

# A Study on Tricycle Sign Systems: A Reflection of Filipino Optimism, Masculinity, Religiosity, and Values

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DOI: 10.18510/hssr.2015.322

Article History: Received on 20th February 2015, Revised on 30th March 2015, Published on 15th April 2015

## Abstract

*Tricycle, the most popular mode of transportation in the countryside, has served as a means to articulate one's thoughts. The signages posted on these usually express humor, wit, spirituality and sexual thoughts. The researchers believe that the language utterances displayed on these tricycles may be influenced by a number of social factors. The paper answered these questions: What are the signages found in tricycles traversing Tuguegarao proper? What do these signages in language reflect the lived world or thoughts of the tricycle drivers? Or their social background? How do these signages correlate to social factors? This paper used the descriptive design in examining the signages that were gathered from 100 tricycle driver respondents in Tuguegarao City. Analysis of the signages is strengthened through Barthesian's sign systems. Drawing on the social constructionism, the paper highlights the following: First, tricycles have become a medium of Filipino expression where the vehicles communicate the drivers' worldviews. The gathered signages reflected some Filipino values and traits such as optimism and fatalism; masculinity and machismo; religiosity and social cohesion; and hard work and cultural capital. Second, the paper holds that language may be understood by looking into the relationship between the signifier and the signified. The signages used by the tricycle drivers reflect not only their explicit thoughts, but also symbolic meanings and their habitus. Lastly, language has fulfilled its metalinguistic function as the signages were analyzed to show that these were representations of one's cultural behavior.*

## Keywords

Language, Culture, Semiotics, Communication, Sign systems.

## Introduction

Even before the advent of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as means to articulate one's thoughts, the tricycle, the most popular mode of transportation in the countryside, has served such. Signages like, Basta Driver Sweet Lover, God is Good all the Time, Souvenir from Singapore, Bawat Problema May Solusyon, Toys for Big Boys, Pasahero sa Umaga, Misis sa Gabi, are seen on tricycles, jeepneys and buses that traverse the locality. These "shout outs" have articulated the values, beliefs, thoughts, worldviews or even experiences of the drivers or the owners. They express humor, wit, spirituality and sexual thoughts.

The tricycle is now considered as the main mode of public transportation in Tuguegarao City. When one roams around the city, one would notice thousands of tricycles, many of which are for public use. Some are owned by private individuals, while others come from neighboring towns. The increasing number of this public transportation ultimately leads to one of the problems that the city of Tuguegarao faces. Indeed, traffic emanates from the numerous tricycles traversing the city. As early as 7 'o' clock in the morning, these tricycles start to pile up especially along the busy streets in the city. This paper, however, will not argue on the validity of such an observation nor will it offer solutions to this problem. The fascination to these statements (signages) has tempted the researchers to look into language and what their language utterances reflect about their social group and background.

The study of language in its sociocultural context is one way of understanding linguistic differences and patterns of thought.

Language as one of the means to express one's self or a culture's worldview serves as a bridge to understand the context of the linguistic expression *viz.*, the nature of the speaker.

The researchers also believe that the language utterances displayed on this type of local public transportation may be influenced by a number of social factors. Each of these factors may be a reflection of the socio-economic background from which the owners come from. The paper analyzed the statements and quotations posted at the back part of these local transport vehicles. Specifically, the paper answered these questions: What are the signages found in tricycles traversing Tuguegarao proper? What do these signages reflect about the lived world or thoughts of the tricycle drivers? Or their social background? How do these signages correlate to social factors?

## Theoretical Framework

The paper is grounded on the social construction theory which suggests that discourse is the vehicle to which self and other, including a wider world are articulated.

For any state of affairs, a potentially unlimited number of descriptions or explanations can be ruled superior in terms of its capacity to map, picture or capture the features of the "situation in question" (Gergen, 1999. p. 47). From the constructionist standpoint, we are not locked within any convention of understanding. Our description, explanation, and/or representation are derived from relationships. When applied to examining the signages in tricycles, social constructionism theory would inform us on how the drivers interpret these, which are shaped by their experiences, beliefs, values, and worldviews.

The research, likewise, used Basil Bernstein's sociolinguistic theory of language codes where he argued in *Class, Codes and Control* (1971) that,

*"Forms of spoken language in the process of their learning initiate, generalize, and reinforce special types of relationship with the environment and thus create for the individual particular forms of significance" (p. 76). That is to say that the way language is used within a particular societal class affects the way people assign significance and meaning to the things about which they are speaking. Littlejohn (2002) agrees and states, "people learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes they employ" (p. 178). The code that a person uses indeed symbolizes their social identity (Bernstein, 1971).*

Littlejohn (2002) suggests that Bernstein's theory shows how the language people use in everyday conversation both reflects and shapes the assumptions of a certain social group. Furthermore, relationships established within the social group affect the way that group uses language, and the type of speech that is used.

In *Theories of Human Communication* (2002), he defined code as something which "refers to a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a social group" (p. 278).

The paper is likewise guided by the Barthesian semiotic reading of signages in tricycles. Roland Barthes, in his works *Elements of Semiology*, argued that meaning is confirmed linguistically. By looking into the relationship of the signifier and the signified, denotation and connotation, signification is produced. This process of making meaning is, according to Barthes' interpretation of Saussure, arbitrary, a product of social convention. The sign can be interpreted as the value of the expression, and is a product of exchange and comparison among dissimilar words and ideas.

The briefest but a most influential section of *Elements of Semiology* concerns denotation and connotation. Expression-relation-content is inserted into a secondary system in two ways: As the plane of expression or signifier of a second system, constituting a connotative semiotic; and as the plane of content or signified of a second system, indicating a metalanguage. Of these "staggered systems," Barthes hedges that "the future probably belongs to alinguistics of connotation." Semiology is itself a metalanguage that will accede to the future language that will speak it. Semiology will take its place in the diachronic unfolding of the general system of metalanguages of the social sciences.

Connotation and denotation are often described in terms of levels of representation or levels of meaning. Roland Barthes adopted from Louis Hjelmslev the notion that there are different orders of signification (Barthes, 1957; Louis, 1961, p. 114ff). The first order of signification is that of denotation: At this level there is a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. Connotation is a second-order of signification which uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified. In this framework connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign (so denotation leads to

a chain of connotations). This tends to suggest that denotation is an underlying and primary meaning - A notion which many other commentators have challenged. Barthes himself later gave priority to connotation, and in 1971 noted that it was no longer easy to separate the signifier from the signified, the ideological from the "literal" (Barthes, 1977). In passing, we may note that this formulation underlines the point that "what is a signifier or a signified depends entirely on the level at which the analysis operates: A signified on one level can become a signifier on another level" (Paul, 1994). This is the mechanism by which signs may seem to signify one thing but are loaded with multiple meanings.

Anne De Leon in her study entitled *Read between the Signs: The Jeepney Linguistic System*, attempted to provide an understanding of the jeepney linguistic system through the lens of the jeepney drivers and owners. The study revealed how signs became a Filipino culture and identity carrier and most of these signages can be seen around jeepney vehicles up until today.

Moreover, she argues that jeepney signs have important functions because they do not only encapsulate the jeepney drivers' psyche, but they also explore the subculture linguistic system within the sociocultural arena. Thus, her study asserted that the jeepney as a part of sociocultural studies can encourage social scientists and cultural studies scholars to read not only between or beyond the lines but also read between the signs.

This paper made use of descriptive design in examining the signages that were gathered from 100 tricycle driver respondents in Tuguegarao City. Data needed were elicited using structured questionnaire which consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire dwelt on the socio-economic background of the drivers and the second part probed into the drivers' thoughts and motivations regarding their chosen signage. An analysis of the gathered signages is strengthened by the Barthesian multiple layers of sign systems: The denotation or literal meaning of a sign, and the connotation, which involves a more abstract meaning. Further, the results of the interview were arranged and analyzed thematically.

### **Discussion and Analysis of Findings**

Drawing on the social construction of reality, the paper examines the drivers' thoughts, beliefs and values considering the signages posted on their tricycles. These signages are believed to capture their reality, thus informing the readers of their social attributes.

#### **Bawat problema may solusyon: Filipino optimism and fatalism**

This signage shows that in every problem that comes the driver's way, a solution would somehow arise. It manifests the optimism of the driver as he has chosen the particular register. According to the driver respondent, he had experienced numerous challenges in life but managed to get through it. The tricycle is also a solution to their financial problem. Since he has difficulty finding a permanent job to sustain the needs of his family, the tricycle has helped him provide. With his meager income, he was able to send his children to school.

Looking into its connotation, this would imply the fatalism of the driver. He is bent to believe that there is a supreme being guiding

him to find solutions to his problems or to cure all his pains. Gripaldo (2005) in his article Bahala na (Come What May): A Philosophical Analysis that presented six senses of the term in Filipino usage he contends that Bahala Na, a Filipino cultural trait is situationally based, that is to say, its meaning can be best understood in a situational setting. The word bahala is believed to have been derived from the word Bathala which in the Tagalog language literally means God (Bostrom, 1968. p. 401). Thus, bahala na as a linguistic expression, signifies leaving something or someone in the care of God.

In this case, the tricycle driver's fatalism which was characterized in his signage, indirectly points to the Filipino cultural trait bahala na considering the driver's belief in a supreme being who is supposed to help him find solutions to his problems in life. Taking into account Gripaldo's analysis of the different senses of the term, the signage, indicates meaning number one, where in this context fatalism would mean, "I would leave everything to God; He will take care of me. It is up to him. I am ready to face the consequences of what life may bring" (2005. p. 205). The Filipino use of the phrase bahala na is fatalistic in the sense that it evokes resignation to the consequences of one's undertaking but the intent of the phrase is providential in that it carries the wish or hope that providence will personally take care of one's future (p. 208).

As the driver has experienced several difficulties in life, he hopes that everything becomes fine in the future for himself and his family. Believing in someone who is in control of life, gives a person a psychological peace of mind and emotional stability.

The following signages also manifest the drivers' optimism. These reflect the values and attitudes that they deem important to possess in order to survive. As the drivers belong to the working class, values like hard work and optimism are vital for their survival.

Signages	Emic perception
<i>Sulit pagod sa kita</i>	<i>Maski hanna yo bannag mu mappasada kang patangalgaw ko neng, always mamba niyan kitam pay, yan ta sulit ba laman. (Even though driving the whole day is an exhausting job, it is still rewarding because at the end of the day I would still bring something home to my family)</i>
<i>Kung may tiyaga, may nilaga</i>	<i>Sakto ma laman nga nu nalappat ka pay manaful kang pangkabuhayan, niyan mu itallag kang kaldero. (If you are an industrious person, you don't have to worry because you'll have something to eat)</i>
<i>Work hard and you will get your reward</i>	<i>Ika nga nila, nu marim matrabahu kunisi ka pay nga magkaroon kang kwartu. Nu awan atafulan isa tolay, awan messimu kang attole na. Kunne kayat kebalinan yo sticker ku kang umay tricycle ku. (As they say, if you don't work how can you earn money? If you don't have a job, how can you survive? That is what my sticker wants to convey)</i>

<i>Nothing is impossible</i>	<i>Nu igga paniniwalam sa lahat ng pangarap mo sa buhay, combined with trust and faith sa Lord, nothing is impossible talaga. (If you believe in your dreams, combined with trust and faith in the Lord, nothing is impossible)</i>
<i>Life is a journey of challenge</i>	<i>Ang buhay ay parang pagaarangkada lang ng tricy sa pang-araw-araw. Minsan mahirap ang byahe, walang pasahero at minsan swerte rin dahil makakarami ka ng isasakay. (Life is like driving a tricycle. Sometimes you would encounter difficulties especially if there are few passengers. But, there are times that you get lucky enough)</i>

**Toys for the big boys: Images of masculinity**

The tricycle drivers consider their source of income, the tricycle, as a toy for it represents an object that is fondly used by them. As one of the driver has said:

*Yo tricycle ku maytu alle yo tu pangarap ku nga gayam pay yin. Syempre mari la anak makammu magayam, pati ikami pay manakam yan ta kayat ku yaw nga sticker. (I consider my tricycle my toy. It's just like my dream toy. The children are not the only ones who play, even us adults play. That is why I like this sticker.)*

If some men own cars and motorcycles, the tricycle drivers have their three-wheeled cycles that they too, treat with fondness and pleasure. It is not only a source of their income, but it has evolved into an object of pleasure and expression. Their childhood toy has become a real-life "toy." The tricycle, as a toy, gives them a sense of satisfaction and a sense of pride in the community. And that like a toy, these drivers make sure that the tricycles are maintained and are kept presentable.

However, this toy also manifests masculinity as the signage, Toys for the Big Boys. It means that the tricycle has been made as their expression or symbol of masculine power. The drivers manifest their manhood by manipulating the machine (the tricycle). When the drivers are equipped with this machine, they become powerful and violent, as the cyborg. As observed, they seem to be reckless and drive so fast when plying the highway. Apparently, speed may also express their manhood in terms of their tricycles, their toys. The fusion of man and machine changes the character of the man. As Jeffords (1994. p. 112) admits in RoboCop neither Alex Murphy nor RoboCop are heroic as separate entities; it is the fusion of the man and the machine that recuperates a masculine identity.

Akin to the cyborg, the tricycle is seen as invincible. Therefore, drivers when armed with their tricycles feel to be invincible as well. The risk they take when plying the highway manifests this feeling. One can see them manoeuvre, so quickly in narrow roads or even in sidewalks which often result to accidents.

Kibby (1996) states that since 1980's, there have been many great boys' toys which represent masculinity as machine-like. Most of the members of the upper class and few of the middle class own boys' toys such as cars and motorbikes that blend features of machinery and masculinity so that they represent both simultaneously (Varney, 2002). The lower working class,

however, equates the tricycle to boys' toys. Accordingly, like the car and the motorbike, the tricycle represents objective conventional values as speed, propulsion, mobility, as well as both machinery and masculinity.

In our cultural ideas about masculinity, mobility as described by Kibby (1996), seems to be a historically inert attribute. In Nordic rural society of the last century, men were intimately connected with their horse, which transported, worked for, as well as represented these men in public (a man and his horse were often portrayed side by side on the family photos) – while women were associated with the stationary cows (Frykman and Löfgren, 1979). In modern societies, the significance of mobility as a symbol of masculinity magnifies.

The tricycle, just like the car and the motorbike, is originally almost exclusively used by men. Within the tricycle drivers' status, the tricycle is significant and often seen as manly in terms of mobility because "individual mobility is a male prerogative, in contrast to the collective and more gender-neutral movement of the trains, trams and buses" (Bjurstrom, 1995 in Lara-de Leon and Zhoumaoji, 2005). Men are equated with mobility while domestication to women.

In the advent of the changing social times and modernity, patriarchy though almost lost its supremacy due to feminization of the workplace and technology (Kibby, 1996). It has always struggled to assert its power. By means of the introduction of technology it had always prevailed, for "science and technology are culturally the domain of men." Patriarchal masculinity establishes its hegemony not only through a physical power but also through the power of reason. Connell (1995. p. 165) describes a historical division between forms of masculinity organized around direct domination, and forms organized around technological knowledge, suggesting that the latter have challenged the former for hegemony in advanced capitalist societies. Under late capitalism "instrumental rationality" and "technocratic consciousness" are the "quintessentially modern masculine style" (Winter and Robert, 1980. p. 271). Patriarchal masculinity is now legitimized by the technical organization of production, rather than imposed by physical or legal force. While technological control legitimates patriarchy, many men are left powerless under their system. The new technology has altered the familiar connection between masculinity and machinery. While the machinery of the industrial age required mastery by physical strength, the technology of the information age involves a more physically inert, passive approach. In the modern workplace, the machine is master, while man (or often woman) is the helper. Accompanying technological development was a loss of certainty, a collapse of fundamental beliefs, and a blurring of the boundaries through which the world was once classified. Patriarchy itself seemed under challenged in the new technological order. The patriarchal authority of the father could not be supported by an ambivalent relationship with the new technology.

As machines dominate production in the modern context, men in patrilineal societies such as the Philippines combine their potential power of masculine with the power of machine, like the tricycles, to be able to prove their maleness in a rough way

(Lara-de Leon and Zhoumaoji, 2005). The unskilled workers emphasize a risk taking, physical prowess and disordered behavior in the atmosphere of noise, speed, and smoke. The tricycle, as another signage displays, is the rule of the road.

#### **Pasahero sa Umaga, Misis sa Gabi: Subliminal messages in the tricycles**

Literally, the signage would mean setting of priorities. The drivers' concern during the day is to look for passengers and bring them to their destination for they bring income to the family. During the night, however, their time is to be spent with their wives and their children. This is the only time of the day that they can rest from work.

This could also mean that the driver devotes his time during the day for work as there are some who work during the night. A driver mentioned:

*Di ba buhay mo maghapon ay iba't ibang pasahero kasi nga driver ka, dapat kapag gabi misis mo naman ang ikondisyon mo. (Your whole day as a driver is spent with the passengers, so it is during the night that you satisfy your wife.)*

His obligation to his family to bring home additional income would come first. The secondary would be his obligation to his wife. The term ikondisyon implies a sexual meaning, where he meant to satisfy their sexual urges and desires.

One of the so many influences of Spain to Filipino culture is the concept of machismo. In the dictionary of Filipino culture and values, Tomas Andres defines machismo as, "the belief in male supremacy and the relegation of the women to a domestic role and as second-class citizens." Further, he posits that the belief in machismo has influenced Filipino society and its treatment to women. Machismo is extremely prevalent among Filipino males and it requires Filipino men to engage in a sexual role which could only be verified by the peer group to which he belongs in terms of number of affairs he maintains and children he sires either with his lawful wife or his mistresses.

Another signage Kahinaan ng lalake ang mga babae would also show machismo. However in this case, the driver respondent values his relationship with his wife. He said:

*Base lang sa experience ko sa buhay na kahinaan ko ang misis ko na kahit mag-away pa kame ako lage ang naglalamang sa kanya kasi ayaw ko siya mawala sa akin. (Based on my experience, I always succumb to my wife. Even during a fight, I would always caress her because I don't want to lose her.)*

In the signage, *Basta sexy libre basta sa driver tatabi, basta driver sweet lover, and ang drayber na may bigote, magaling sa diskarte*, male chauvinism is shown. These manifest how men perceive women as a sexual object. As the drivers said:

*Natiliwan nak agbababai. (I was caught having an affair with women) Sitam yo bigotek nge, madiskarte yaw nga tolay yan ta lagi on-the-go nu mabiyahе jebit aru chiks. (Look at my mustache, these shows I am good. I am motivated to work especially when there are ladies around.)*

*Nakaka-inspire ngamin ti seksi nga babai, lalo nu napintas! (Sexy and beautiful women are inspiring.) Nu seksi pati gwapa, ganadu driver mappasada. (A driver gets excited with beautiful and sexy women around).*

Numerous writers in literature have described the languages of seductive females, given that the body of a woman is almost invariably treated as “an object to be looked at and possessed.” Whereas a man’s has other prerogatives – It is “desiring and therefore, in becoming, ready for action and for transformation.” In short, the female body is akin to an object, a commodity, or a consumption good (Neiger, 2003. p. 52).

**In God we trust: Filipino religiosity**

This signage reflects the innate religiosity among Filipinos which enables them to trust God and to genuinely accept reality in the context of God’s will. Abad (2001), in his paper entitled Religion in the Philippines, believe that Filipinos, mainly Roman Catholics, continue to see themselves as religious people, possessing a strong belief in God and remaining even more faithful to both the Bible and to major religious tenets. The study revealed that 59% of the driver respondents are Catholics which would explain the use of several language registers like:

Signage	Emic perspective
<i>Jesus never fails</i>	<i>Nu igga anguruk mu ta yafu, ari na ka siyempre yatun nga biguan jebi nu driver ka nga nasikan debosyon mu nakasta agkaw pasadam ya. (If you believe in the Lord, he will not fail you. If you have a strong devotion to the Lord you will always earn a lot)</i>
<i>Have faith in the lord</i>	<i>Sa bawat kayod, Panginoon lagi ang siyang gumagabay sa atin kaya dapat lagi tayong magtiwala sa kanya. Asawa ko na rin may sabi na bagay din daw sa tricycle to para maganda lagi pasada. (In all that we do, God is always guiding us. Therefore, we should always trust in Him. My wife said that this register is good for my tricycle so I may have a lot of passengers)</i>
<i>In god we trust</i>	<i>Tu ngamin nga byahe ku, Panginoon y maserbi nga protector tam. Dapat laman tu matiwalala tam sa tapenu nakasta y byahem tam. (In all my trips, God has been protecting me. We should always trust in Him so He will guide us)</i>
<i>God is love</i>	<i>Tayong Pinoy gare is malakas paniniwala sa taas. Ang God mahal tayo nian kaya dapat bilang sukli sa everyday blessings na binibigay niya, dapat laman nga talyanan tera pay kang kabutihan sa kapwa. (Filipinos have a strong faith in the Lord. God loves us and in return for all the blessings He gave us, we should do good to our fellowmen)</i>

According to these driver respondents, they seek God’s help for protection. In their daily routine as tricycle drivers, they draw strength and courage from him who never fails them. Moreover, they also mentioned that what triggered them to choose the signage is their acceptance of the fact that God continues to

give them blessings and protection from any harm. Some of the tricycles have these signages:

Signages	Emic perspective
<i>God’s blessing</i>	<i>Eksplanasyon ko lang diyan na rason ko eh blessing kasi sa amin ni Misis ang Tricy naming kaya yan lang pinalagay naming nung pinagawa naming ang tricycle. (This tricycle is a blessing to us.)</i>
<i>God bless our way!</i>	<i>Bawat byahe may kaakibat na basbas dapat. Ang pagiging driver, hindi sa lahat ng oras ligtas tayo, kaya dapat humingi tayo patnubay mula sa kaitaasan. (All our trips must be protected and blessed. Since I spend the day driving around, I am not confident of my safety and so I ask guidance from up above.)</i>
<i>God is good all the time</i>	<i>Nasikan pangurug ku kanni Diyos Ama tera. Iggina ballaman yo makapangwa kang ngamin maski hanna ziyat tera ta utun lusak. (I have a strong faith in the Lord. Though life is hard here on earth, the Lord is still in control.)</i>

In Isip’s discussion on Filipino Religious Belief System, she emphasized that Filipinos relate to God primarily as lord-creator, the source and giver of life to all that exists. God is a great provider whose will is a real factor in the lives of Filipino Catholics, and there is basic optimism that despite all their sufferings and hardships, God’s plan will work out for the best.

The use of such signage may also suggest strong Filipino spirituality which is seen as a powerful domain of one’s soul to deeply connect with the creator. Their strong belief on the existence of a divine or supreme being, therefore, is emphasized. And because they are grounded in spiritual values, they tend to bear with life’s difficulties. The tricycle driver’s job is difficult. They would go through the intense heat of the sun and they would brave the outpouring rain just to be able to earn for their family’s needs. The majority of the driver respondents have families to feed and are therefore expected to bring home some money at the end of the day. Though their job is that difficult, their belief in God somehow gives them strength to handle the difficulties they encounter as tricycle drivers. Believing and trusting in the almighty gives them a feeling that the weight of the world has been lifted off their shoulders and that everything will move smoothly and perfectly.

Looking into the connotation of these signages, it can be said that the respondents’ religiosity is a reflection of the society’s solidarity. Durkheim (2001) asserted that religion is “an eminently collective thing.” It binds men together, as the etymology of the word religion testifies.

Durkheim further argued that religious phenomena emerge in any society when a separation is made between the sphere of the profane—the realm of everyday utilitarian activities—and the sphere of the sacred—the area that pertains to the numerous, the transcendental, the extraordinary. An object is intrinsically

neither sacred nor profane. It becomes the one or the other depending on whether men choose to consider the utilitarian value of the object or certain intrinsic attributes that have nothing to do with its instrumental value. The wine at mass has sacred ritual significance to the extent that it is considered by the believer to symbolize the blood of Christ; in this context it is plainly not a beverage. Sacred activities are valued by the community of believers not as means to ends, but because the religious community has bestowed their meaning on them as part of its worship. Distinctions between the spheres of the sacred and the profane are always made by groups who band together in a cult and who are united by their common symbols and objects of worship. Hence, religion is a system of symbols, beliefs and rituals that are based on the classification of common things into the sacred or the profane. This classification and the resultant practices are borne out of society's need to maintain some level of social cohesion.

Considering this, language becomes a symbol or a representation of the will and the mind of the society. So, when we see registers like *In God we trust*, it represents the faith and the belief of the society to a god. The word "we" refers to the society which believes in a god. These symbols or representations reinforce the bonds between the members of any society. They have a way of bringing the individual consciousness back to focus on the group.

Gorospe (2007) in his article entitled *Understanding the Filipino Value System*, emphasized that moral and religious values are pre-eminent and claim the highest priority in the objective scale of values because they are absolutely necessary in order to become fully human. He further said that the heroes of EDSA placed the good of the Filipino people before the safety and security of their families. They were willing to risk their lives for God and people. Value-ranking or the priority of values is not merely arbitrary or subjective. There is an objective ranking of values based on existence or reality and other objective criteria. Using the criteria of permanence, ability to be shared, and depth of satisfaction, Max Scheler ranked human values from the lowest to the highest as follows: Sense values like sensual pleasure are exemplified by the *lakuatsero* or *pabling*; utilitarian values like profit and efficiency by the businessman and technocrat; life values, by the doctor and the hero, e.g., Dr. Bobby de la Paz and Emilio Jacinto; cultural values, by the genius and the artist, e.g., Jose Rizal and Francisco Balagtas; religious values, by the saint, e.g., Mother Teresa or Lorenzo Ruiz.

The use of such signages as a reflection of Filipino religiosity can also be seen as the respondents' way of lessening their anxiety in life. Kottak (1991) in his book *"Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity,"* explained that supernatural beliefs and practices can help reduce anxiety. They can dispel doubts that arise when outcomes are beyond rational human control. He even said that similarly, religion helps people face death and endure life crises. As one driver said:

*The Lord is near to all who call upon him*

*May malakas akong paniniwala sa nag iisa nating Panginoon.  
Bawat pagsubok ay nakayanan dahil malapit ako at ng pamilya*

*ko sa Kanya. (I have a strong belief in our God. I survive all trials in my life because I am close to my family and to God.)*

Moreover, Kottak said that religion reduces anxiety and allays fears. And if people participate in religious rites, the successful completion of the rite may eventually enhance the social solidarity of participants. Drivers then recognize that difficulty and burdens of life create anxiety; however, their belief in a God whose guidance never fails lessens the anxiety brought by life's difficulties. The rosaries and other religious objects are also proofs of their fear and anxieties. The mere presence of these in their tricycles makes them feel protected.

#### **Katas Saudi/Katas ng Hongkong/Souvenir from Singapore/ Katas ng Dagupan Bus: Values and cultural capital**

These signages clearly reflect the reality that Filipinos are hardworking and responsible individuals who value their earnings for the sake of the family. This boils down to the set priorities of the tricycle drivers. To most of them, the family comes first. Family is evidently highly valued by them. Their dreams and aspirations are always centered on their families. As Isip (1999) puts it, "For Filipinos, their families are the most important reference group, the core of their alliance system, where they find security, strength, and support. Loyalty to family and kin, family solidarity and togetherness, concern for the family, rank high in their priority."

The driver respondents work hard for their families and are willing to work abroad in order to uplift the family's socio-economic status. But, it does not end there. Their sense of responsibility comes into play by making sure that they get something out of their hard work. As Licuanan (2014) mentions in her article, a Moral Recovery Program: Building a People, Building a Nation, "Filipinos have the capacity for hard work, given proper conditions. The desire to raise one's standard of living and to possess the essentials of a decent life for one's family, combined with the right opportunities and incentives, stimulate the Filipino to work very hard. This is manifested most noticeably in a willingness to take risks with jobs abroad, and to work there at two or three jobs. The result is productivity and entrepreneurship for some, and survival despite poverty for others."

Symbolically, their usage of these signages can be seen as a representation of an uplifted socio-economic status of the family. The tricycle is seen as a status symbol for the family. To use these signages then is to show the community that they are at least successful in their attempt to give their families a better life. The owners of the tricycles who chose these signages admittedly said that the tricycles were bought out of the savings they, or their wives, have acquired as OFWs.

Cars have become a necessity nowadays but could also be used as a status symbol. The tricycle has also served both, a necessity, and a status symbol, to the lower working class. Although there are vehicles bought for their functionality, the tricycle communicates wealth and masculinity. Regardless of what a vehicle communicates, status symbols send messages about the type of cultural capital a person has. Sociologists like Bourdieu define cultural capital as those characteristics that can be used to increase one's economic standing, but are not actually wealth.

Bourdieu (1986) in his book, *the forms of Capital*, identified three forms of cultural capital. He posits that it can exist in three forms: In the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. In the embodied state, most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposes a process of embodiment and incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, which must be invested personally by the investor. As the acquisition of a muscular physique or a suntan, it cannot be done at second hand (so that all effects of delegation are ruled out). Cultural capital, in the objectified state, has a number of properties which are defined only in the relationship with cultural capital in its embodied form. The cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc., is transmissible in its materiality. A collection of paintings, for example, can be transmitted as well as economic capital (if not better, because the capital transfer is more disguised). But, what is transmissible is legal ownership and not (or not necessarily) what constitutes the precondition for specific appropriation, namely, the possession of the means of "consuming" a painting or using a machine, which, being nothing other than embodied capital, are subject to the same laws of transmission. The objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications is one way of neutralizing some of the properties it derives from the fact that, being embodied, it has the same biological limits as its bearer. This objectification is what makes the difference between the capital of the autodidact, which may be called into question at any time, or even the cultural capital of the courtier, which can yield only ill-defined profits, of fluctuating value, in the market of high-society exchanges, and the cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer. With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative autonomy *viz.*, its bearer and even *viz.*, the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given moment in time. It institutes cultural capital by collective magic, just as, according to Merleau-Ponty, the living institute their dead through the ritual of mourning. One has only to think of the concours (competitive recruitment examination) which, out of the continuum of infinitesimal differences between performances, produces sharp, absolute, lasting differences, such as that which separates the last successful candidate from the first unsuccessful one, and institutes an essential difference between the officially recognized, guaranteed competence and simple cultural capital, which is constantly required to prove itself. In this case, one sees clearly the performative magic of the

power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition.

In summary, Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital would refer to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, values that one acquires through being part of a particular social class. Sharing similar forms of cultural capital with others creates a sense of collective identity and group position. In the case of the tricycle drivers and their families, belonging to the lower working class led them to acquire skills, attitudes and values needed for their survival. Those who have family members working abroad were able to obtain material things like the tricycle. Their skills, attitudes, and values helped them acquire such, hence, allowing social mobility within their social group. In Bourdieu's term, these skills, attitudes and values belong to the physical embodiment of cultural capital or the habitus. The habitus is the deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences. It allows us to successfully control our social environments. The tricycle drivers and their family grew up in a difficult environment as shown in their profiles. People who usually live in these types of environment would likely to acquire survival skills.

### Conclusion

The foregoing discussions highlight the following: First, tricycles have become a medium of Filipino expression where the vehicles communicate the drivers' worldviews. Just like social media, public utility vehicles serve as a means to express one's thoughts, even values, attitudes, and beliefs. The gathered signages reflected some Filipino values and traits like:

*Bawat Problema May Solusyon* reflects Filipino optimism and implies the fatalism of the Filipino driver as he believes on the existence of a Supreme Being who guides him in finding solutions to his problems and cure to all his pains.

*Toys for the Big Boys* are a signage that reflects masculinity, that is, the tricycle has been made as their expression or symbol of masculine power. As observed, they seem to be reckless and drive so fast when plying the highway. Apparently, speed may also express their manhood in terms of their tricycles, their toys.

*Pasahero sa Umaga, Misis sa Gabi* stresses that the driver's obligation to his family to bring home additional income would come first. The secondary would be his obligation to his wife. The signage clearly reflects the concept of machismo which has influenced Filipino society and its treatment to women.

*In God, We Trust* reflects the innate religiosity among Filipinos that ultimately leads to social cohesion. Moreover, such registers can be seen as the drivers' way of lessening their anxiety in life. Their belief in a God whose guidance never fails lessens the anxiety brought by life's difficulties.

*Katas Saudi/Katas ng Hongkong/Souvenir from Singapore/Katas ng Dagupan Bus* are signages that clearly reflect the reality that Filipinos are hardworking and responsible individuals who value their earnings for the sake of the family. Symbolically, their usage of these signages can be seen as a representation of

an uplifted socio-economic status of the family. The tricycle has become a necessity and a status symbol to the lower working class. It is a status symbol that sends messages about the type of cultural capital a person has.

Second, the paper holds that language may be understood by looking into the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative is the obvious or common sense meaning, while the connotative is the “socio-cultural” and “personal” associations (Chandler, 2013) of the sign. The signages used by the tricycle drivers reflect not only their explicit thoughts but also symbolic meanings and the habitus associated with their experiences.

Lastly, language has fulfilled its metalinguistic function as the signages were analyzed to show that these were representations of one’s cultural behavior.

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