

A Study of Linguistics as Immediate Applicable Linguistics

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Abstract

According to Halliday (2006), the discipline *Linguistics* has been regarded as "the scientific study of language which involves analyzing language form, language meaning, and language in context". It explores the relation between languages and artifacts, properties and other aspects in order to process the production of meaning. Yet, it can be observed in Myanmar classroom context at tertiary level that *Linguistics* has been taught as theory rather than as theory which can be put into immediate practice. In fact, it is a discipline from which we can gain not only linguistic knowledge related to academic studies but also insights into how society can benefit from linguistic systems or, in Mahboob (2017)'s words, material, biological and socio-semiotic systems. This paper deals with applicable linguistics or subaltern linguistics which can give rise to the empowerment of local practices and resources in-hand immediately through CREDIBLE approach proposed by Mahboob (2017). Students were assigned to prepare posters or signboards for awareness-raising project for the sake of their community. The themes include violence against women, environmental conservation, peace building, road safety and workplace harassment. Sign and symbol interpretation carried out in this research was conducted in accordance with the chart of semiotics of social networking by Warwick (1997). Reflection questionnaires were constructed with reference to Mahboob (2017)'s CREDIBLE approach to measure the success of the trial project. The results of the research proved that public awareness-raising process becomes more successful and effective when the concept is presented through eye-catching illustrations (i.e. pictures, signs and symbols), and concise words or phrases.

Keywords: Subaltern Linguistics, material, biological and socio-semiotic systems, CREDIBLE approach, Semiotics of Social Networking

Introduction

The discipline "Linguistics" has been regarded merely as a portfolio of theories related to language. A quick survey using Facebook Poll conducted among students reinforced that most undergraduate and postgraduate students attempt to learn linguistic theories by heart to earn pass mark. As they have rarely experienced the practical use of these theories, most of them find it difficult to understand them. In fact most linguistic theories are somehow related to real-life situations. In this paper, two branches linguistics known as Sociolinguistics and Semantics have been put into practical use through social awareness raising campaign. Due to increasing demands in society, most people tend to struggle solely for the betterment of themselves and of their family. Holiday (2016) addressed the dramatic growth of ego especially among young adults that results the decline in social awareness. For this reason,

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what needs to be done in our society is to raise social awareness campaigns from which people will become aware of the immediate needs in their society. The effectiveness of poster presentations is measured using Mahboob (2017)'s CREDIBLE approach. It is hoped that the results of this paper will be useful for those from social science field who are observing ways to raise social awareness among society and those who want to teach and/or learn Sociolinguistics and Semantics as applicable linguistics.

Rationale of the Study

It has always been true that some researchers tend to carry out research through surveys, questionnaire and interviews. Yet, most of them cannot fully fulfill their promise that they will make some immense contributions to the subjects or those from who they have collected the data. There is no wonder that some people tend to stay away from such surveys, questionnaire and interviews as they cannot provide them with immediate benefit. Some take part in questionnaire and interviews but not at their own will. This can lead to negative impact on reliability of data and of results. Therefore, it is important to provide advantages to society as immediately as possible. Ethicality has been taken into account in designing campaigns as it is essential to respect beliefs and traditions of others. For these reasons, the research on immediate applicable linguistics was done, and most importantly, in doing this research, students were encouraged to think of more contributions for further development of social awareness and its consequences.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to propose a handy way to apply theoretical linguistics to applicable linguistics that can benefit the real-life society.

The objectives of this paper are:

- (1) To present a tangible way to apply sociolinguistic and semiotic theories for society
- (2) To reflect subjects' awareness on immediate needs in society
- (3) To evaluate the effectiveness of social awareness raising posters

This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- (1) How can sociolinguistic and semiotic theories be applied in real-life situations?
- (2) How do posters communicate social awareness information with society?
- (3) How can the effectiveness of social awareness raising posters be measured?

Literature Survey

Social awareness

Social awareness refers to the understanding of feelings, needs and wants of society. Greenspan (1981) proposed that social awareness or social ability is composed of cognitive components such as social sensitivity, social insight, social communication, social goal setting and social understanding. In order to raise social awareness among people, Goleman (2017)

believed that we need empathy, organizational awareness and service in the process of raising social awareness. Empathy can make people understand others' feelings, experiences, needs and wants. Only then can they have awareness on how to help them out "from top to bottom and from inside to out". Actual realization of these immediate plans based on social awareness will be initiated through service. Inclusiveness plays an important role in raising social awareness as no one will take part actively if they feel like they are isolated.

Sociolinguistics

In implementing social awareness process, it is required to use proper style and register of language used in respective society. Yule (2014) states that sociolinguistics is "a broad area of investigation that developed through the interaction of linguistics with a number of other academic disciplines". There are factors to be considered in doing sociolinguistic analysis – role relationship, age, gender, ethnicity, educational background, professions, social class and channels. Sociolinguistic competence is of vital importance in conducting social awareness projects as it helps us use and understand language properly depending on role relationship between addresser(s) and addressee(s) and context.

Social semiotics

According to Hodge and Kress (1998), language can be presented through the use of "the subsequent emergence of multimodality" in different modes of communication. They believed that the success of social semiotics will base on "a socially created network of options that have meaning potential realized in the context of use". Therefore, social awareness can be raised not only through the use of either standard or non-standard language but also through the use of illustrations.

Warwick (1997) proposed the relationship between sign, object and interpretant in decoding social semiotics as in the following chart.

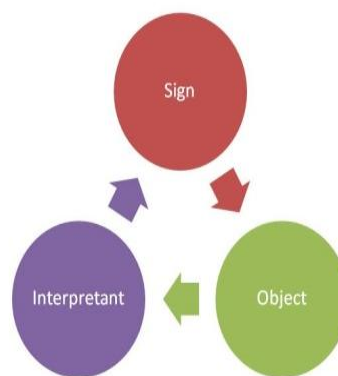


Figure 1: The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication by Warwick (1997)

According to him, sign is regarded as the first, object as the second and interpretant as the third to be considered. Sign is an element that represents the object which leads to further interpretants. For instance, the exclamation "Yuck!" can objectify as "dirty". Based on this concept, there are variable interpretants like mud, booger, faeces and so forth.

Credible approach to linguistics

Mahboob (2017) found out tangible way to apply linguistics into practice for the betterment of society. He proposed CREDIBLE approach to linguistics that can benefit people in different ways as follows:

- 1) Contextually relevant (think logically)
- 2) Responds to practical needs (not driven by theory)
- 3) Engages stakeholders (not just collecting data)
- 4) Draws on an understanding of local knowledge and practices (pay attention to beliefs, practices and expressions of locals)
- 5) Informed by diverse approaches and experiences (not just western)
- 6) Benefits local communities (or little credibility of a project)
- 7) Leads the field/discipline and contributes to the larger (global) theories (there is always more than one way to do things)
- 8) Ethical (responsible and respectful; not just having consent from signed)

This approach is based on the principle that a research should give benefit to society as immediately as possible rather than a test on proposed or proven theory. It also encourages that fact that doing a research does not need to be in English or in other international languages but it is even better to use local language with colloquial style depending on targeted society. Besides, the approach helps researchers to consider society as a whole no matter people from that society are rich or poor, and literate or illiterate.

Symbol

Pickering and Hoeper (1986) stated that symbols are used to represent people, objects, events, emotions, etc. along with oblique meaning which is deeper than direct meaning. According to them, there are three types of symbols namely:

- (1) Traditional symbol,
- (2) Original symbol and
- (3) Private symbol.

Conventional symbols are the ones with widely accepted interpretation such as white which represents purity and black which refers to evil. Original symbols "derive their meaning from the content of the work in which they are used." For instance, the letter "A" in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne represents adultery but at the end of the story it changes into a badge of honour. Private symbol "restricts the source of its meaning even more than original

symbols" and it is common for authors to use their philosophy freely in defining meanings of symbols.

Previous Researches

Before conducting a research, one of the most useful ways to strengthen it is to observe previous researches done by other scholars as they give more fruitful ideas on research methods and data statistics. Dhobley (2017) did a case-study on "Visual Social Awareness on Indian Society" which focused on how both literate and illiterate people could gain benefit from visual media concerning health related problems. Posters that raised social awareness on health related problems were put in public places and field method was used to analyze the data. The results of his research proved that the campaign has created awareness on consumption due to the growth of population and the need to recharge natural resources among people, and has become more effective by using visuals.

In her research "The Use of Posters in Disseminating HIV/AIDS Awareness Information within Higher Education Institutions", Gobind (2014) examined the effectiveness of the use of posters at a university in order to disseminate HIV/AIDS awareness information. The data were collected using self-administered survey questionnaire among academic, admin staff and students from the university, one-on-one interviews and semi-structured interviews. The results of analysis showed that subjects have awareness towards HIV/AIDS posters at the university in addition to assisting programme coordinators plan and design HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and to taking the needs and habits of target audience into consideration.

What makes this paper different from Dhobley (2017) is that it is based on the hypothesis that linguistics is not only theoretical but also practical and on a wide variety of topics rather than health related ones. Students were encouraged to choose any topic which shows urgent need to raise social awareness in preparing their posters. Similar to the research carried out by Gobind (2014), data were collected from university students attending Diploma in English at Yangon University of Foreign Languages. Unlike Gobind (2014)'s, this research uses self-designed posters and peer feedback using set criteria based on Mahboob (2017)'s CREDIBLE approach.

Research Methods

In carrying out this research, research methods play a significant role as this paper uses both theoretical research methods as well as action research methods. In Edgar and Manz (2017)'s words, the research was done through "a logical exploration of a system of beliefs and assumptions" based on proposed theories. In addition to this, as Carr and Kemmis (1986) point out, this paper was also carried out in a form of "self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices."

Both descriptive qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this paper. Participants in this research are 96 Diploma in English students who have various backgrounds. Their ages range from 23 to 54 and nationalities include Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Myanmar, Mon, Rakhine, Shan, half-Chinese and half-Indian. They have different first degrees such as BA (English), BA (Russian), BA (History), B.Sc. (Chemistry), B.Sc. (Mathematics), B.Sc. (Physics), BE (Civil) and BE (Mechanical). 41% of them are native to Yangon whereas 59%, districts like Patheingyi, Haka, Dawei, Mawlamyaing, Kyaukpadaung, etc. 33% are married and the rest are single. More than half of the class is working as private teachers, some are tourist guides, translators, agents and business men, and others, dependents and students.

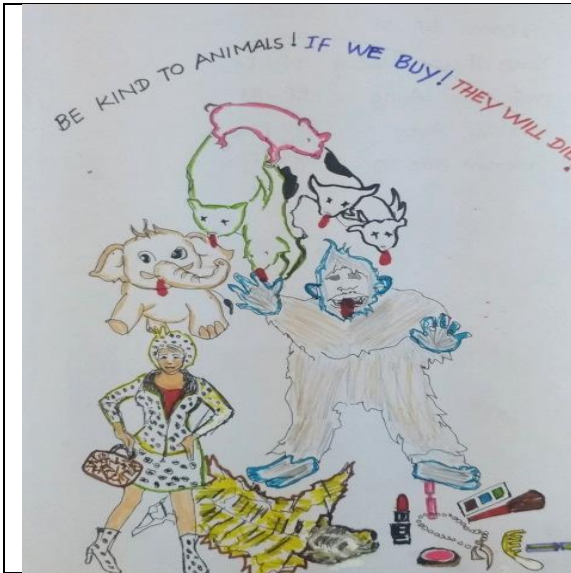
In this research, first, Diploma in English students were assigned to draw posters in groups of 4 or 5 after 5-period lecture on sociolinguistics, 2-period lecture on social semiotics and 2-period practical on language used in different societies along with signs and symbols. They were told to address on any theme which needs to raise urgent social awareness in their society. Second, the effectiveness of the use of symbols in posters was analyzed using categories proposed by Pickering and Hopper (1986). Third, their posters were peer-assessed through reflection questionnaire in the form of anonymous voting system using 8 criteria based on Mahboob (2019)'s CREDIBLE approach to subaltern linguistics on Mentimeter.

Analysis of Social Awareness Project

Posters submitted can be categorized into 8 themes known as:

- (1) Animal right (1 poster)
- (2) Smoking (2 posters)
- (3) Women's Dignity (1 poster)
- (4) Road Traffic Safety (1 poster)
- (5) War (5 posters)
- (6) Global Warming (6 posters)
- (7) Peace (1 poster)
- (8) Morality (2 posters)
- (9) Clean Environment (1 poster)

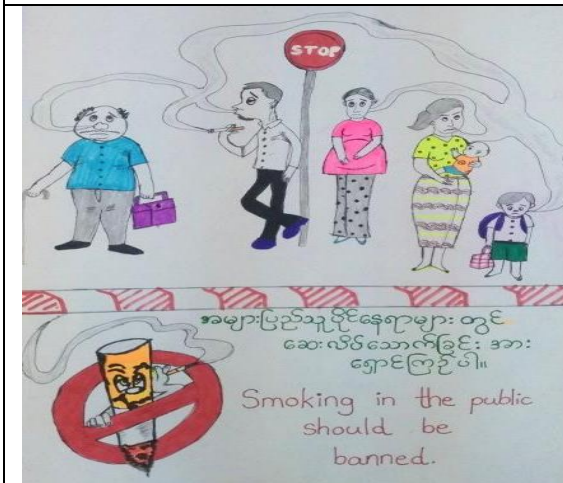
Each theme addresses on respective and immediate needs of inner society and outer society. As the posters were designed by Diploma students currently residing in Yangon (41% native to Yangon and 59%, districts), most themes were related to war and global warming which are challenging people from some regions in Myanmar. A list of posters can be seen as follows.



Poster 1



Poster 2



Poster 3



Poster 4



Poster 5



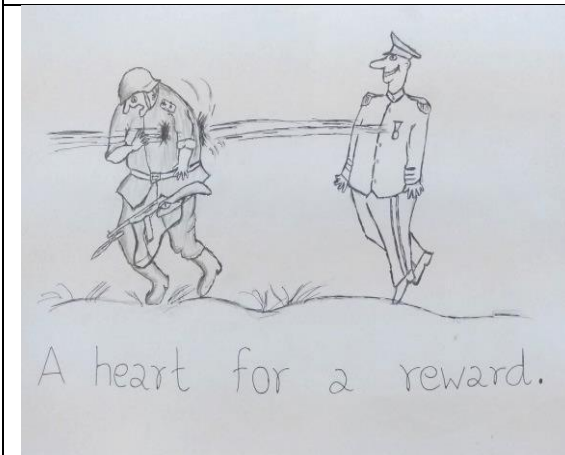
Poster 6



Poster 7



Poster 8



Poster 9



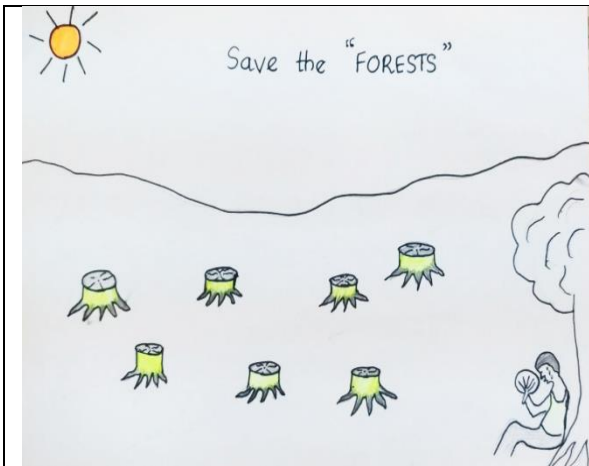
Poster 10



Poster 11



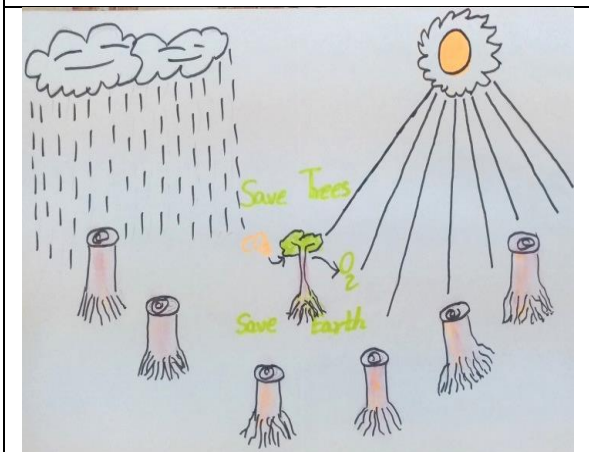
Poster 12



Poster 13



Poster 14



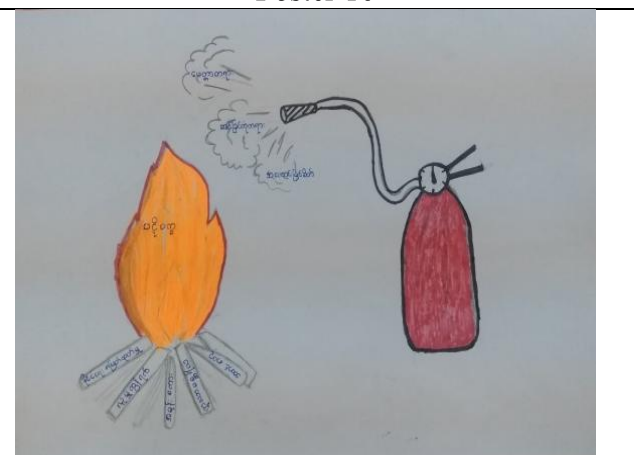
Poster 15



Poster 16



Poster 17



Poster 18

<p>Poster 19</p>	<p>Poster 20</p>

Eight criteria used in peer-assessing posters for social awareness project were based on Mahboob (2017)'s CREDIBLE approach to linguistics. They are as follows:

1. Relevancy to context
2. Responsiveness to practical needs
3. Attractiveness to society
4. Reflectiveness to understanding of local knowledge and practices
5. Meeting immediate social needs and experiences
6. (Immediate) profitability to local communities
7. Ethicality
8. Contribution to further development of social awareness

In evaluating the potential success of posters, it is important to consider how appropriate they are to the context and current situations in targeted society. Furthermore, it is required to decide whether they respond to practical needs in society. Only when they suit the needs of the society, target people will become interested in these posters. Besides, poster designing groups were encouraged to compete the attention of target society in raising awareness. What is more, these groups also had to reflect their understanding of local values and practices so that their posters would be of use in raising social awareness. None of the people will be interested in posters if they are something not related to what they are encountering at first-hand experience.

Having learned sociolinguistics and social semiotics, most students could make their poster meet most of the criteria. Although they came up with different themes, their main purpose – to raise social awareness for the betterment of society – is the same.

As symbols and colours representing meaning play crucial role in poster illustrations, these are also taken into consideration in assessing the effectiveness of posters. Symbols are

grouped into 3 according to Pickering and Hoepfer (1986): Traditional symbol, original symbol and private symbol. The use of symbols in each poster can be seen as follows.

Table 1: The use of different types of symbol in posters

Poster No.	Theme	No. of Colours Used	Social Semiotic Symbols	Types of Symbol		
				Traditional	Original	Private
1	Animal Right	4	Cosmetics, Accessories, Clothes	0	3	0
2	Smoking	2	Coffin	1	0	0
3	Smoking	5	Red Stripe on cigarette	0	1	0
4	Women's Dignity	5	Symbol for females	0	1	0
5	Road Traffic Safety	6	Bumping	0	1	0
6	War	3	Clutches Tear Bullets	0	3	0
7	War	4	Bullets Student	0	2	0
8	War	4	Peace Symbol, Dove	1	1	0
9	War	2	Soldier's Cap, General's Cap, Awarded Badge	0	3	0
10	War	3	Launcher, Gun, Red burns	0	3	0
11	Global Warming	3	Cut trees	0	1	0
12	Global Warming	3	Hands holding globe	0	1	0
13	Global Warming	3	Fan, Cut trees	0	2	0
14	Global Warming	3	NIL	0	0	0
15	Global Warming	3	CO ₂ , O ₂ ,	0	3	0

Poster No.	Theme	No. of Colours Used	Social Semiotic Symbols	Types of Symbol		
				Traditional	Original	Private
			Cut trees			
16	Global Warming	4	Prison bars, Tear	0	2	0
17	Global Warming	6	Leaves	0	1	0
18	Morality	3	Wood, Flame, Fire extinguisher, Extinguishing powder	0	0	4
19	Morality	2	Shoes	0	0	1
20	Clean Environment	5	Green for rubbish from kitchen, Blue for dry rubbish, Orange for recycling products	0	0	3

Findings

It can be observed from the data analysis section that students actively took part in designing posters for raising social awareness. Their ideas even to design the same theme vary from one group to another. What is more, they tend to raise social awareness of people not only from Yangon Region but also from other parts of Myanmar. Although half of them are from Yangon, they tend to show their care to others through certain themes like war.

With regard to Table 1, the most frequent use of symbols can be found in designing posters about war and global warming which have become the most popular topics in the world. It can be observed that of all three symbols proposed by Pickering and Hoepfer (1986), the most frequent symbol found in posters was original symbol. The reason is that as the target audience includes not only educated people but also laypeople from different demographic backgrounds, students had to try to make anyone get the message they want to convey. Therefore they used commonly accepted original symbols to help people realize the messages of their posters.

Findings based on peer assessment or reflection of the effectiveness of posters can be seen as in the following table.

Table 2: Findings on peer assessment of the effectiveness of posters

Poster No	Theme	Criteria								Total Votes
		Is contextually relevant	Responds to practical needs	Attracts the attention of our society	Draws on understanding of local knowledge and practices	Is based on immediate social needs and experiences	Is beneficial to local communities	Is ethical	Contributes to the further development of social awareness	
1	Animal Right	27	28	52	29	29	30	31	47	273
2	Smoking	31	25	35	32	26	41	19	50	259
3	Smoking	38	33	38	33	28	41	12	46	269
4	Women's Dignity	46	28	41	32	37	40	43	55	322
5	Road Traffic Safety	31	30	31	38	40	35	27	39	271
6	War	38	31	29	23	29	27	35	33	245
7	War	39	37	52	27	48	31	52	43	329
8	War	25	27	21	28	38	29	29	34	231
9	War	42	19	32	15	21	11	14	63	217
10	War	38	44	39	38	24	28	45	32	288
11	Global Warming	29	27	31	21	40	16	32	21	217
12	Global Warming	26	48	39	36	39	31	44	32	295
13	Global Warming	47	38	41	38	32	36	47	45	324
14	Global Warming	18	34	27	31	45	51	46	43	295
15	Global Warming	8	39	21	21	27	14	26	39	195
16	Global Warming	27	45	23	41	37	21	48	41	283
17	Peace	11	17	12	21	13	8	34	22	138
18	Morality	40	47	44	26	51	35	43	38	324
19	Morality	49	42	41	39	39	32	37	30	309
20	Clean Environment	34	39	36	41	42	43	34	42	311

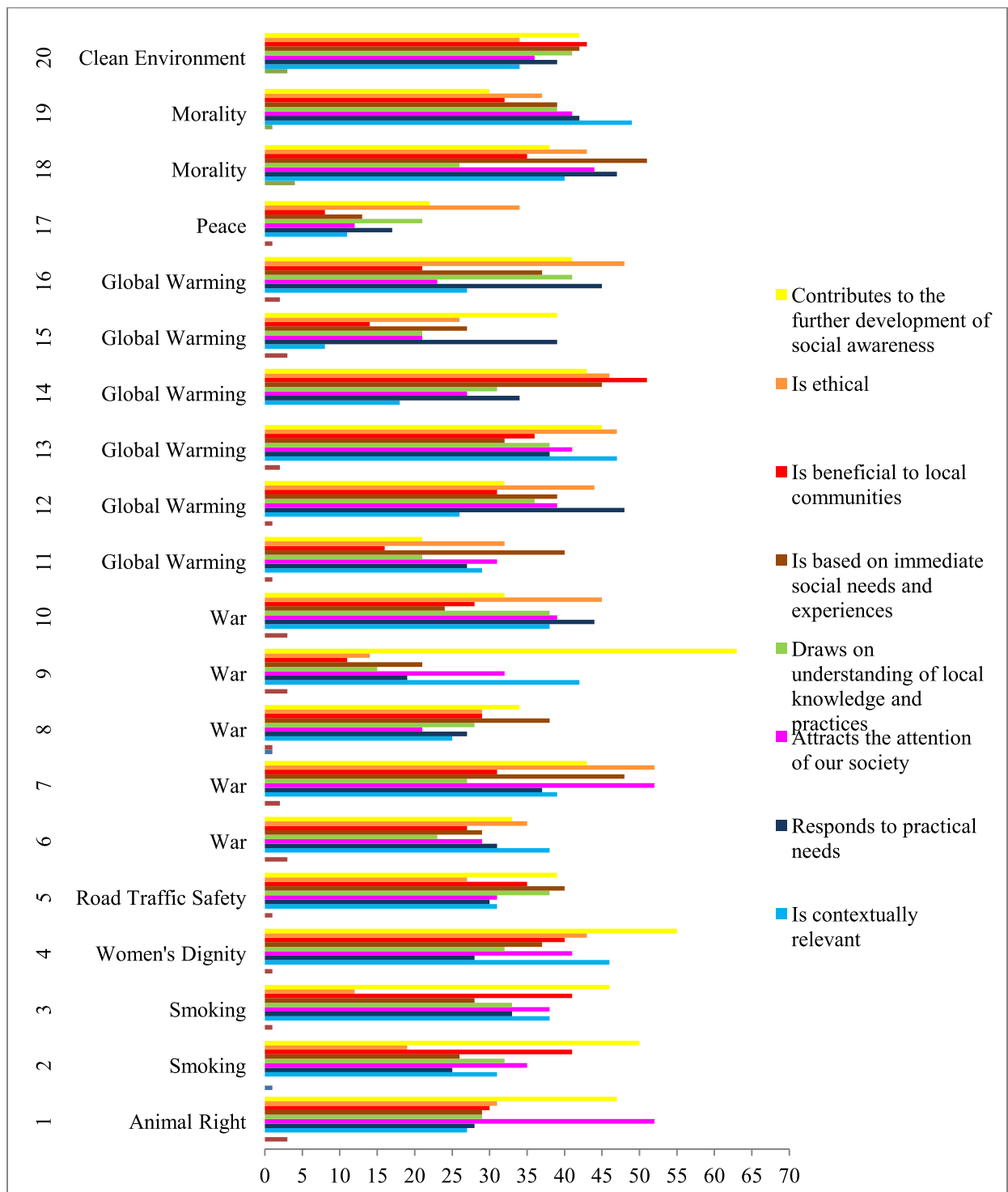


Figure 2: Findings on peer assessment of the effectiveness of posters

As seen in Table 2 and Figure 2, it can be observed that Poster 7 about war was given the highest vote (329) by students as it reflects what is happening in some parts of Myanmar. Two original symbols were used to illustrate the message to raise awareness on side effects of war. Its focus on a schoolboy reinforces the fact that countless number of children lose their opportunities to walk on the path of education because of the impact, consequences and aftermaths of war. It also depicted the fact that destroyed houses have forced civilians to flee to refugee camps.

The second highest votes (324) went to Poster 13 about global warming and Poster 18 about morality. Although illustration was simple, Poster 13 could attract the attention of the viewer as the message conveyed is brief and clear. Language used in this poster is very short and simple and it comprises only basic vocabulary like *save* and *forest* which are familiar to most people in society. Even if the audience is not illiterate, they can imply the meaning from illustration. The sweating boy under the only tree left uncut was using a Myanmar traditional fan which is a symbol referring to the heat. The dazzling orange sun represents global warming. Although the message was written in English and only one original symbol was used, illiterate people from communities can get to the point because of illustrations which were created as realistic as possible.

Likewise, Poster 18 serves as a mirror to the current affairs like political expediency, negative impact of social media, personal attacks using hate speech and fake news which can all lead to social riots. Language used in this poster is Myanmar and therefore it is obvious that students who designed this poster know the benefit of the use of mother tongue in public awareness posters. Fire extinguisher is used as a symbol to put out social riots using love, reasoning and optimism. In terms of colour, stronger colour red is used for fire extinguisher as it can conquer the fire in orange, less strong colour. In addition, the highest number of private symbols like wood, flame, fire extinguisher and extinguishing powder was used. Labels can help viewers easily understand the given message. For these reasons, Poster 18 fits the needs of criteria for the success of social awareness project.

The third highest votes (311) can be found in Poster 20 which is about conserving clean environment by using appropriate dustbins for different kinds of rubbish. Most participants believe that this poster can somehow give social awareness on clean environment as types of rubbish are associated with different colours of dustbin. This poster is attractive and understandable even for illiterate people. What is more, based on this poster, further development on social awareness about clean environment can be encouraged in society. Some participants advocated that sometimes it is more effective to familiarize targeted society with context than to make them feel hostile through the use of fine as punishment for throwing rubbish recklessly. It can be seen from this poster that it is not only welcoming to people from society to use proper dustbins but also educating them.

Poster 17 about peace received the fewest vote (138) although the theme is a popular topic worldwide. The criterion which got the fewest vote is 'Being beneficial to local

communities". The message – to heal the world with love – is conveyed through lyrics from the song titled "Chit Thaw Kabar Myay" by Big V. Being unrealistic to real world, the message was considered vague and imaginative by most participants. Besides, it was not contextually relevant as love cannot give immediate benefit to our society. Students found it odd to see the vine entwining the globe as it does not convey any additional message related to the theme. From the votes given to this poster, it can be concluded that a poster should address not only on problems or crisis but also on practical solution or awareness on how to figure them out. If a lot of artistic values are added to posters for raising social awareness, those who are not keen on these values will not understand the given message. Therefore, a poster for raising social awareness should be clear and easy to understand in a short period of time.

Another poster which received the second fewest vote is Poster 15. Although it calls upon hot topic worldwide, the illustrations are not very effective. Despite the fact that it raised awareness on excessive logging, the message conveyed is ambiguous. There is rain on left hand side of the poster but still trees underneath the rain are not growing like those under scorching sun. Besides, it does not show the effect of exhaling oxygen and inhaling carbon dioxide. Most students insisted that in order to modify this poster for better results, trees under rain should be growing happily while inhaling carbon dioxide and exhaling oxygen for people. Although 3 original symbols are used, it is not successful in conveying the intended message.

According to the data in Table 1 and Table 2, it can be concluded that the highest votes do not always depend on the use of numerous symbols. Except Poster 18, the other posters which got high number of votes such as Poster 4, Poster 7 and Poster 13 used not more than 2 symbols. The other posters with 3 symbols each like Poster 1, 6, 9, 10 and 15 did not get as high votes as Poster 4, 7 and 13. Therefore it can be observed that in raising social awareness through posters, the number of votes do not depend on the number of symbols but their immediate contribution to society.

Discussion

Based on the findings in previous section, it can be said that the effectiveness of social awareness raising posters does not depend solely on the use of symbols but on clear message that can be understood by both literate and illiterate people in the society. It can be learned from this research that whenever social awareness campaigns are conducted, it is important to take not only literate people but also illiterate ones into consideration. Symbols related to Myanmar culture like Myanmar traditional fan and schoolbag should be used for better understanding of conveyed message as they are meant for Myanmar. Moreover, it can be said that posters which are designed as near as possible to reality in society are the most effective ones in raising social awareness even though some may not use eye-catching colours and illustrations. Most importantly, any kind of posters for social campaigns should be within the reach of people from different standards of living. Reactions of poor and illiterate people cannot be neglected as they

are part of our society. Inclusiveness should be paid attention in designing social awareness raising projects.

Similar to Dhobley (2017)'s case-study on "Visual Social Awareness on Indian Society", the results of this research assured that trial campaign is successful in creating awareness on different themes. Participants especially those native to Yangon insisted that they have become aware of other themes which are not from their immediate society like war through simple visuals. For instance, some students native to Yangon have never experienced civil war throughout their lifetime and posters raising awareness on the negative impact and aftermaths of war gave them food for thought. At the same time, a few students from some districts who have encountered civil war could share their first-hand experiences and secondary experiences through posters.

With regard to the outcomes of "The Use of Posters in Disseminating HIV/AIDS Awareness Information within Higher Education Institutions" by Gobind (2014), posters for raising social awareness helped participants to go on designing further awareness raising campaigns in their society. Besides, during class discussion for posters, most participants said that they should take into account the needs and habits of target audience in order to make their campaigns more successful. Familiarization of targeted society to the campaign is one of the factors that give rise to its success. It can be noted from students' reflections that once targeted society feels like they are inclusive and are directly addressed, they will become more collaborative in building a peaceful, safe and clean society.

All in all, it can be observed that students can have better understanding of sociolinguistics through hands-on activities. As they started designing posters, they need to apply their sociolinguistic, semiotic and subaltern linguistic knowledge they gained from Warwick (1997), Hodge and Kress (1998), Yule (2014) and Mahboob (2017). They had to consider relevancy, reliability, validity and practicality of their own work while putting theories into practice. Peer feedback based on criteria sprouted from Mahboob (2017)'s CREDIBLE approach to linguistics helped students have more confidence in assessing the effectiveness of posters.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a fruitful way to put linguistics theories targeting sociolinguistics and semiotics in particular into practice in addition to suggesting a social awareness campaign from which society can gain benefit. Peer feedback and reflections were used to reinforce the potential success of trial campaign. Even though only trial campaign has been done in this small scale research, 96 Diploma in English students represent the society as their ages range from 23 to 54, and they have different educational background, originality, ethnicity, standard of living and professions. With regard to reflection section, it was found that students can not only build social awareness on different themes but also think of their society composed of both rich and poor, and educated and uneducated as a whole. Further research can be done in macro campaign

by placing posters in public places and by doing one-on-one interviews on public reactions. It is anticipated that this paper serves as an initiative for lecturers teaching Linguistics and students learning Linguistics to stop memorization but to take part in putting theoretical linguistics into applicable linguistics.

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