




## **Coping Strategies and Restrictions during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Some Selected Cartoons and Comics**

**Dr. Hamdi Ebeid Khalil**

Lecturer of Linguistics

Faculty of Arts, Suez University

[hamdiebeid2019@gmail.com](mailto:hamdiebeid2019@gmail.com)

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## **Coping Strategies and Restrictions during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Some Selected Cartoons and Comics**

### **Abstract**

With the advent of COVID-19 pandemic, the whole world is overwhelmed with a mood of fear, anxiety, depression and psychological discomfort. The Coronavirus has wrapped all aspects of life with a new mode so that the authorities concerned have imposed stay-at-home orders, curfews and restrictions on mass mobility and daily activities. These restrictions have given rise to unprecedented practices rarely available in pre-Coronavirus era. Consequently, the normal course of life has greatly changed and a new daily routine has been established during the COVID-19 pandemic whose impact on all life activities is characterized by being extensive and having far-reaching consequences. This paper investigates the COVID-19 repercussions in some purposively selected cartoons and comics from different websites. The selected cartoons and comics attempt to establish what may be called *covidity*, a neologism that requires collective and wide-spread response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It analyzes negative pandemic-related aspects that have bearing especially on travel, religious and sport activities. The study draws upon Kress and Leeuwen's approach of Visual Grammar (2006) within the framework of social semiotics. The study probes Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), which is mainly applied and opted for deeper examination of visual discourse maintained in the data under discussion. Multimodality is a concept that accounts for different semiotic resources in communication to express certain meanings or ideologies. The paper demonstrates how coping strategies help to alleviate the grim mood created by the pandemic and to get adapted to new circumstances.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Multimodality, Visual Grammar, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Coping Strategies.

## إستراتيجيات التكيف والإجراءات الاحترازية خلال جائحة كوفيد-19 : تحليل خطابي متعدد الوسائط لبعض الرسوم الكرتونية والمضحكة المختارة

### مستخلص

مع ظهور جائحة كوفيد-19، ساد العالم أجمع حالة من الخوف والقلق والانزعاج النفسي. لقد أضفى فيروس كورونا نمطا جديدا على كافة مناحي الحياة، مما دفع السلطات المعنية لإصدار تعليمات البقاء بالمنزل وحظر التجول والقيود على التنقل الجماعي والأنشطة اليومية. وقد أدت هذه القيود إلى ظهور ممارسات غير مسبوقة قلما تواجدت في فترة ما قبل فيروس كورونا. وبالتالي، تغير المسار الطبيعي للحياة بشكل كبير وظهر روتين يومي جديد خلال جائحة كوفيد-19 والذي كان له تأثير بالغ المدى على جميع أنشطة الحياة. تبحث هذه الدراسة تداعيات كوفيد-19 في بعض الرسوم الكرتونية والرسوم المضحكة المختارة من مواقع الكترونية مختلفة. تهدف البيانات المختارة إلى إرساء ما يمكن تسميته "بالكوفيدية"، وهو مصطلح جديد يتطلب استجابة جماعية وواسعة النطاق لجائحة كوفيد-19، ويحلل الجوانب السلبية المتعلقة بالوباء وتأثيرها لا سيما على السفر والأنشطة الدينية والرياضية. تعتمد الدراسة على منهج كريس وليوين في القواعد النحوية المرئية (2006) في إطار نظرية السيمائية الاجتماعية. كما تبحث الدراسة في تحليل الخطاب المتعدد الوسائط والذي يتم تطبيقه بشكل أساسي في تحليل الخطاب المرئي بصورة أشمل للبيانات قيد الدراسة. إن تعدد الوسائط مفهوماً يفسر الوسائل السيمائية المختلفة في التواصل للتعبير عن معاني أو أيولوجيات معينة. وتكشف الدراسة عن مدى مساهمة تلك الاستراتيجيات في التخفيف من حالة التجهم التي خلفها الوباء والتأقلم مع الواقع الجديد.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** السيمائية، تعدد الوسائط، القواعد النحوية المرئية، تحليل الخطاب متعدد الوسائط، استراتيجيات المواجهة.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the advent of Coronavirus pandemic, there have been thorough changes that encompass all fields and aspects of life. The COVID-19 has been unanimously deemed as an unprecedented global crisis that engulfed the whole world into unusual and unexpected realities. The negative impact of the COVID-19 has been so disproportionate that it brought about radical modifications in economic, health, political, socio-cultural and even religious practices. The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified the COVID-19 as pandemic in March 2020 and declared the emergence of the novel Coronavirus (2019-NCoV) a public health emergence of international concern (PHEIC) (WHO, 2005). Consequently, state authorities all over the world imposed extraordinary measures meant as mitigatory procedures enabling people to cope with the virus crisis. These measures include stay-at-home orders, social distancing, self-isolation and restrictions on all daily activities and practices.

The COVID-19 has ushered in a new era where the world awakened to a reality that has never been witnessed before. Coping strategies have been devised to create some kind of coexistence with the virus crisis. This has usually been achieved through temporary or permanent lockdowns of schools, universities, restaurants, shops, etc. This is in addition to diminishing face-to-face interactions and contacts and imposing curfews. The COVID-19 has an enormous effect on people's daily spatial behaviors and way of communication. That is why some countries have ceased or banned international travel by closing country borders and limiting passenger traffic. Implementation of health measures for travelers, awareness-raising in the population and risk communication was put into practice. (WHO, 2020).

At the sport level, the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the authorities concerned to ban assembly of masses and fans in sport facilities. Moreover, some national and international tournaments have come to a halt due to the current virus crisis. Religious practices have largely been affected by the outbreak of the COVID-

19 pandemic. In this regard, countries have taken drastic measures to raise worshippers' awareness of the dangers of the COVID-19 in mosques and churches where some congregational practices have been suspended. The negative impact of the pandemic made it incumbent to lock down religious centers and traditional congregations. It might be said that some rituals have been practiced on a limited scale provided that social distancing and proper precautionary measures are observed.

The study is concerned with investigating the impact of the COVID crisis on people's daily lives and the functioning of societies. It also sets out the restrictions imposed by governments and the relevant authorities on some practices, especially travel, sport and religious ones as coping strategies with this global crisis. The most noticeable means through which this can be achieved were cartoons and comic strips. The study attempts a multimodal discourse analysis of the content of these genres of popular arts that served to nudge the people on different effects of the pandemic and how to cope with the new world that the pandemic brought about. The data have been collected from various websites concerned with evoking broad risks, repercussions and instructional campaigns associated with the COVID-19 in different aspects of daily life. That is why the collected samples were not confined to just one website. The data collected during 2020-2021 are grouped on the basis of how coping strategies are put into effect to avoid the detrimental nature and to get acclimatized to the status quo of the COVID-19.

## **2. Cartoons and Comics**

These two media genres, i.e., cartoons and comics are closely interrelated. This section intends to set out subtle differences between the two genres and how they are socially and linguistically utilized. Cartoons can refer to a multi-dimensional art form and a depiction of visual art. Although the definition assigned to cartoon has changed overtime, modern usage basically views cartoon as a semi-realistic or a non-realistic drawing intended for evoking satire, caricature, humour or any other artistic styles. The term cartoon was essentially originated in the Middle Ages and was initially referred

to as a preparatory drawing or a type of art such as a panel painting, fresco painting and colour painting on glass. In the nineteenth century, cartoon was described as a humorous illustration in magazines and newspapers while it was referred to as comic strips and animated films in the early twentieth century onward.

Cartoons in print media can be classified into various categories: editorial cartoons on the Internet, gag cartoons, comics, webcomics, caricature, graphic novels, comic books, pocket cartoon, advertisement, television, and movies animations. (Brian, 2009, p.15-32). These types of cartoons have a common element, i.e., humorous effects and have a message that people should take seriously. It can be added that cartoons cover underlying philosophy or ideology along with humorous tones. This is confirmed by (Brian, 2009, p.1) stating that "cartoons influence the way people look at political and world events, they make people think, and they help people laugh at themselves". This means that cartoons are not a single way art, but they are a multi-faceted genre of art. Cartoons, according to (Brian, 2009), are not just humorous illustrations, telling jokes, but they depict real-life experiences where the cartoonist has the ability to express and convey his standpoint concerning life and its ongoing events.

Comics can be defined as a rather new graphic art and a form of art by which artists can express and depict the world around them. Comics may serve different real-life concepts such as evil, morals, heroism and many other societal precepts. Comics have become major elements in the culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eisner (1985, p.5) elaborates that "comics as an ancient form of art or method of expression, found its way to the widely read comic strips and books which have established an undeniable position in the popular culture of this century". Not only has the genre been recognized as a medium and an art form, but it also inspired other means of communication from textbooks to interactive media. Comic (a term of Greek origin) is an independent publication or a style and narrates a story that comprises comic art employing different textual devices such as balloons, captions and onomatopoeia to indicate sound

effects, dialogues and other information.

Comics first appeared as a form of sequential art that varied from periodical comics, graphic novels, to instructional manuals and storyboards (Eisner, 1985, p.124). This means that comics are not always intended for stories displaying humorous effects, but they can belong to different genres and may not have humorous overtones. Comics can help in understanding and unearthing common issues in a particular area and contribute to unifying opinions towards personal, national, political and social tendencies and perceptions. The functions of Sequential Art can be divided into two broad applications: instruction and entertainment (Eisner, 1985, p. 139). Topics implied by comics can vary according to artist's interests and orientations.

Cartoons/comics have become the most powerful communication means among media avenues, especially the Internet. Webcomics are another form characterized as the online version of cartoons and comic strips. Unlike their print counterparts, webcomics are wholly published on the Internet and are often illustrations that supply a smooth and easy access to the public, which may not be available in print formats.

### **3. Research Questions**

The current study seeks to answer the following research questions:

**RQ 1** How do cartoons and comics reflect crisis generated by the COVID-19 at various fields of daily life?

**RQ 2** What are the coping strategies implied by the selected cartoons and comics?

**RQ 3** How can cartoons and comics identify people's attitudes and ideologies towards COVID-19 and get them aware of the dangers of the virus?

#### **4. Theoretical Framework & Literature Review**

Communication is not only linguistically realized by verbal texts or wording, but it can also be achieved through different paralinguistic modes. These paralinguistic modes can combine to impute certain social and linguistic messages to language users in a way that is more competent than mere texting messages. This is the domain of social semiotics which is concerned with meaning makers and meaning making. Considering language as a system of signs became one of the most basic components of social semiotics (Hodge and Kress,1988). Social semiotics establishes a correlation between the signified (meaning) and signifier (form). This means that the relation between form and meaning is not arbitrary but motivated (Kress, 1993). Social semiotics investigates the dissemination and the modes of communication that are used to enable people to accurately comprehend messages conveyed to create some kind of semiotic mingling between different modes of communication. The study introduces the concept of multimodality as an increasingly visible phenomenon of communication.

Multimodality is a linguistic concept that emerged and evolved over the last two decades to account for different resources used in communication. Texts, under semiotics, are analyzed through multimodal complexes and are decoded in a way that signifies anything expressing meaning such as words, images, symbols, sounds, gestures, etc. to express meaning. "Texts in contemporary society are increasingly multi-semiotic; texts whose primary semiotic form is language increasingly combine language with other semiotic forms" (Fairclough, 1995, p.4). The move from verbal to visual communication has been described in terms of explicating discursive implications.

The concept of multimodality is defined as " the use of several semantic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.20). These several semiotic modes are complementary to each other in the sense that messages and ideologies imputed are collectively the result of



different semiotic resources. Analyzing visual communication is an integral part of critical disciplines of language. Critical Discourse Analysis pays a considerable attention to investigating underlying interpretations or ideologies of the visual structures. CDA is influenced by and reviewed in the works of prominent scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (1997a, 1998). CDA is a growing interdisciplinary approach to discourse according to which language is a form of social practice.

It is essentially pertinent to analyzing implicit and explicit social and interactive relationships as manifested in language. That is why CDA is regarded as having a complex relationship between language and society. Fairclough (1992:110-112) proposes that the critical discourse analysis of a text should pass through three stages of description, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. It has already been emphasized that CDA is characterized by its interdisciplinary nature and diverse perspectives of its analysis of a great number of social issues. Consequently, Multimodal Discourse Analysis is capitalized on both critical linguistics and Visual Grammar (VG) as being paramount integration of both approaches.

This prompts us to state that MDA is concerned with analyzing language depending on the combination of different modes in a particular media. This concept is expressed by O'Halloran (2011:120) stating that MDA "extends the study of language per se to scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound". He refers to these semiotic means as "semiotic resources". The present study attempts to analyze and investigate the underlying readings of signs along with other semiotic resources. For this reason, cartoons and comics are semiotically probed in terms of Kress and Van Leeuwen's *Grammar of Visual Design*.

MDA is a critical method of discourse analysis that highlights the significance of interpreting visual images along with verbal discourse. This means that MDA encompasses both construction and representation of meaning (Van Dijk, 1997b, O'Halloran, 2008).

This is based on the assumption that visual resources can express ideological meanings just as the verbal text gives rise to meanings in a given context. In this vein, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) refer to three meta functions, namely, representational, interactive and compositional. The representational metafunction elucidates the ways participants, events and their associated circumstances are realized.

On the other hand, interactive metafunction symbolizes the relationship between interactive participants and represented participants. The former are those participants who speak or write, read, make images or view them whereas the latter are those that constitute the subject matter of communication such as people, places and things (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.48). The third metafunction, i.e., composition is used to associate the representational and interactive image with each other. This interrelated relationship is based on three interlinked systems: (i) informational value, characterized as (the placement of elements, participants and syntagms that relate them to each other and to the viewers), (ii) salience, defined as " the elements made to attract the viewer's attention to different degrees, such as factors of foregrounding or backgrounding, relative size, contrasts in tonal value or (colour)", (iii) framing, being the presence or absence of framing devices realized by elements which create dividing lines or by actual frame lines".(Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 177). The concept of multimodality and visual communication are not only proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) but are also grounded on studies postulated by Halliday (1978).

Based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) (2004) as an important approach in critical studies of language and understanding the different choices that the speaker makes to express different meanings, Kress and Van Leeuwen have formulated their aforementioned metafunctions. According to SFG, three broad metafunctiona are postulated: ideational/experiential, interpersonal and textual. The ideational function has to do with construing human experience. It is the means by which we make sense of reality and

react to the world around us. This is always referred to in the text through participants' reactions, cognition, perception, etc. Interpersonal function refers to the interactive functions of language that are exchanged among speakers such as statements, questions, offers and commands. It helps to establish and maintain social relations and roles such as the role of questioner or respondent which we assume by asking or answering question through the interaction between one person and another. Textual function has to do with the way a text is structured and presented as a message. It is associated with the internal organization of the text and its connection to the context. It is noted that ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions in SFG correspond respectively to representational, interactive and compositional functions in VG. The study adopts an integrated theoretical framework of both the VG and MDA as two social semiotic approaches. The VG developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), based on Halliday's SFG, accounts for the understanding of how the visual images convey certain messages under the model of metafunctions.

The impact of COVID-19 and ways to cope with this widespread crisis have been tackled in a number of previous studies from different perspectives. Some of these studies have touched upon repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic and mechanisms relevant to alleviating people's suffering and the grim reality of the crisis. On the other hand, other studies have neglected the concept of coping strategies and restrictive measures during the pandemic and just analyzed the topic from different angles.

Sultan (2021) approached COVID-19 crisis in a study entitled *Fighting Covid-19 with Fun: Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Egyptian Coronavirus Webcomics*. The objectives of the study were 1) identifying the complexity of the nature of webcomics and proving their status as being a unique means of creative expression worthy of scholarly discussion, 2) highlighting the massive effect of webcomics in creating stereotypical knowledge without verbalizing any word. The data for the study were collected from various Facebook pages that contain webcomics that widely spread and

circulated on social media in Egyptian society. The study adopted a multidisciplinary approach combining socio-pragmatic analysis with multimodal visual analysis. Data analysis was categorized according to webcomics that shed light on expressing people's emotions towards the crisis, assessing the performance of the government in dealing with the pandemic and handling the crisis of the doctors in Egypt. The researcher concluded that webcomics performed socio-communicative functions such as expressing public demand, resentment, humor and public denials.

In the same vein, Hussien and Aljamili (2020) reiterated how humor in Jordanian social media primarily contributed to overcoming the pandemic burdens and providing relief in a study entitled *COVID19-Humor in Jordanian Social Media: A Social-Semiotic Approach*. The study aimed at exploring the effect of humor on easing anxiety and gloomy atmosphere and lightening the mood, tension and stress load generated by the pandemic. The data for the study were based on some memes and caricatures extracted from Jordanian social media websites in the period between March and May 2020. The study adopted Kress and Leeuwen's approach of social semiotics.

A survey was conducted to extract social media users' opinions concerning the effect of humor on people's psychological and healthy conditions. Questions were posed to participants on their impressions on the effect of humorous figures attached as a link in the survey. It was found that approximately 1274 participants responded to the inquiries involved in the questionnaire. The main findings of the study were that people's reactions and perspectives are influenced by humor implied in the selected figures and that Jordanian social media must have a greater share in alleviating people's psychological impact caused by the pandemic.

Alabi (2020) approached Coronavirus in terms of its impact on various aspects of life in a study entitled *Crisis Communication and Coping Strategies during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Content Analysis of Coronavirus Cartoons and Comics* (CCC). The study examined some selected Nigerian online newspapers cartoons and webcomics

on Coronavirus socio-economic, health, and political dynamics in the Nigerian society. The main objectives of the study were to emphasize the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on people and highlight the role of cartoons and webcomics in surmounting psychological and emotional effects of the pandemic. The study did not follow a specific approach in analyzing the data. It just narrates the content of the selected figures without investigating multimodal discourse analysis of different semiotic resources implied in the figures. It even neglects some important restrictive measures imposed on different activities during the crisis. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge the gaps in this regard.

## 5. Data Analysis



Fig. 1 Provincial and international travel restrictions during COVID-19. By Adrian Raeside, Prince George Citizen, April 30, 2021.

Measures of travel restriction or adjournment of travel schedules have been imposed by state authorities with the advent of COVID-19. This cartoon was published following Canadian prime minister's Justin Trudeau decree of a month-long [ban on flights from India and Pakistan](#), but planes arriving from other heavily infected countries have not been halted. At the same time, [travel within and between provinces](#) is being restricted. The ban was first imposed on April 22 and has already been rolled over several times. The measure does not apply to cargo flights or medical transfers. In the above cartoon, four participants are symbolically depicted. The driver along with his family representing traveling citizens whereas the policeman represents the Police Department. The policeman is addressing the

citizen, who is driving his car, by looking at him (vector) while the driver does not directly look at the policeman. The conversational interaction is realized by the verbal representation of the caption that reads: I SAID...WE'RE RESTRICTING INTER-PROVINCIAL TRAVEL TO CONTROL THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS!.

It is noted that the policeman who is wearing a mask is a symbolism that he is sticking to precautionary measures taken during the COVID crisis as a coping strategy. On the other hand, the other participants, i.e., the citizen and his family seem heedless to COVID instructions as they are travelling among provinces unmasked. This cartoon humorously contains an element of irony concerning precautionary measures and coping strategies imposed by the relevant authorities. In other words, while land transportation and other means of transportation were restricted during the COVID-19, air travel was not excluded and made permissible as shown by this cartoon. The cartoonist wants to draw attention to this ironic reality through the caption in the dialogue bubble that coping strategies and restrictive mechanisms are not applied to air travel.

Four planes are seen flying over the represented participants, but not all of them are given a complete shot in the image. This number of planes has a significant symbolism that the air travel is in full swing is if no Covid crisis is under way. The composition of these planes indicates the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.176). One of these planes was given saliency to attract the viewer's attention to a certain message this image wants to convey through the size of the frame. "Just as image producers, in depicting humans or quasi-human participants, must choose to make them look at the viewer or not, and at the same time, choose to depict them as close or far away from the viewer - this applies to the depiction of objects also" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.124).

The depicted plane is not only put in the foreground, but it is also in the sharper focus of the viewer and receives the highest informational status. It seems that the plane in the foreground is too close to the interactive participant, i.e., the policeman that it causes

his head cap to forcibly fly away and he is trying to raise his voice pitch as indicated by his right-hand gesture beside his mouth.

The other participant, on his turn, could not clearly hear what is being said and tries to concentrate more, which is evidenced by his left-hand gesture on the ear. The plane composition is perhaps the main reason why the reacted participant i.e., the citizen does look directly to the policeman while he was talking to him. This also expresses the citizen's surprise and resentment of the policeman's statement that goes contrary to the air travel in the image. Disapproval and discontent are also inferred by the eye gaze and facial expressions of other participants accompanying the citizen. It must be stated here that the citizen and his accompanying participants are the reacted participants since reactional processes are typically framed by demonstrating the positioning of the depicted participant. "The Reactor, the participant who does the looking, must necessarily be human, or a human-like animal- a creature with visible eyes that have distinct pupils, and capable of facial expression"(Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.67). The cartoonist intends to attract attention to the ideological irony in the image where travel restriction was partially implemented which is still a risk of spreading the pandemic.

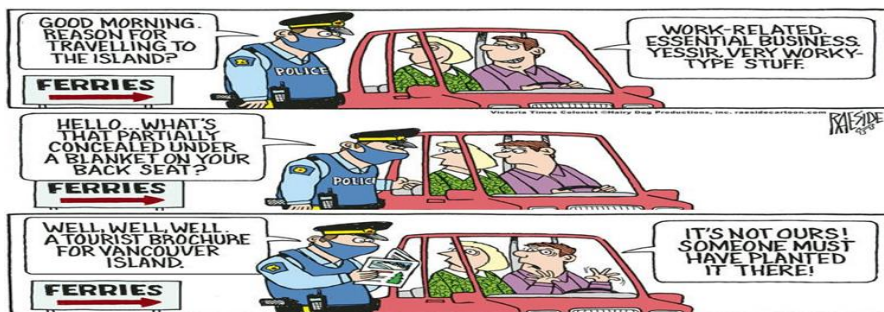


Fig. 2 Cartoon: People caught at road checks and ferry terminals - travelling for non-essential reasons outside their health regions could be fined \$575, B.C. Times Colonist, April 24, 2021, by Adrian Raeside.

In order to keep communities and people safe, road check points were established to impose restriction on travel at the time of the pandemic crisis. Interestingly, this cartoon has to do with protecting British Columbia's health-care system from COVID-19. That is why check on travel between regions to help enforce the non-essential travel restrictions was announced and came into effect on April 23, 2021. Public Safety and Solicitor General, Mike Farnworth issued an Emergency Program Act order to prohibit non-essential travel stating that "These restrictions on non-essential travel are saving lives, it's in the best interest of all British Columbians to follow them, and I know most are given the significant drop we've seen in out-of-region travel," (BC Gov News, 2021). These coping strategies and restriction directions during the COVID-19 are quite clear in the above figure. The key to understanding the meaning of this cartoon is through the homogenous organization of the visual and the verbal representation in the image.

Two denoted participants are displayed by this figure. An interactive metafunction is seen through the conversational representation in the dialogue bubbles between a policeman wearing a mask and man and woman in their car. The arrow which reads FERRIES, denotes that they are going to cross BC Ferries vehicle traffic. The policeman asked the other participants the reason why they are travelling in order to check whether it is essential or non-essential travel through the caption in the dialogue bubble that reads: GOOD MORNING. REASON FOR TRAVEL TO THE ISLAND? That is because travel restriction order issued by Mike Farnworth affects those who are travelling across regional zones for recreational purposes, but it is OK to travel for reasons deemed essential (CBC News, 2021). The phrase REASON FOR TRAVEL TO THE ISLAND? represents "demanding information that is a form of a question in which case the expected response is an answer, although the listener may also disclaim the question" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.122). The man driving the car replied in the caption that reads: WORK-RELATED. ESSENTIAL BUSINESS. YESSIR, VERY WORKY-TYPE STUFF. The way the man replies to the policeman's inquiry has a symbolic connotation concerning



the ideological message of the image. The man seems to have a wide face smiling which many indicate that he is not travelling for essential reasons or as a way to divert the policeman's attention from knowing the real reason for travel.

In the second shot of the cartoon, the body posture of the participants has changed slightly from the first shot of the cartoon. The leaning position of the policeman and pointing finger (vector) reflect a tendency to get closer to inspect what is in the backseat of the car, which is also observed from his hand gesture towards the car. Likewise, the leaning position and the suspicious-looking face of the man and woman towards the policeman symbolically connotes their fear and perplexity.

Consequently, the policeman poses his second inquiry in the bubble that reads: HELLO...WHAT'S THAT PARTIALLY CONCEALED UNDER A BLANKET ON YOUR BACK SEAT? The speech act is realized here by the interrogative mood which is also regarded as 'demanding information'. In the last shot of the cartoon, there is a sharp eye gaze (vector) on the part of the policeman while he was holding something at his hand (material process). The gaze of the policeman shows his astonishment and unexpectedness of what he found. This is obvious from the verbal representation of the bubble that reads as: WELL, WELL, WELL. A TOURIST BROCHURE FOR VANCOUVER ISLAND. The composition of the word WELL at the foreground of the bubble message and its intentional repetition has the most informational value. This is achieved through the textual metafunction where the foregrounded element signifies its thematization. The way the verbal representation is structured and introduced by the word WELL here is an indication that travel is not intended for essential reasons and therefore, the man and the woman are going to be fined for not sticking to travel instructions.

When faced with brochure (circumstance), the man and the woman pretended as if they knew nothing about it. The sharp-eyed gaze and surprising-looking face of the man and woman and the man's gesture of the hand (vector) semiotically symbolize their

extreme shock and denial of any connectedness to this travel brochure. This is also evidenced by the textual elements: IT'S NOT OURS! SOMEONE MUST HAVE PLANTED IT HERE! The material process (planted) connotes their unwillingly and unintentionally complete unawareness of this circumstance as the act of planting is connotatively used in the sense of hiding something, particularly something illegal, in someone's properties in order that they will be wrongly accused of that thing. Therefore, such a metaphorical association of the material act of planting is a reflection to relinquish responsibility of the action involved and at the same time to mirror others as wrongdoers or criminals. The intertextuality and contextualization of this image indicate that the cartoonist mocks and censures people's status after applying travel measures and not committing to these safety procedures.

The verbal representation and reactional processes in this image create a humorous effect on the part of the participants i.e., man and woman in relation to the effectiveness and application of the measures intended to contain and limit the pandemic risks.



Fig. 3 Syndicated Cartoon. Air Travel and COVID- Jeff Koterba Cagle Cartoons. Tulsa World. February 3, 2021.

In figure 3 the cartoonist highlights the extreme measures and coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 crisis. The image shows that all passengers in the airport are subjecting to PCR test in order to get travel license. A lot of passengers and a health-care professional are depicted as participants in this figure. All participants in the image are wearing face mask which symbolically

refers to the full commitment of all people to the Coronavirus measures being applied in airport halls. The image also depicts a health-care professional who is wearing a mask and a heavily protective isolation uniform. This underscores the importance of this public health action and the role of health-care workers depicted as the frontline agents in the battlefield with the unknown foe, i.e., COVID-19. The cartoon illustrates a health-care worker getting ready for undertaking their duty while wearing hospital scrubs and equipped with necessary tools for the virus testing procedures. There was a long line of passengers waiting for the results of the PCR test to be announced. They are also keeping social distance while standing in the line adhering to the precautions of COVID 19. Semiotic analysis of the image shows that the participants are getting fed up with this long line and being kept wait for a long time.

This can be semiotically inferred from the body posture and eye gazes from some participants. The image shows that some participants in the line are standing while others are taking a sitting posture on their bags. The cartoonist also represents participants' boredom and dissatisfaction with these long and red tape procedures through depicting a baby crying on his mother's arm. Similarly, the symbolization of boredom and discomfort is indicated by the grim-face looking and hand-crossed status of the man sitting on the bag. Strict measures can also be inferred from the locative circumstances which are called setting (Kress and Van Leeuwen ,2006, p.72).

The horizontal black barrier line is meant as keeping social distance among passengers. On the right angle of the image, there is a close-up shot of a sharp-gazed and anxious-looking man who might seem worried about the delay caused by such prolonged actions. It is not clear whom this man is looking at as no Phenomenon is observed in the frame. Therefore, this is called non-transactional reaction since “an eyeline vector emanates from a participant, the Reacter, but does not point at another participant” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.74). There is a correlation between the visual structures and verbal representation which focus on the strict precautionary measures intended to withhold the spread

of COVID-19 and how participants react to such measures. The cartoonist symbolically connotes the feeling of other participants' discontent with the procedures in progress through the caption bubble that reads: **WELL, NO, IT'S NOT A RAPID TEST...BUT WE'LL STILL HAVE THE RESULTS BY THE TIME YOU REACH YOUR GATE...**

This caption represents a symbolic foregrounded clause with a borne message transmitted through the large bold font size. The verbal labeling **BUT WE'LL STILL HAVE THE RESULTS BY THE TIME YOU REACH YOUR GATE..** indicates that the speech act here is realized by 'the offer of information'. "A prediction, for example, is an 'offer of information' with future tense and either second or third-person subject, or first-person subject with a ' non-volition verb" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.123).

The image shows that the reactor here is a sharp-gazed old man looking at the caption bubble at a surprisingly annoying manner. In short, modality in this image is realized through different semiotic resources such as health-care professional, several test tubes acting as circumstance means used in the PCR test, a long line of participants with their body postures and facial expressions as well as a verbal representation. The interplay of these various elements sustains a two-fold message: applying COVID-19 travel precautions and participants' reservation about the duration and discomfort with these precautions.



Fig. 4 Mark Knight's cartoon on how the AFL players will return to playing and continue to follow COVID-19 health guidelines. May 22, 2020. KidsNews.

Restrictive measures are also extended to sport activities where certain actions were enforced to curb the pandemic. These measures include lockdown of some sport facilities, diminishing the number of fans or playing on empty stadiums and adjournment of some national or international tournaments. Due to the novel waves and high risks of the Coronavirus, the Australian Football League (AFL) announced that it would launch season 2020 with a lot of restrictions on movement that would lead to lessening the risks of getting infected with the virus.

This figure shows two participants of the AFL representing two different teams. It is worth noting that one of the participants, i.e., the one on the left side of the image is the outstanding and extraordinary star player Dusty Martin from the Richmond Tigers. This player is famous for his customary signature on the footy field "Don't argue". This is obvious from the verbal process of the speech bubble down the bottom: DON'T ARGUE WITH DUSTY'S DISTANCING! It is an old-fashioned fend off technique where a player running with the ball puts his arm out and with the palm of his hand pushes the opposing player trying to tackle him away (Knight, 2020). This arm stretching technique on the part of Dusty Martin is used by way of visual metaphor which uses imagery or pictorial representation of an object to suggest an association or similarity. It is related to an image that the viewer is meant to understand as a symbol for something else. The action process involved in this image is a mono-directionality of the action where a depicted element connects two participants, an Actor and a Goal (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 74). In this figure, the actor is the player Dusty Martin whereas the goal or the Reactor is the other player on the right angle of the image.

Dusty Martin puts the palm of his hand (material process) on the other participant's mouth and nose (goal) with his whole arm stretching out. Semiotically, the player's arm, measuring about 1.5m long, acts as if it were a tool for maintaining safety social distance between the two participants and it just so happens that this is the 'social distancing' length we are told to keep from other

people when we are out. Hence comes the idea of visual metaphor where fend off tactic initiated by Dusty Martin is converted to Coronavirus precautionary measure as keeping social distance. The cartoonist evokes Dusty Martin's fear of getting infected with the virus by semiotically portraying his left-hand palm on the opponent's face as a mask though Martin himself does not wear a mask.

The depiction of affluent tattoos which dominantly covered Martin's whole body adds to the ideology of the cartoon. It symbolically contributes to restrictive measures in the sense that this tattoo would also be regarded as a line measure marking 1.5m distance. The skull on his right arm symbolizes the hazardous atmosphere created by the virus. Semiotically, the skull connotatively symbolizes underlying risky or dangerous situations, death, mortality, gloom and warning. It also symbolizes the need to be alert or cautious and seeking wisdom or courage when embarking on doing something. Therefore, the skull may be used in this figure as a portrayal of dangers or fatal nature that COVID-19 represents and at the same time as a warning to people of this virus and to stick to precautions and restrictive actions. Colours used in this figure may also add to the intended message the cartoonist is evoking. The dominant colour in this figure is the black one where the background, the uniform of the two participants or even the goalkeeper, who is given a high and oblique angle, are all mostly portrayed in black. This mirrors COVID-19 as a plague, commonly known as the Black Death, the most fatal pandemic of human history, causing the death of around 75-200 million people. In the same vein, the two tattooed cups on his right hand may be semiotically a reflection of his dominance and triumph over the pandemic just as the case with his game rivals.

Dusty Martin's tough facial expressions and the sharp-eyed gaze at the opposing player is a symbolic connotation of his keenness on keeping the social distance during the game. It can be added that the foregrounded composition of Dusty Martin and the

horizontal position leaning to the opposing player using his arm measuring 1.5m as a physical detachment triggers the viewer's interest of how the ideology of protective measure in the AFL is noticeably observed in the image. In the same vein, the low angle and the very longshot of the opposing player allow Dusty Martin to occupy the height of the frame symbolizing Martin's supremacy and physical dominance over the other participant.

The speech bubble down the bottom is positioned on the left as given information since Dusty Martin's signature move called "don't argue" is a fan-favourite and a popular trend while his stretched arm measuring 1.5m distance is positioned on the right as new information attracting the viewer's attention to this metaphorically symbolic conversion. The image also displays another visual backgrounded represented participant i.e., empty stadium which occupies most horizontal frame of the image. The cartoonist draws the viewer's attention to restrictive measures that prevent mass gathering at stadiums in an attempt to ensure control of the pandemic.

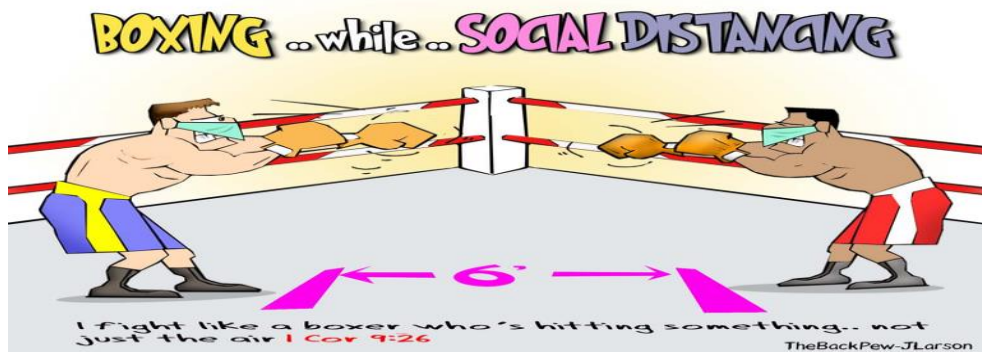


Fig. 5 Boxing Cartoon: The back pew. By Jeff Larson, 2020.

This figure metaphorically shows extreme precautionary procedures taken at the time of the pandemic crisis. The implied message is conveyed through the visual representation as well as the verbal labelling. This cartoon can be analyzed in terms of actional process since it depicts two participant boxers representing agents of the action. The actional process in this figure is attained through the

hand vector and leaning body posture signifying ready-to-fight status of the two participants in a bidirectional transaction. This is also mirrored through the mouth gesture of the two participants. It is noted that bidirectional transactional action is "a vector, formed by a (usually diagonal) depicted element, or a double-headed arrow, connects two Interactors"(Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.74). The first symbolization of sticking to COVID-19 precautions are face masks the two represented agents are wearing.

The image highlights maintaining enough safety distance between the represented participants with the top of the image caption that says: **BOXING.. while.. SOCIAL DISTANCING**. The two participants are separated by two bold dividing horizontal lines that signify physical detachment. The image also symbolizes two single-headed arrows measuring 6m distance. The arrows drawn between the two represented agents show commitment to social distancing.

The image bottom caption reads: (I fight like a boxer who's hitting something ... not just the air 1 Cor 9:26). Theologically, this caption derives from the Bible verse 9:26 recited by Paul. This verse runs: "Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, 1 Cor.9:26). The Apostle Paul is referring to Isthmian games in Greece. The phrase "I do not fight like a boxer beating the air" is taken from the customs of boxers who were accustomed to exercise their muscles to acquire greater skill and dexterity before the real contest. This may be called shadowboxing. This term means a combat or an act of fighting an imaginary opponent where a contender moves around and throws punches into the air in a way that mimics fighting. Shadowboxing is a warm-up technique aiming to prepare the muscles before getting involved in a stronger encounter. The bottom caption under investigation has a deeper and contextualized meaning and significance. The cartoonist heavily draws on a theological percept to condensate the idea of the cartoon through resorting to Pauls' quotation that connotes his real and tangible contest with his adversaries and not just fighting with his own shadow or beating the air with his hands.



This verse also connotes his severe blows that he deals to his real adversaries like Satan, the world and the flesh and that he never experienced defeat in front of these as he is always involved in real and not mimic combats. The cartoonist utilizes this quotation in his caption by way of conceptual metaphor to denote that just as the act of running (material process) is not randomly or meaninglessly oriented but is contingent on insightfulness, determination and focus on the goals (mental process) he tries to achieve, fighting (material process) is directed at something else (goal) for the purpose of winning and not just hitting the air. The Coronavirus here, based on this analogy, is depicted as an enemy represented by Satan and flesh that constitute a real risk to mankind. The illustration is changed from running to boxing, both being included in this quotation. The cartoonist reconfigures Satan in a theological way in order to accentuate the precautions in the minds of the viewers. So, Satan is conceptualized as a mysterious pandemic that mankind should be aware of. Put differently, just as Paul fiercely fights his opponents by directing concentrated and condensed blows and his determination to come out victorious, the two boxers are trying to fight the Coronavirus by taking adequate and diverse protective procedures mirrored by different semiotic resources.

The cartoonist tries to convey the underlying ideological message that this is not shadowboxing or a mock-battle or fighting the air, but it is a real contest through which restrictive measures and coping mechanisms must be applied as the image displays. It can be added that the colour modulation in this figure adds to the underlying message the cartoonist tries to instill in the viewer's mind. The figure mirrors one boxer as black-skinned while the other boxer is mirrored as white-skinned. This symbolically connotes that all people, regardless of their colour, race and religion, should stick to the precautions of COVID-19 that is commonly viewed as a threatening-life enemy. It also expresses the collective and infallible will to combat and curtail the virus. An atmosphere of danger-safety dichotomy is symbolically exhibited by red-white colour mingling in the figure. The boxing ring bars are portrayed in red and white colour. The red colour symbolically creates a sense of engulfment in

danger represented by Coronavirus whereas the sense of security represented by precautions is inferred by white colour.

The grey colour with which the floor of the boxing ring is painted is reflexive of a sense of bewilderment and mystery evoked by the outbreak of COVID-19. Likewise, the cartoonist's choice of colour symmetry is telling: the colours of the constituents of the upper caption are symmetrical to those of elements depicted in the boxing ring. In other words, the colour of the word *social* in the caption is symmetrical to that of the two horizontal lines with two single-headed arrows acting as social distance measurement. This adds to the idea of highlighting the restrictive measures evidenced by this figure. The colour of the word *while* is symmetrical to that of the ring ropes and bars whereas the colour of the word *distancing* is symmetrical to that of the ring floor. Such a colour symmetry here may be symbolically utilized as creating a state of anxiety and cautious atmosphere in anticipation of the COVID-19 risks. Put together, the image modalities, i.e., the two bold dividing horizontal lines, the two single-headed arrows and colour modulation give the viewer the impression that the image is semiotically loaded with precautionary interventions that are required to control the pandemic.



Fig. 6 Cartoon/comic exemplifying the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on religious practices, Daily Trust (online), May 25th, 2020.

Religious practices are also affected by COVID-19 and so a dire need to come up with mechanisms to cope with the COVID crisis arises. This may extend to lockdown of mosques, churches, religious centers and other sanctuaries. This is intended to prevent any assemblies or contacts that may give rise to further outbreak of the virus. This figure can be best understood in terms of verbal and mental processes that are created through balloons and bubble thoughts. "These processes connect a human or (animate) being with 'content', but where in transactional reactions it is the content of perception, in case of thought bubbles and similar devices it is the content of an inner mental process (thought, fear, etc.)" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.68). They went to add that "the content of the dialogue balloon or thought balloon are not represented directly, but mediated through a Reacter, a 'Senser' (in the case of a thought balloon) or a 'Speaker' (in the case of the dialogue balloon)".

This cartoon depicts the green cell of Coronavirus and personifies it as if it were speaking and complaining through a thinking bubble about how extreme measures pertaining to religious practices are taken. The green cell which is bestowed with human traits reflects a mad face and looks angry and surprised. Therefore, the Coronavirus image is a reactional image. This is also symbolically inferred from the mouth ridiculous gesture of the green cell which expresses its disapproval and dissatisfaction with the succinctly locked mosque. The eye direction of the Coronavirus cell is mono-sided. This gaze indicates the sense of fear, worry, confusion and bewilderment rendered by the outbreak of the Coronavirus. So, the eye look of the Coronavirus cell reflects the senses instilled in the minds of people during the pandemic as if it were a criminal that is wanted. The disdainful face of the Coronavirus cell with an exaggerated size of the nose suggests the grotesque visualization of the virus. The gray colour of the mosque door is illustrative the state of uncertainty that haunt people with the advent of the virus. The verbal representation hints at the same message received from the visual representation of the Coronavirus green cell. The caption reads: TSK...I GUESS I'M NOT INVITED HERE! It is noted that TSK, according to *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus* (2023), is

used to "represent the sound made to show you disapprove of something, or a word said twice in a humorous way to suggest disapproval". It is often used as an exclamation of disdain, contempt and impatience. The visual elements of the Coronavirus cell and the bubble text symbolically imply its desire to have access to the tightly closed building. The Coronavirus appears as a person who is aware of the fact that he is *persona-non-grata*, therefore it is strictly resisted.

The cartoonist shows that major religious practices observed by Muslim communities such as rituals associated with Ramadan fasting, Friday congregations, Eid al- Ftr "the Lesser Feast" and Eid al-Adha "Feast of Sacrifice" were performed individually indoors. The image depicts a mosque's door that is heavily closed with a huge lock and three other external bolts on the left side of the door. The message obtained from such extreme lockdown can be described as an exaggerated sense of how actions of religious precautions are in place. The image also employs textual elements to produce the same effect of the visual semiotics on its viewers. This can be achieved through using other modalities that contribute to envisioning the world during the pandemic crisis and awakening to a new world with completely different coping strategies. This symbolization is reflected also through the exaggerated font size of the caption: **RMADAN KAREEM!** which is followed by the caption below: **BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.** The phrase Ramadan Kareem is one of the phrases that are frequently circulated in the month of Ramadan. People used to greet and congratulate each other applying the attribute of generosity to Ramadan due to the grace of God Almighty over His servants in this blessed month.

The textual elements connote performing Ramadan rituals in closed places and even privately in a way to ensure that no mass gathering is involved. The idiom *behind closed doors* is used in the sense of doing something in secret, privately and away from public view or observation or without an audience or crowd watching. It is mainly based on the idea of lacking normal and public disclosure through preventing access to the public or any mass gathering since

the actions involved are of secretive or furtive nature. This caption represents demanding information through which the cartoonist here tries to instill in the viewer's mind that public places such as religious centers or mosques or other public assemblies may be risky locations for observing their religious obligations. Rather, they must be observed individually away from public observation as a coping strategy with the Coronavirus crisis.

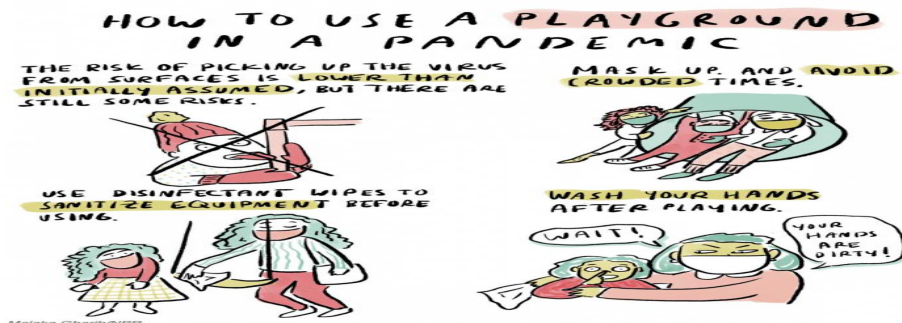


Fig 7. Comic: How to safely play on a playground by Malaka Gharib for NPR.2020.

This comic is of constructive nature in that it can mobilize public health responses to the pandemic. It intends to raise people's awareness of the risks associated with the Coronavirus and explores the diseases it causes. It educates people, especially children, how to use the playground during the pandemic according to the WHO's guidelines to avoid being infected with the virus and prevent its further novel spread. The comic mainly focuses on children who are more vulnerable-being less immune-to catch the virus than other people. These instructional messages are clearly conveyed through piling up the visual elements as well as the verbal labeling. Therefore, the function of this comic can be classified as an instructional instead of an entertainment one. The first caption on the top left reads as: THE RISK OF PICKING UP THE VIRUS FROM SURFACES IS LOWER THAN INITIALLY ASSUMED, BUT THERE ARE STILL SOME RISKS. The speech act in this caption is realized by the 'offer of information' (statement) which is realized by the indicative mood in which the finite element (is) follows the subject (the risks of picking the virus).

The figure shows a child (actor), wearing hand gloves, while sticking his tongue to one of the bars of a playground goal. The whole figure is marked by large X symbol which can be semiotically multifaceted mark that must be connotatively interpreted. It is noted that some associated the X symbol with the skull and crossbones that signify danger and death. The symbol X in this figure connotes a warning to avoid hazard or danger of sticking tongue to the bar as there are still risks of the Coronavirus.

The top right figure depicts three represented children wearing a face mask and hand gloves (actor). This symbolizes their adherence to the precautions that should be applied in playgrounds at the time of the pandemic. This is also displayed by the verbal representation that reads as: MASK UP. AND AVOID CROWDED TIMES. The speech act here is realized by the imperative mood or command which can be subsumed under 'demanding information'. "The imperative mood, 'the command', has no subject at all, and when the polarity is positive, no finite either" (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.123). Consequently, MASK UP (nonfinite) and AVOID UP (nonfinite) is a command that contains instructions and implies coping strategies during the crisis.

The bottom left figure depicts a mother (actor) advising her little daughter (reactor) to abide by instructions while using the playground. This is firstly indicated by the face masks the two participants are wearing. The mother (actor) is using disinfectant wipe (circumstance of means) to sanitize (material process) the equipment (goal). The horizontal elongation of the image which displays the mother's upright position with her hand fully stretched towards the equipment symbolizes the mother's keenness to keep a safe detachment from the equipment with the rest of her body. The little girl's head gesture (vector) towards her mother is a symbolism that she is attentively listening to her mother's tips. The caption USE DISINFECTANT WIPES TO SANITIZE EQUIPMENT BEFORE USING here is also displayed at the imperative mood which is characterized by nonfinite verbs as the polarity is positive. The verbal labeling USE DISINFECTANT (nonfinite) and TO

SANITIZE (nonfinite) is 'demanding information' that requires a particular action.

The figure right down is also an instructional comic between two represented participants, i.e., a mother and a little daughter concerning Coronavirus precaution after playing as the above caption says WASH YOUR HANDS AFTER PLAYING. This is an imperative mood realized by nonfinite element (wash). In this figure, the represented mother (sayer) is holding between her hands the passive daughter, which expresses physical attachment and intimacy and symbolically connotes the mother's fear and anxiety about her daughter. This is inferred from the speech balloon WAIT! YOUR HANDS ARE DIRTY!

This verbal representation is a reaction from the mother to her daughter's finger gesture on her nose without wearing a face mask. The nonfinite verbal labeling (wait) represents 'demanding information' that necessitates keeping away one's dirty hand off his face so as not to get infected with the virus. On the other hand, the verbal representation YOUR HANDS ARE DIRTY is realized by the 'offer of information' category since it represents a statement in the indicative mood in which the finite verb follows the subject.

## 6. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented global event that has noticeably negative and diverse implications on all aspects of life of people and societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the mood of the whole world to a new reality that has never been experienced before. The repercussions of the pandemic have been demonstrated and highlighted in the content of cartoons and comics. Not only have these two genres shown the impact of the pandemic on daily practices but also have implied coping strategies and restrictions that should be put into force to contain the spread of the virus. They have always been invested in representing pandemic/crises and their relevant consequences in an educating and edifying way. The study reveals that cartoons and comics are not primarily intended to provide humorous effects, but they are mostly

employed to enlighten the people and raise their awareness of the nature and precautions of the virus. This reveals that cartoons/comics are considered as attitudinal in nature. They give rise to certain instructional, attitudinal and behavioral orientations.

The paper concludes that the selected data serve as mechanisms through which the negative impact of the pandemic on travel, sport, religious practices or even mass mobility was pinpointed during the pandemic era. It also concludes how some precautionary measures of the COVID-19 are metaphorically interpreted. In other words, the cartoonists utilize some semiotic resources that are later regarded as restrictive and protective measures by way of metaphorical conversion. One of the most important findings of the study is that the selected data sometimes involve underlying irony and mock of those who do not pay heed to the virus precautionary guidelines. This was made clear by both the visual and verbal representation. In addition, the selected cartoons sometimes pose a critique to the authorities concerned for not enforcing the appropriate measures, which is an implicit and indirect request of applying the necessary procedures to stop the spread of the pandemic.

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