings show that barriers to bathroom access negatively impact mental health, educational performance, and physical safety. The study above not only promotes gender-neutral symbols for transgender individuals but also advocates gender-inclusive bathroom designs for other marginalized groups, including parents with small children and people with disabilities. The implication of the research study corroborated the current semiotic investigation in emphasizing the significance of symbolism for their existence towards the identities of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Clary (2023) also investigated the impact of supportive and non-supportive symbolism on the identity development, emotional well-being, and social engagement of transgender and gender-diverse adults in Texas. This research employed audio-recorded semi-structured focus groups and interviews involving 11 transgender participants. The results show that positive symbols, including flags, signs, inclusive language, and representation, are crucial in shaping individuals' identities. They enhance emotional well-being, help cope with challenges, and foster social connections. The findings highlight the crucial role of geographic and cultural context in the environments where transgender people inhabit.

Additionally, Bingham and Cotas (2022) investigated how factors affecting the acceptance and safety of transgender women in Metro Manila's B.P.O. companies could inform and improve diversity and inclusion policies. The research found that transgender women in B.P.O.s felt accepted and supported, mainly through measures like gender-neutral bathrooms, based on interviews. The studies above imply that implementing gender-neutral spaces and inclusive policies can reduce discrimination, promote equality, and create a more supportive environment for all gender identities. It underscores the broader need for public institutions to adopt similar practices to foster inclusivity and protect the rights of transgender and non-binary people. Thus, the research findings correlate to the analyzed theme of the crucial role of LGBTQIA+ symbols, which serve as their symbolisms for the existence of their identities.

Unity for Advocacy and Activism

Semiotically, LGBTQIA+ flags carry a profound expression of one's identity, just like how people wave their flags in their own countries. Raising the rainbow flag in front of the crowd makes them proud of themselves. The public display of this symbol serves as a visible declaration of solidarity for activism and advocacy. In particular, Athena aired out that:

In the context of LGBTQIA+ symbols, the rainbow flag is our most commonly recognized symbol. So, for me, you can feel it when someone acknowledges the flag, like when they say, 'Raise your flag, right?' It makes us proud, just like when we see the Filipino flag being raised, you know? It gives us a sense of acceptance when they recognize us. Even though some may not fully accept us, at least they can tolerate us because, you know, just like heterosexual couples, the LGBTQ+ community also has its negative stereotypes, but not everyone is like that. Just like in heterosexual relationships, there are good and bad people. That is why, at least with the flag alone, when we see it, it makes us proud. It shows that they support us, which makes me feel supported (RP-06).

The participant's remarks highlight the importance of symbols, particularly the rainbow flag, in conveying a message of inclusivity. Beyond the visibility of LGBTQIA+ symbols implies their active engagement and advocacy in battling against heteronormativity while advancing their rights and equality. Seeing these symbols made them feel seen and validated based on the contention of Aphrodite.

For me, these symbols help us recognize the symbols for the L.G.B.T. It is a big help. I feel accepted here, especially for the members of the L.G.B.T.Q. Some hide their true identities because they are afraid of being judged. And then, when they see signs like this, it is like they are flattered. I feel flattered because they accepted me here since not all places or countries can accept us (RP-05).

On a broader note, the LGBTQIA+ symbols not only promote recognition of the identity of each letter of its acronym but also break stereotypes against them. These visual cues, mainly the rainbow pride flag, convey a strong message of inclusivity. Displaying their symbols publicly or putting rainbow flag stickers on their vehicles promotes inclusivity and breaks stereotypes against them. Apollo shared with the group that last January, the LGBTQIA+ community in their area offered their helping hands to the people affected by the typhoon. To ensure the community recognized them, they put rainbow stickers on their pickup trucks as they visited all the affected areas. Here is the gist of what he said:

Yes, it is about helping each other. Also, Ma'am, they should be encouraged to support us. They will see that we are not what they might think; we are helpful and caring. Just through these symbols, Ma'am, they can recognize us for who we are (RP-07).

Displaying the LGBTQIA+ symbols evokes a sense of inclusivity by highlighting the existence of their community. Their active involvement in society signifies their confidence in expressing their authentic selves to the public. Indeed, the LGBTQIA+ symbols, mainly the rainbow flag, serve as powerful tools to promote visibility and acceptance where their identities and feelings are validated, which makes them feel that they are part of the society despite the challenges of societal norms. Hence, Apollo's remarks on the significance of the symbols in breaking stereotypes against them received support from Eros:

For me, symbols are a huge help for the L.G.B.T.Q. Community. Through these symbols, we can show our pride in who we are and counter the negative things people say about us, especially on social media, where they often claim we are a burden to society (RP-01).

The significance of using symbols for unity and activism was examined in the research study of Gut (2021) on the analysis of the Women's Strike in Poland, protesting a restrictive abortion law enacted in 2021. The movement used online activism and symbols like the lightning bolt to advocate for women's rights. Visual analysis and interviews reveal how these symbols enhanced communication, visibility, and networking. Findings highlight their effectiveness in promoting the movement and fostering societal change. This case study underscores online activism's impact on contemporary social movements. Gut's research study (2021) implies that symbols such as the lightning bolt effectively express unity and activism. The study's results corroborated the identified theme of this linguistic investigation, particularly the use of LGBTQIA+ symbols to battle negative stereotyping while advancing their advocacies.

Accordingly, the use of LGBTQIA+ symbols in promoting unity for activism and advocacy corroborated the study of Collar (2021) on exploring identity at gay pride events through temporary tattoos and LGBTQ+ symbols. Interviews show that the temporary body art makes them feel socially accepted despite their experiences of isolation and discrimination. It is important to note that body art, such as tattoos, are examples of symbolism that represents the LGBTQIA+ community.

Manifestation of Acceptance and Awareness

The LGBTQIA+ symbols are powerful visual representations promoting acceptance and awareness of gender and sexual diversity. They also act as an avenue to correct misconceptions about the LGBTQIA+ community, which can contribute to their exclusivity. They allow society to engage in a healthy discussion about understanding the rights of each LGBTQIA+ member, primarily how to address them. It also offers the public educational insights on each letter of the acronym L.G.B.T.Q.I. A+, explaining the hidden meaning of the flag and the gender identities they represent. It signifies the active existence and engagement of the LGBTQIA+ community in advancing their rights, just like what Minerva said:

It will inform other people about the specific differences in each individual's gender identity, not sexual orientation, but gender identity, as part of the L.G.B.T. community. With that knowledge, people will be less likely to misinterpret or misunderstand each other's preferences and identities. For example, as Psyche mentioned, there are situations where people assume someone is gay and expect them to act a certain way. This misunderstanding can insult our community and undermine our efforts to be understood and accepted for who we are (RP-04).

The impact of the LGBTQIA+ symbols not only promotes educational awareness about gender and sexual diversity but also corrects the misconceptions of each gender identity on a deeper level, which can be a contributing factor to their exclusivity. For instance, Hera aired out that:

So, Ma'am, this can help us, especially with our identities. Even though it is still difficult for us to be entirely accepted, we are slowly gaining acceptance in the community. Those symbols can help us spread the information that being gay is different from being bisexual and being lesbian is different as well. This distinction is essential for everyone to understand (RP-02).

The participants' remarks imply the negative impact of the lack of awareness about these symbols and the understanding of the representation of each gender identity. Indeed, by educating people on the meaning behind each symbol and advocating for what LGBTQIA+ stands for, society will be better equipped to address them adequately. Aphrodite stressed out that:

Basic information is essential to raising awareness among people who need to be made aware of the proper labels. For example, if you are addressed as 'sir,' you can tell them you are trans, and they can address you as Miss instead. Correcting them can help them become aware when addressing others next time (RP-05).

Promoting educational awareness about gender and sexual diversity not only gives basic information to the public but also raises awareness to people on how to treat them fairly regardless of their gender identities, just like what Apollo shared:

Then, symbols are beneficial because aside from knowing where you are, who you are, or what you are, it also helps those who might not

be aware so that they will not mistakenly treat you in a way that you're uncomfortable with. For instance, if you are a straight man, someone wants you to wear a dress (RP-07).

In a broader periphery, the LGBTQIA+ community has various symbols representing them. The representation of each letter of the acronym has its pride flags, which breaks stereotypes against their community. Despite the differences and the identities they carry themselves, they are still often misinterpreted by society. Thus, these symbols give society an understanding that not all members of the LGBTQIA+ community fit into narrow categories, just like what Athena pointed out in general:

So, I want to focus on the use of symbols and labels. The word 'gay' is often used as a general term for everyone. Bisexuals are called gay; transgender people are called gay. For lesbians, it is just 'tomboy' for all. Even women who look masculine are called 'tomboy.' The L.G.B.T.Q.I. A+ community is diverse; even within our community, we accept this diversity. I admit that it can be confusing, and within our culture, we often settle with calling everyone 'gay' because it is tiring to explain all the differences. Transgender and transwoman are different too. When we say transwoman, it usually refers to someone who has undergone surgery—pre-op and post-op. Those who have not had surgery are different from those who have. It is diverse. So, sometimes, within our community, we use 'gay' as a casual, familiar term. It is okay if it is just among us, but it can be unkind when used by others (RP-06).

In essence, the LGBTQIA+ symbols allow people to deeply navigate the historical context of the existence of each pride flag, which represents each gender identity. Through this educational input, people can understand the root cause of the challenges. Their struggles eventually influenced society's negative perceptions of them, which can contribute to a feeling of exclusion. Interpreting the LGBTQIA+ symbols, which act as signifiers, signifies empathy and understanding of their continued battle against discrimination and negative stereotyping.

Based on the dominant notions shared by the research participants, including awareness of LGBTQIA+ symbols and other significant topics relevant to the LGBTQIA+ community into the educational curriculum could create a positive ripple effect in advancing their rights. Through public awareness, it weakens the issues of heteronormativity.

Dunkerly, Morris, and Taylor (2020) conducted a year-long qualitative case study to disrupt heteronormativity and enhance pre-service elementary teachers' support for LGBTQIA+ students. The findings of the study indicated a significant shift in the attitudes and readiness of pre-service elementary teacher candidates to engage with LGBTQIA+ children. Despite facing resistance and apathy, the candidates showed an increased preparedness to support LGBTQIA+ students after researching and creating multimodal texts addressing LGBTQIA+ topics. The findings of the previously mentioned study imply that engaging with LGBTQIA+ symbols and topics through multimodal texts can contribute to increased acceptance and awareness within the LGBTQIA+ community. In the context of the current study, the use of LGBTQIA+ symbols, coupled with education and awareness-raising efforts, can play a vital role in manifesting acceptance in a broader community.

Seeing the LGBTQIA+ symbols displayed in public and online spaces advocates awareness in society. Through this, the public knows the meanings behind the symbols and helps battle negative stereotyping against them. In the study of S.H., Shabu, and Thomas (2021), they explored the Indian youth's

perceptions of homosexuality and the experiences of homosexual individuals post-decriminalization in 2018. The research, using qualitative interviews and surveys with 83 participants, revealed that education and awareness are essential for normalizing societal views on homosexuality in India. The result of the study implies that increasing awareness and education about homosexuality is crucial for fostering acceptance in Indian society. In the context of the current study, by promoting visibility and understanding through education and the use of LGBTQIA+ symbols, societal attitudes toward homosexuality can become more inclusive and supportive.

4. Implications and Concluding Remarks

4.1 Implication for Future Research

The researcher specifically investigated the language and identity of the LGBTQIA+ community through the memetic contents found in the online linguistic landscapes. Additionally, the researcher explored the perspectives of LGBTQIA+ members in terms of the integral role of how signs that represent them can foster inclusivity and exclusivity.

Drawing from the semiotics approaches, qualitative content analysis, and thematic analysis, the researcher unveiled deeper meanings and offered nuanced implications. Nevertheless, the researcher focused solely on examining how LGBTQIA+ identities unfold through the semiotic elements depicted in memetic content. Thus, exploring other potential aspects for identity exploration is recommended, such as fashion, hairstyle, and clothing, drawing from another semiotic perspective.

4.2 Concluding Remarks

Semiotics play a significant role in unveiling the meaning behind each sign and cultural identity. It allows people to express their collective identities through various forms of communication, and through semiotics, signs become powerful tools for expressing and shaping collective identities. This current linguistic study investigated the meta-semiotic tasks depicted in LGBTQIA+ memes, revealing layers of meaning and symbolism. It also explores how LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identities in the memetic linguistic landscape and how semiotic elements significantly convey inclusivity and exclusivity within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Based on the data results, Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar analysis can unravel more profound layers of meaning and symbolism. It employs three meta-semiotic tasks—the representational, interactional, and compositional meta-functions—to unravel nuanced meanings in the memetic contents.

From the perspective of the representational meta-semiotic task, the research findings revealed that memes have high value in the narrative process, particularly the reactional process, compared to action and conceptual processes. This means that memes are effective means of visually encoding real-life experiences or events that can be channelled through narration.

In the interactional phase, the analysis focused on three components: the gaze, the size of frames, and the angles. The study revealed that "offer images" outweigh "demand images" in terms of its gaze. The result implies that the producer of the memes wants to only convey a message without directly seeking interaction from the viewers. It further signifies that the memes under-analyzed are subject to contemplation. It allows the audience or viewers to reflect and interpret the textual and visual cues manifested in the memes. In the context of the research study, the producers provoke the viewers to contemplate the relevant issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community.

Regarding the sizing of frames, the data revealed that medium close shot dominates among other sizes of frames. The medium close shot, which captures visibility from the waist to the head, also represents a far personal distance. This shot lets the viewers focus on the participant's facial expressions, gestures, and body language. The result implies that the study positions viewers as observers rather than active participants. The closer visibility of the represented participants allows the viewers to keenly observe the non-verbal gestures, which play a significant role in interpreting the intended message. In this research study, the analyzed memes create a space for reflection and contemplation, enabling viewers to connect with relevant LGBTQIA+ issues on a personal level and consider their relevance to their own experiences or beliefs.

The study depicts the horizontal frontal angle as the most prominent. The horizontal frontal angle invites the viewers to get involved in the participants' world. The interplay of textual and visual cues in the memes can effectively ignite viewers' participation by urging them to empathize with the relevant issues portrayed in various memes. The research study shows that horizontal frontal angles signify that the memes reflect real-life scenarios or phenomena, directly or indirectly implicating individuals.

From the vantage point of the compositional meta-semiotic task, the data are analyzed based on the meme's framing, information value, salience, and visual modality. To begin with, the "connection framing" outweighs the "disconnection framing." It involves analyzing the choices about the boundaries of people, objects, and actions within the visual space and how these choices influence the semiotic meaning. Based on the result of the study, the connection framing was achieved by employing similarities and rhyming patterns in color and form, as well as through vectors that connect various components. In the context of the research study, this implies that cohesive visual strategies are more effective in conveying integrated and meaningful messages, particularly the experiences and issues faced by the LGBTQIA+ community. It enhances the viewers' ability to unravel and interpret the hidden meanings depicted in the memes as a unified whole.

The study reveals that the memes portray their components in both "Ideal" and "Real" placements concerning their information value. The "ideal" information provides an emotive appeal and is placed on top, while the "real" information contains specific or practical information at the bottom. This research study implies that employing the "Ideal" and "Real" placements in the LGBTQIA+ memes can effectively communicate on two levels. The first level elicits an emotive feeling placed on top, which can motivate a solid desire to get engaged and take practical action based on the intended message. The second level aims to strengthen the emotive appeal in concrete reality by placing specific information at the bottom. Generally, the "Ideal" and "Real" placements of the compositions of the memes are employed to emotionally connect with the viewers while educating them based on the given practical information.

When it comes to the memes' salience, the study revealed that the use of rainbow colors and the utilization of bolder fonts and bigger text sizes serve as the semiotic modes that stood out and drew the viewers' attention, which acts as an integral part of interpreting the message. The research study shows that the prominence of textual and visual cues effectively communicates the intended message. Lastly, the study revealed that most memes are present in high modalities. It means that the study realistically portrays the participants. In the context of this study, the use of high modality signifies that the memes are perceived as authentic and realistic, further enhancing their relatability to their audience. Moreover, a high modality can easily ignite the viewers' attention, which can intensify the persuasive power of the memes. In essence, the compositional meta-semiotic task allows viewers to connect emotionally with the represented participants while educating them on the intended message through framing, information value, salience, and visual modalities.

Apart from the linguistic investigation of the meta-semiotic tasks depicted in the LGBTQIA+ memes, this research study also examined how LGBTQIA+ individuals shaped their identities in the memetic linguistic landscape. With the employment of Peirce's triadic model, which includes the critical investigation of the memes' representamen, object, and interpretant and categorization of signs, the data revealed three meaning categories: symbolic, contextual, and intertextual meanings. This analysis is crucial for understanding how LGBTQIA+ identities construct themselves in the memetic linguistic landscape.

By carefully analyzing the interplay between representamen, object, and interpretant in memes, the study reveals essential themes: unity and community empowerment, fear of coming out, and social commentaries on LGBTQIA+ issues. These themes are significant for understanding how LGBTQIA+ individuals shape their identities in the memetic linguistic landscape.

The memetic linguistic investigation of this research study was supplemented based on the LGBTQIA+ perceptions of how semiotic elements play a significant role in conveying messages of inclusivity and exclusivity within their community. A thematic analysis was employed to answer this linguistic query. In investigating how semiotic elements play a significant role in conveying messages of inclusivity and exclusivity, three themes emerged: symbols of existence and identity, unity for activism and advocacy, and manifestation of acceptance and awareness.

In conclusion, the research study's findings signify that LGBTQIA+ symbols, such as the rainbow pride flag and the flags representing each identity, are powerful representations of their existence that can promote acceptance and inclusivity. On the other hand, misconceptions, mislabeling, and a lack of awareness of the meanings of each symbol can contribute to their exclusivity. Addressing these issues through education can foster a more informed and supportive society, offering hope and optimism for positive change. Indeed, society can drive this progress and ensure broader acceptance within diverse communities by effectively interpreting and respectfully presenting these symbols. Hence, semiotic elements are crucial in shaping and communicating messages of inclusivity and exclusivity within the LGBTQIA+ community, profoundly influencing societal perceptions and interactions.

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