

What's in a message: A systemic functional analysis of cancer prevention messages

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This article provides some insights on how a particular reading from a theoretical framework can bring out details and problems with health communication posters. Using Michael Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, the article examines cancer prevention messages in cancer posters produced by the Ministry of Health Malaysia. The analysis shows that the posters organize and convey their intended messages through the realization of the three strands of meaning or metafunctions—the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual—by drawing on the grammatical resources of the language used. Such meanings are created and expressed throughout the three main sections of the posters; the heading, the body of the text, and the signature line. Despite its practical limitations in particular linguistic contexts, the article shows that SFL is a useful tool for the analysis of Malaysia's cancer posters and how it can potentially provide a more nuanced understanding of the country's ongoing health risk communication initiatives.

KEYWORDS

cancer prevention message, health communication, Malaysia, systemic functional linguistics

Artikel ini memberi beberapa pandangan mengenai bagaimana bacaan tertentu dari satu kerangka teori dapat

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mengemukakan perincian dan masalah berkenaan poster komunikasi kesihatan. Dengan menggunakan kerangka Linguistik Sistemik Fungsional (LSF) oleh Michael Halliday, artikel ini mengkaji mesej pencegahan kanser dalam poster-poster kanser yang dihasilkan oleh Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia. Analisis menunjukkan bahawa poster berkenaan menyusun dan menyampaikan mesej yang dimaksudkan melalui penrealisasian tiga lembar makna atau metafungsi—ideasional, interpersonal, dan tekstual—dengan mengembleng unsur nahuan bahasa yang digunakan. Makna-makna tersebut dicipta dan dipersembahkan menerusi tiga bahagian utama poster; tajuk, kandungan teks, dan garis tandatangan. Walaupun terdapat limitasi praktikal dalam konteks linguistik tertentu, LSF merupakan satu alat yang berguna untuk menganalisis poster kanser Malaysia dan bagaimana ia berpotensi untuk memberi pemahaman yang lebih bernas terhadap inisiatif komunikasi risiko kesihatan yang berterusan di negara ini.

KATA KUNCI

mesej pencegahan kanser, komunikasi kesihatan, Malaysia, Linguistik sistemik fungsional

1 | INTRODUCTION

Health communication is an important aspect of public health and the health care system. It involves the use of communicative strategies which are aimed at informing and influencing the public, with the general goal of enhancing their knowledge, attitudes and practices related to health and health care (Thomas, 2006). The scope of health communication includes health promotion and disease prevention, health care policy and business, as well as the improvement of people's health and the quality of life (Harrington, 2015; Schiavo, 2013).

Health communication has emerged as a scholarly field in the last three decades. This multifaceted and multidisciplinary field of research is concerned with the interchange of health-related information between and among people at all levels in health care settings (Schiavo, 2013). Health communication scholars are generally interested in examining how the mass media communicate health information and the ways the information conveyed by media channels influence people's health knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. Poster are one such channel that has been and continues to be used in health care settings with considerable effectiveness (Thompson, 2014). This is because health posters are attention drawing media that generally convey health information in a condensed and visual form with the help of written texts and visual images. The visual images accompanying the written texts not only help to supplement and reinforce the information in the posters, but may leave a lasting mental image long after the posters are viewed. This mental image, as Bastable et al. (2020, p. 577) maintain "serves as a cue to the viewer to remember the message being delivered."