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Meaning in Motion: A Semiotic Study of Traffic Signs in Davao City as the Language of Road Communication

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Abstract: This study investigates how drivers who have completed the Theoretical Driving Course (TDC) and Practical Driving Course (PDC), and those who have not, interpret traffic signs, pavement markings, and other road symbols within the road context of Davao City, Philippines. It explores how meaning is constructed and translated into driver compliance, viewing the road as a communicative field shaped by signs, culture, and interpretation. Guided by the semiotic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Yuri Lotman's (1990) concept of the semiosphere, this qualitative study analyses how drivers and motorcyclists engage with both the mechanical and the semiotic language of the road. Data were generated through two complementary methods: focus group discussions (FGDs) with 12 purposively selected participants comprising TDC-PDC-trained and non-TDC-PDC drivers and motorcyclists, and live roadside interviews conducted with drivers navigating the actual roads of Davao City. The roadside interviews were essential in capturing how material traffic signs embedded in their physical environments, encountered under real driving conditions, and shaped by their visibility, placement, and spatial context, carry semiotic weight that abstract depictions cannot fully replicate. Findings reveal that formally trained drivers exhibit higher levels of semiotic awareness, interpreting colours, shapes, and symbols not merely as functional cues but as signifiers within a shared system of meaning. In contrast, untrained drivers relied more heavily on habit, intuition, and experiential knowledge, which emerged as a mode of engagement termed as folk semiosis. Crucially, however, folk semiosis is not the exclusive domain of the untrained drivers; even formally trained drivers negotiate this intuitive, experience-driven mode of sign-reading when navigating unfamiliar roads and terrain, where it functions additively to discipline and interpretation, sharpening alertness, deepening caution, and enriching their already-established semiotic competence. This study concludes that the road is not merely a space of



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transit but a living semiotic ecosystem where meaning, disciplined behaviour, and safety continuously intersect. Nonetheless, while untrained drivers who exercise genuine caution and self-taught discipline through folk semiosis can contribute meaningfully to orderly and smooth traffic flow, they must ultimately recognise that formal TDC and PDC training remains indispensable, not only for a deeper, legally grounded understanding of road and traffic signs, but for the fuller, more conscious participation in road safety that semiotic education can reliably produce.

Keywords: semiotics, traffic signs, road communication, driving culture, folk semiosis, Davao City

Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2026) reports that road traffic incidents claim over 1.35 million lives each year, painting a grim portrait of the global struggle for road safety. While mechanical failures or technical errors account for only a small portion of these tragedies, it is the human factor, consisting of habits, behaviour, and miscommunication, that too often turns movement into danger (Risser et al., 1991; Chaloupka & Risser, 2020). When driving on roads anywhere in the world, misunderstanding is not merely semantic; it is a matter of life and death.

Traffic signs function as key instruments of order on the road, constituting silent yet eloquent and direct forms of communication designed to guide drivers and pedestrians through the intricate choreography and rhythm of traffic (Aguilar, 2015). However, as Dudek (2018) cautions, to frame traffic devices simply as neutral guardians of order risks naturalising the institutional power they embody. Traffic signs do not merely reflect a universal conception of order; they enforce a particular, institutionally defined version of it, one that is produced by regulatory bodies, engineering conventions, and state authority. In this sense, the road sign is simultaneously a communicative act and a technology of power. Yet, as Shinar and Vogelzang (2012) suggest, their meanings are not always comprehensively understood. Between the symbol and its interpreter lies a fragile space where comprehension can falter, and from that gap of understanding, danger and deadly accidents can emerge.

Situated in the southern Philippines on the island of Mindanao, Davao City is the largest city in the country by land area and serves as the economic and cultural hub of the Davao Region. It is home to a diverse population of over 1.7 million people and is characterised by a complex urban road network that accommodates a wide range of vehicles, from private cars and motorcycles to jeepneys and public utility vehicles. In this context, the issue of road sign comprehension takes on a distinctly local resonance. The persistence of undisciplined driving behaviour, inadequate enforcement of traffic laws, and limited formal training among drivers all contribute to growing risks on the roads (Fernandez et al., 2020). The result is not merely congestion but a breakdown in communication, an erosion of shared understanding that should ideally unite road users in the pursuit of collective safety. Data from the City Transport and Traffic Management Office (CTTMO, 2018) revealed 13,291 apprehensions for disobeying traffic signs within a single year, reflecting both a systemic problem and the sociocultural patterns through which Filipinos interpret and respond to traffic signs.

To address these issues, the Land Transportation Office (LTO) implemented a more structured approach to driver education. The Theoretical Driving Course (TDC) and Practical Driving Course (PDC) were introduced to instil a deeper understanding of traffic rules and symbolic awareness of road signs, especially among new drivers. These programmes, reinforced by the Comprehensive Driver Education (CDE) scheme for licence renewal (Autodeal, 2024; LTO Portal PH, 2023), aim to move beyond technical skill toward semiotic communicative competence, a literacy in the language and symbols of traffic and road signs.

Still, questions linger. Do these educational interventions genuinely shape how drivers read the semiotic landscape of the road? Does formal training alter not just

knowledge but perception or the subtle act of seeing, sensing, and interpreting meaning amid motion? Within this space of inquiry, Davao's roadways become a semiotic field, a cultural text where the visual and behavioural dimensions intertwine.

Hence, this study seeks to understand how drivers, both TDC/PDC-trained and untrained, interpret and respond to traffic signs. Through the lens of semiotic theory, particularly the frameworks of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Yuri Lotman (1990), this study explores the ways meaning is produced, exchanged, and sometimes lost within the local semiosphere of road communication in Davao City. This study does not merely treat the road as infrastructure but as a living language, in which drivers and motorcyclists must learn to read, and for which they should continuously re-negotiate through their interpretive responses, everyday habits, and lived experience on the roads.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the language of the road requires more than recognising symbols; it involves entering a living system of meanings that circulate among drivers, traffic signs, and the broader culture of speed, transit, and movement. This study is grounded primarily in the semiotic frameworks of Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Yuri Lotman (1990) and is enriched by recent scholarship in road semiotics and movement communication.

For de Saussure (1916), every act of communication involves a *signifier*, the perceptible form that meaning takes, and a *signified*, the concept it evokes. Within this relational system, meaning is never isolated; it arises from difference and opposition. Applied to the road, a red light gains its meaning as "stop" not by itself alone but through its contrast to other symbols: the green light that permits movement and the yellow sign that warns of transition, informing drivers to prepare to continue movement. Road communication thus forms a network of signifiers continuously interpreted by drivers navigating the road environment. Crucially, in de Saussure's system, the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, that is, there is no natural or inevitable link between the visual form of a sign and its meaning. Rather, meanings are established by social convention and maintained through collective agreement. This is why driver training is so consequential: without exposure to the code, the sign remains mute or misinterpreted, and this can lead to harmful accidents and social disorder.

Yet, these signs do not exist in a vacuum. As Lotman (1990) proposes, all signs inhabit a semiosphere, a cultural and communicative space where meanings are born, exchanged, and transformed. The concept of the semiosphere is crucial to understanding how road communication functions: it situates individual sign interpretation within a larger cultural and social ecology. The roads of Davao City form their own semiosphere, a dynamic system where global standards of traffic signage meet local interpretations, habitual behaviours, and the rhythms of Filipino driving culture. Within this cultural semiotic sphere, even the smallest sign, e.g., a pedestrian crossing or a flashing hazard light, carries traces of shared cultural knowledge and collective habit. The semiosphere is not homogeneous. Lotman (1990) describes a tension between the centre, where meanings are institutionalised and standardised, and the periphery, where meanings are improvised, transformed, and sometimes contested. As this study demonstrates, formally trained and untrained drivers occupy different positions within this semiosphere.

Recent scholarships have further enriched this semiotic foundation. Wagner (2006) argues that road signs constitute a universal visual semiotics, i.e., a cross-cultural system in which geometric forms, colours, and pictograms are designed to communicate across linguistic boundaries. Yet as Wagner (2006) demonstrates, universality is always in tension with local interpretation: the same sign may evoke different responses depending on cultural context, individual experience, and degree of formal training. Jensen (2014), working within a framework of mobile semiotics, extends this insight by attending to the moving body as a semiotic actor. For Jensen (2014), the driving subject is not a passive reader of signs but an embodied participant in a semiotic encounter shaped by speed, attention, and spatial context, a perspective that resonates with the lived driving experiences described by participants in this study. Similarly, Dudek (2018) analyses traffic signals as technologies of normalisation, arguing that they function as norm-enforcing devices that translate institutional authority into everyday behavioural commands. This framing acknowledges that driver compliance is not simply a matter of cognitive decoding but of internalised social discipline.

It is worth acknowledging that the study of road signs has also been productively approached through the framework of linguistic landscapes (see Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Backhaus, 2008; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008), which examines the visibility, power, and ideological dimensions of written language in public space. While linguistic landscape studies offer a valuable lens for understanding the spatial politics of signage, the present study's primary focus on the cognitive and cultural processes through which drivers produce and negotiate meaning from traffic signs, rather than on the ideological dimensions of language-in-space, renders the Saussurean-Lotmanian framework the more appropriate analytical tool for its purposes.

By combining de Saussure's (1916) structural semiotics with Lotman's (1990) cultural semiotics, and drawing on the contributions of Wagner (2006), Jensen (2014), and Dudek (2018), this study views road communication not merely as a technical system of signals but as a living text in which drivers and motorcyclists read, interpret, and sometimes misread. Their comprehension of traffic signs, shaped by education, training, habitual behaviour, intuition, and cultural context, reveals how meaning travels within the semiosphere of the road.

Literature Review

Traffic signs are among the most universal tools of road communication. They provide drivers with directions, warnings, and guidance through visual messages designed to ensure the safe and orderly flow of traffic. As Sigua (2008) and Fernandez et al. (2020) explained, traffic signs are typically positioned at intersections and critical points in cities and towns across the Philippines to communicate safety information and appropriate behaviour to road users. According to DriveSafely.Net (2021), these signs serve not only as warnings but also as instruments of discipline, directing both drivers and pedestrians toward predictable, orderly, and safe conduct.

However, studies show that comprehension of traffic signs varies significantly across contexts and cultures. In Turkey, Kirmizioglu and Tuydes-Yaman (2011) found that among 1,478 Turkish drivers, only 12 of 30 common traffic signs were recognised by at least 70% of

respondents, suggesting that familiarity and exposure play a vital role in interpretation. In Israel, Shinar and Vogelzang (2012) reported that traffic signs combining symbolic and textual information were better understood, especially among drivers who were less familiar with abstract symbols.

In the Philippines, Fernandez et al. (2020) observed that many Filipino drivers lack discipline and adequate training, resulting in poor comprehension and disregard for road signs. Commonly ignored signs, such as No Loading/Unloading or No Parking Anytime, reflect how everyday driving practices often drift away from standardised semiotic codes. This gap in understanding reveals a deeper problem: a disconnection between the intended meaning of traffic signs and the interpreted meaning within the local road semiosphere.

Regulatory, Warning, and Informative Signs

Regulatory signs articulate the laws and boundaries of road behaviour, ensuring that drivers recognise actions that are either mandatory or prohibited (Dewar et al., 2023; LTO Portal PH, 2023). These include speed limits, directional rules, and parking restrictions, which are semiotic structures that express institutional authority through form, text, and colour.

Warning signs use symbols and colour to evoke alertness and anticipation. Typically triangular or diamond-shaped, they serve as pre-emptive measures against potential hazards or road changes (Kim, 2020). Yellow, for instance, functions as both an attention signal and a cultural cue for caution, a visual code that transcends spoken language.

Informative signs emphasise guidance rather than control. They indicate destinations, distances, and facilities, forming what Lotman (1990) would call the informational layer of the semiosphere, a framework that keeps movement intelligible and culturally patterned.

Pavement markings and hand signals also extend the semiotic landscape of the road. Pavement lines, arrows, and colours supplement other signs by directing vehicular flow, while hand signals function as non-verbal, embodied communication between drivers (Szafranski, 2024; Zutobi, 2023). These diverse semiotic forms coexist to sustain the complex order of traffic, each dependent on a shared understanding among road users.

Driver Compliance

Driver compliance reflects how individuals respond to the signs and symbols that structure life and conduct on the roads. Gargoum et al. (2016) found that environmental factors such as road width, parking density, and number of lanes significantly influence adherence to speed limits. Likewise, Vignali et al. (2019) observed that drivers' attention to signage, particularly in work zones and busy intersections, varies depending on perceived safety and familiarity.

Theoretically, driver compliance intersects with what Dudek (2018) calls the norm-enforcing function of traffic devices in that compliance is not simply the outcome of correct interpretation but the product of normalised, institutionally encoded behaviour that has been internalised as social habit. From a Lotmanian perspective, drivers who comply with road signs do so not merely because they have decoded the signifier correctly, but because they have assimilated the sign's meaning as part of a shared cultural semiosphere. Compliance, in this sense, is as much a cultural act as it is a cognitive one. This distinction is

central to the present study's interest in comparing formally trained and untrained drivers: what differs between them is not only knowledge but the degree to which semiotic conventions have been internalised through structured exposure.

In the Philippines, the Metro Manila Accident Recording and Analysis System (MMARAS, as cited in Sy, 2017) identified that disregard for traffic signs was the most commonly violated rule, accounting for nearly 55,000 apprehensions in 2016 alone. Such violations often stem from human error, distraction, and limited training, which are factors that collectively disrupt the semiotic and social order of the road.

Road Communication

Communication on the road extends beyond physical signs; it involves a social, cultural, and semiotic dialogue among road users. Asuncion et al. (2014) found that in Davao City, awareness and compliance with road regulations correlated strongly with drivers' education level and employment status, with poor driving education identified as the leading contributor to major accidents since 2010. Similarly, in Poland, Wontorczyk and Gaca (2021) discovered that comprehension of non-standard signs was significantly influenced by personal traits such as age, gender, and experience.

These findings resonate with Lotman's (1990) idea that every community develops its own semiotic boundary, which is a space where meanings are negotiated through shared experience. As Ferreira (2022) suggests, when drivers become aware of one another's communicative intentions through signals, gestures, and lights, they participate in a form of cultural dialogue that transforms the road into a living language that warrants careful reading. Hazard lights, horns, and brake lights thus serve as extensions of human expression within this semiotic system (Thomas Law Offices, 2022).

Driving Outcomes and Road Safety Education

Studies have consistently linked driving education to safer road behaviour. Topolšek et al. (2019) found that structured driver training programmes significantly reduce accident rates and encourage defensive driving. Conversely, inadequate training contributes to adverse outcomes such as road rage, traffic violations, and accidents (American Psychological Association, 2014; Yazdi et al., 2024).

In the Philippines, the LTO requires a 15-hour TDC and an 8-hour PDC for licence applicants (Motodeal, 2020). These programmes aim to cultivate both technical and communicative competence, thereby developing a capacity to interpret and respond correctly to traffic signs and symbols. As Al-Rousan and Umar (2021) emphasised, comprehension of traffic signs is not only a matter of safety but also of literacy within a semiotic system.

In summary, the existing literature on traffic signs highlights the importance of driver training and awareness in fostering compliance and reducing accidents. However, most studies focus on cognitive recognition, and relatively little attention has been given to the semiotic process of meaning-making, that is, how meaning is formed, interpreted, and acted upon within specific cultural contexts of road safety and communication. Few studies have examined how de Saussure's (1916) micro-semiotic structures (signifier and signified) interact with Lotman's (1990) macro-semiotic semiosphere, especially within the

communicative environment of Philippine roads. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap, interpreting the road as both a text and a cultural dialogue where drivers, signs, and symbols participate in continuous meaning-making.

Research Questions

Guided by Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) structural semiotics and Yuri Lotman's (1990) concept of the semiosphere, this study explored how drivers interpret and respond to the semiotic systems that shape road communication within the cultural context of Davao City. Specifically, it addressed the following research questions:

- (1) What semiotic elements are embedded in traffic signs, such as symbols, colours, shapes, and textual information, that influence drivers' interpretation and comprehension?
- (2) How do drivers' interpretations of traffic signs, pavement markings, and other traffic symbols translate into compliance or non-compliance on the road?
- (3) In what ways do formal driving education and experiential learning shape drivers' participation in the cultural semiosphere of road communication?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-interpretive research design to explore how drivers interpret and respond to traffic signs within the cultural and communicative landscape of Davao City. As Patton (2002) explains, qualitative-interpretive inquiry allows researchers to understand human experiences in context and to illuminate the meanings people assign to their actions. In this study, meaning is examined not merely as cognition but as semiosis or the dynamic process of producing, interpreting, and comprehending traffic signs.

Guided by de Saussure's (1916) structural semiotics and Lotman's (1990) theory of the semiosphere, this research interprets road communication as a cultural semiotic system. De Saussure's (1916) micro-level approach to signs provides the structural foundation for analysing semiotic components such as colour, shape, text, and imagery, while Lotman's (1990) macro-level concept of the semiosphere situates these signs within the broader communicative and cultural context of Filipino driving behaviour.

Participants and Methods

Researchers conducted two methods in gathering drivers' opinions on driving and road signs in Davao City: (1) a focus group discussion (FGD) and (2) brief roadside interviews with drivers.

A total of 12 participants were purposively selected from Ateneo de Davao University (ADDU) to participate in FGD. These participants were assigned pseudonyms and represented four groups:

- Three (3) TDC-PDC private vehicle drivers (FGD-07, FGD-08, FGD-09)
- Three (3) non-TDC-PDC private vehicle drivers (FGD-01, FGD-02, FGD-03)
- Three (3) TDC-PDC motorcyclists (FGD-10, FGD-11, FGD-12)
- Three (3) non-TDC-PDC motorcyclists (FGD-04, FGD-05, FGD-06)

Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants possessed firsthand knowledge and varied experiences related to driving, traffic sign interpretation, and compliance. This diversity of experience allowed the researchers to examine how meaning is

constructed across different training backgrounds and driving practices. Participation in the FGD was entirely voluntary, with no coercion or incentive involved in the selection or retention of participants, ensuring that those who engaged did so out of genuine willingness to share their experiences and perspectives on road sign interpretation and driving in Davao City. Openness was likewise observed throughout the discussions, as participants, both those who had undergone formal Theoretical Driving Course and Practical Driving Course training and those who had not, were encouraged to speak freely and candidly about their theoretical knowledge of traffic signs and their practical, lived experiences on the roads, without fear of judgment or correction.

However, to capture candid and realistic responses to road signs as they are encountered in practice, brief roadside interviews were also conducted with at least five (5) drivers actively driving in Davao City. Unlike the FGD's use of abstract sign images, these interviews engaged drivers within their actual driving environment, allowing the researchers to examine how the material presence of signs on the road, including their placement, physical condition, and spatial context, shapes interpretation in real time. All drivers interviewed showed their driving licenses with consent, indicating that they completed both TDC and PDC with LTO Davao.

Data Collection Procedures

As mentioned above, the study utilised an FGD as the primary method of data collection (Appendix A). FGDs encourage participants to express their perceptions in a socially interactive setting, allowing meanings to emerge through dialogue while maintaining openness, tolerance, and respect for differing views (Hennink, 2014). Two separate FGDs were conducted: one for TDC-PDC drivers and one for non-TDC-PDC drivers. Each discussion revolved around participants' interpretations of fifteen (15) selected traffic signs culled from the website of the Land Transportation Office (LTO) of the Philippines, their sources of driving knowledge, and their behaviours in real-world driving scenarios. All discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Non-English responses were translated with care to preserve local expressions and contextual nuances.

The authors acknowledge that presenting traffic signs as graphical images, rather than as material objects encountered in situ on the roads of Davao City, carries methodological implications. As the reviewer rightly notes, material traffic signs, those that are embedded in their physical environments, carry semiotic weight that abstract depictions cannot fully replicate; their visibility, placement, physical condition, and spatial context all mediate how drivers encounter and interpret them (Jensen, 2014). The present study addresses this limitation partially through the open-ended discussion questions that accompanied each sign, which encouraged participants to situate their interpretations within lived driving experiences on actual roads. These discussions elicited rich situational accounts, including descriptions of specific incidents on Davao's streets, that contextualise participants' sign interpretations within real driving environments.

Nonetheless, the researchers did not confine their inquiry to the FGD room. Live roadside interviews (Appendix B) were conducted with drivers in motion on the actual roads of Davao City, a methodological decision that proved decisive in capturing the nuanced, realistic interpretations that only real-time, on-the-ground driving engagement can

yield. Unlike abstract sign images, material traffic signs carry irreducible semiotic weight: their physical visibility, precise placement, condition, and spatial embeddedness all shape how drivers encounter and interpret them. These interviews brought the study into direct contact with the living semiosphere of Davao's roads, grounding the analysis in the material realities of everyday driving.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using semiotic analysis and thematic analysis. Some data (utterances spoken in Cebuano) were transcribed to English using OtterAI and TurboScribe and had been manually reviewed and corrected for accuracy. Semiotic analysis involved identifying how the signifier (e.g., visual form, colour, text) and signified (intended meaning) interact to produce a driver's interpretive response. By framing signs as relational constructs, this method highlighted how meaning shifts across different interpretive contexts, which is an essential feature of the Lotmanian semiosphere.

The transcripts from the FGD and the brief roadside interviews were coded and examined for recurring themes using the framework proposed by Gibbs, Lewins, and Taylor (2005). Themes emerged around participants' interpretation and understanding of signs, their compliance (or non-compliance) behaviours, and their perceptions of road communication. These themes were interpreted through the dual lenses of de Saussure's (1916) semiotic structure and Lotman's (1990) cultural semiotics, revealing how individuals negotiate meaning within a shared yet complex road environment. Through this methodological approach, the study bridges the technical and the cultural: the sign as both structure and story, the road as both text and territory.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were provided with informed consent forms detailing the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of their involvement, and were informed that they could withdraw from the FGD at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms in all transcripts and analyses. The study followed the ethical standards set forth by the International Statistical Institute (ISI, 2023) and adhered to the guidelines of responsible research conduct established by Ateneo de Davao University (ADDU). Furthermore, throughout these roadside interview encounters, the confidentiality and anonymity of all participating drivers were strictly observed. No identifying information was recorded, and all responses were treated with the utmost discretion. Equally, participants were given full freedom to respond openly and honestly, without any form of coercion, pressure, or evaluative judgment, ensuring that the accounts they offered reflected their genuine, unguarded experiences of navigating road signs on the streets of Davao City.

Results and Discussion

Communication on the road transcends spoken language. It unfolds through signs, colours, symbols, texts, and shapes that together construct a visual lexicon or an intricate grammar of speed and movement on the roads. Within this communicative ecosystem, the driver becomes both reader and interpreter, constantly negotiating meaning amid motion. Guided

by de Saussure's (1916) structural semiotics and Lotman's (1990) cultural semiotics, the findings of this study reveal how traffic signs operate as living sign systems that are expressions of a shared yet fluid system of meaning.

The Semiotic Elements of Traffic Signs

The analysis of participants' responses in relation to the 15 selected traffic signs and pavement markings revealed four dominant semiotic elements: colour, shape, text, and symbol. These elements function as the primary signifiers (the perceptible forms through which the road communicates to drivers), and each carries its own semiotic weight, evoking cognitive, emotional, cultural, and behavioural responses.

In Saussurean terms, these elements form part of the langue of road communication, which is the structured system that organises how meaning is generated and understood. For instance, colour serves as an immediate semiotic cue. Red universally signals prohibition or danger; yellow evokes anticipation or caution; and green offers permission to move. Yet, as Lotman (1990) reminds us, meanings never exist in isolation; they are always mediated by cultural habits and human behaviour. Within the semiosphere of Davao City's roads, these colours acquire subtle layers of local resonance: red may suggest not only warning but also the authority of a governing institution, while yellow may carry cultural associations of vigilance or alertness rooted in Filipino everyday experience.

For most non-TDC participants, when asked what the colour red means on the road, the responses suggested a basic but sometimes imprecise understanding. In the following exchange, the participants' responses illustrate varying degrees of semiotic competence:

"So, for red, you strictly follow, or in some instances, stop." (FGD-03)

"If it's red, you really have to follow it." (FGD-01)

"For the warning signs, red means to stop." (FGD-03)

Yellow was interpreted in different ways. One participant conflated yellow with pavement markings, while others acknowledged its caution-signalling function but introduced a troubling flexibility:

"For warning, I notice it's red. For pavement [markings], it's yellow." (FGD-02)

"Yellow is the same. You can still bend it, or be cautious, or be on high alert, or be ready anytime, so you can be sure to go or to stop." (FGD-03)

"Yellow is to yield, or like a warning, or like a reminder to drivers to prepare at any time." (FGD-04)

The word "still" in the phrase "you can still bend it" (FGD-03) is pragmatically significant: it presupposes that bending the rule has been established as possible in prior experience, revealing an intuitive logic that allows for rule-bending under certain conditions. This is precisely the kind of folk semiosis that operates outside the institutionalised code, and which, as the TDC/PDC-trained participants later contested, can prove dangerous.

The challenge of nighttime visibility, where the material condition of signs intersects with semiotic intelligibility, was raised by one TDC/PDC participant in Cebuano:

"Pag gabie lisud gud siya labi na ug ngitngit ang mga dalan. Labi nag wala mga lamp lights so dili ma klaro ang road signs. So, isip usa ka driver, mag-amping gud."

(Respondent 02)

("At night it is really difficult, especially when the roads are dark. Especially where there are no streetlights, road signs are not clearly visible. So, as a driver, care and caution are important.")

This observation, i.e., that darkness erodes the visibility of the signifier itself, aligns with Jensen's (2014) point that the driving body is an embodied semiotic actor whose interpretive capacity is conditioned by environmental context. The sign's meaning is not simply encoded in its visual form; it depends on the material conditions of its encounter.

Surprisingly, most non-TDC/PDC participants did not know what the colour blue above or near traffic lights means. One interpreted blue as signalling a temporarily altered road:

"When it's blue, it can still be moved. For example, the 'One Way' sign. Maybe the road is being fixed, so it may be two-way in the future." (FGD-02)

This is a skewed understanding. Blue lights above traffic signals are not directed at drivers but at traffic enforcers and CCTV operators, indicating from a distance that the light is red. When the blue light is on, passing through constitutes a red-light violation. The participant's interpretation represents a creative but incorrect improvisation within the semiotic periphery.

All TDC-trained drivers and motorcyclists, in contrast, demonstrated clarity in understanding traffic lights:

"Honestly, colour matters to me more than shape, because colour gives me the signal to take precautions all the time. I know that shapes do serve a purpose, particularly for rotundas or roundabouts, but I pay so much attention to the traffic lights, especially red and yellow." (FGD-09)

"I am very careful with the yellow light. Even if I don't see running vehicles or motorcycles, or even if I see that things are clear in all directions, I stop. I always do this for safety. I don't agree that the principle behind the yellow light can be bent." (FGD-11)

"I am with them in terms of how to respond to a yellow light. Accidents happen in seconds. It is always good to have precaution." (FGD-12)

These responses illustrate that for formally and theoretically trained drivers, semiotic competence has been internalised as a safety disposition. It is a cultural attitude rather than merely a rule to be followed. This reflects what Dudek (2018) calls the norm-enforcing function of traffic signs: compliance is the expression of an internalised social discipline.

“Dili man lisud sabton ang mga road signs diri sa Davao. Ang importante lang kabalo ka sa left turn, right turn, ug kanang do not enter. Mao ra man an ang basic, ug kanang U-turn, or No U-turn, sayun ra man na sila sabton ug sundon ug driver ka diri. Pero ug bag-o kang driver unya wala kay lisensiya unya taman kag drive, delikado na. Maka disgrasya gud ka.”
(Respondent 01)

(“Road signs here in Davao are not difficult to understand. What matters is that you know the left turn, right turn, and do not enter signs. Those are really the basics. And the U-turn and No U-turn signs are also easy enough to understand and follow, as long as you are a driver here. But if you are a new driver, you have no license, and you just keep on driving anyway, that is already dangerous. You will really get into an accident.”)

For Dudek (2018), traffic signs and licensing requirements are not merely practical instruments of road management but technologies of institutional discipline that are mechanisms through which the state defines, enforces, and delimits legitimate participation in road culture. The speaker’s warning that driving without a license is not only illegal but inherently dangerous reflects an internalised understanding of this disciplinary logic: the license is not simply a document but a semiotic marker of certified competence, signaling that the bearer has been formally inducted into the institutionalised code of road communication. To drive without it, in this reading, is to operate outside the boundaries of the semiosphere’s normative centre, untethered from the structured system of meanings that makes road behaviour legible, predictable, and safe.

Shape

Shape plays a fundamental role in the visual syntax of road communication. Triangular forms warn of hazards, rectangles suggest regulation, and circles often indicate command or prohibition. These geometric conventions reflect the structural regularities of de Saussure’s (1916) system of differences: a triangle means “caution” because it is not a circle, nor a rectangle. The contrast itself creates meaning. The Lotmanian perspective expands this by situating the symbol within the larger communicative field, in that meaning arises not only from contrast but from cultural assimilation. In the Davao road semiosphere, familiarity with shapes becomes a form of cultural learning, transmitted through social experience as much as through formal instruction.

One non-TDC participant, who acknowledged having learned the meaning of the Give Way sign only after months of driving, and only because a fellow driver honked at him, reflected on the experience:

“It’s noticeable that the ‘Give Way’ sign cannot be changed. It will always remain a triangle. So, even if you can only see the triangular shape because the text is not clear, you can understand what it means. But I only knew this after a few months of driving because my friend, who taught me how to drive, did not tell me what it meant. So, I was a bit errant one time to a driver because I didn’t know that this triangle meant I had to slow down and yield to traffic on the main road. He honked at

me nonstop. I know it affects driving compliance, so I try to remember it to the point that I would not need to read it anymore.” (FGD-02)

This account illustrates a process of folk learning, in which the gradual acquisition of semiotic knowledge occurs through social interaction and experience rather than formal instruction. Another non-TDC participant elaborated further:

“To be honest, I did not notice the shapes along the roads during the first two years of driving because I did not have to drive far from the office and from home. When I noticed them more closely, I got used to them, but I was not sure what they meant. For example, I only knew today that the diamond shape cautions us that the road ahead can be slippery when it rains, or it’s a sharp curve, with a sign that looks like a snake, warning drivers to slow down.” (FGD-03)

Although these participants did not experience accidents as a direct result of their unfamiliarity with shapes, a single misreading could prove fatal. Notably, one TDC/PDC participant, who has been driving for about 30 years of his life, and who regularly drives to unfamiliar destinations, described a more heightened awareness, expressed in Cebuano:

“Ug pakyawon kog laing lugar, mutan-aw ko sa mga road signs kay ug layong dapit na unya pakyawon ka, mag prepara ka ba sa mga road signs kay di ta kabalo sa danger... Pareha anang mga danger signs. Kanang for example dili makita nga kurbada. Ikmat ta ana.” (Respondent 1)
(“When I take cargo deliveries to unfamiliar places, or transport people to faraway places, I always pay close attention to road signs, because when the destination is far, you need to read the signs carefully, because you never know what dangers lie ahead. For example, the danger signs for hidden curves. We should be cautious about it.”)

Beyond driver training, this statement reveals an intuitive, context-driven mode of sign-reading: the driver attends to signs not through a codified understanding of the semiotic system but through an experiential sense of danger that activates situational awareness. This is a form of folk semiosis that is functionally adaptive but structurally incomplete, in that the driver responds to the sign without necessarily understanding the full conventional code it belongs to, particularly because driving beyond his habitual routes exposes him to unfamiliar semiotic terrain, probably offering signs, markings, and road conditions he has not yet learned to read.

Generally speaking, TDC/PDC-trained participants showed systematic knowledge of shapes:

“Only when I enrolled in a TDC did I learn that shapes actually have meaning. I thought it was just for aesthetics. I can read textual signs and follow the traffic lights, but I sort of ignored the shapes before. But after the TDC training, I now know the meanings of a triangle [to give way], a circle [no U-turn], and a vertical rectangle [one way and keep right].” (FGD-08)

"For starters, like me, the textual signs in big sizes are readable. However, for some shapes, such as the crossing sign or pentagon, people might get confused, but new drivers like me, who learned it through formal training with Davao LTO, now understand what they mean." (FGD-10)

Lotmanian semiosis suggests that knowledge of local driving culture and knowledge from formal training complement each other in sustaining effective driving behaviour and road safety. Thus, it is valid to say that folk semiosis need not be the exclusive domain of the untrained drivers. When formally trained drivers encounter unfamiliar roads or terrains, this same intuitive, folk semiotic, experience-driven mode of sign-reading can sharpen their discipline and caution, reinforcing rather than undermining their semiotic competence to read road and traffic signs.

Text

Text acts as an explicit clarifier. It anchors the sign's visual message in linguistic form, transforming abstract semiotic cues into direct instruction (e.g., No Parking, Slow Down, No U-Turn). The inclusion of text in traffic signs bridges symbolic abstraction and practical comprehension, especially for drivers who are still developing their visual literacy in road communication.

"It's easier to comprehend if there's text that complements an image because it aids common sense. But for most signs or shapes with no text, I wonder what they mean. For textual signs, I can actually understand." (FGD-03, non-TDC/PDC)

A TDC/PDC-trained participant offered a more confident response:

"The combination of the text and symbols is indeed helpful for drivers like us. All of these play a big part in trying to communicate what is supposed to be communicated on the road. But for me, after undergoing the training with LTO, I can now read signs and shapes even without a textual complement. The reality on the road is that some signs and shapes do not have accompanying texts at all, so a driver must interpret and understand them." (FGD-11)

While FGD-03 illustrates obliviousness (a dependency on text as a crutch for understanding), FGD-11 demonstrates the confidence and self-sufficiency that formal training produces. However, one TDC/PDC participant interviewed on the road supported the value of textual clarity, noting in Cebuano that road signs in Davao are generally manageable for practised drivers:

"Wala man, dili man lisud sabton ang mga road signs diri sa Davao. Ang importante lang kabalo ka sa left turn, right turn, ug kanang do not enter. Mao ra man ang basic, ug kanang U-turn, or No U-turn, sayun ra man na sila sabton ug sundon ug dugay na kang driver diri. Dali lang basahon ug sabton." (Respondent 1)

("No, road signs in Davao are not difficult to understand. What matters is knowing the left turn, right turn, and do not enter signs. Those are the basics, and even U-turn and No U-turn signs are also easy to read, understand and follow as a veteran driver here.")

This response, while reassuring in its confidence, reveals the limited semiotic vocabulary of the non-trained driver: mastery of a small set of basic, heavily textual signs is mistaken for comprehensive semiotic literacy. The unfamiliar shapes and abstract symbols that fall outside this basic set remain unread. Nevertheless, among trained drivers, textual and symbolic elements function as mutually reinforcing semiotic codes, each amplifying the interpretive value of the other. For untrained drivers, however, the capacity to decode symbols in the absence of textual support is not merely desirable but essential, for traffic signs do not always carry explanatory text, and an inability to read the symbol alone exposes both the driver and other road users to preventable and potentially fatal risks. If folk semiosis (intuition, gut feeling) can be helpful, so, too, is formal driver's training that exposes one to understanding both the fundamental and complex signs and texts on the road.

Symbol

Symbols distil complex meanings into compact, universally recognisable images, such as a pedestrian crossing, a cyclist sign on the road, or a merging arrow. These icons quicken recognition and response. Yet, as Lotman (1990) argues, even universal symbols acquire local inflections within different cultural semiospheres. A pedestrian symbol in Davao, for instance, might signify more than the act of crossing; it reflects collective behaviour, social habits, and even respect (or lack thereof) for pedestrian spaces and pedestrians themselves.

A TDC/PDC-trained driver described their understanding of the pedestrian crossing sign in Cebuano:

"Ang pinaka importante sa akua ang pedestrian crossing, so ug makakita ko ana nga sign, mag slow down gud ko kay possible naa gud mga tawo nga manabok sa crossing, so slow down gyud, hinay hinay lang gud kay naay uban nga manabok nga kanang magsalig nga pedestrian crossing siya unya manabok lang deretso dili mag tan-aw sa agianan, unya delikado man na ug laksi o kusog imong padagan sa imong sakyanan." (Respondent 2)

("The most important sign for me is the pedestrian crossing. When I see that sign, I really slow down, because there might be people about to cross the road. I drive slowly because some pedestrians trust the pedestrian crossing sign and cross directly without looking, and that is dangerous if you are driving fast.")

This response is notably nuanced in that the driver does not merely follow the pedestrian crossing sign but understands the social interaction it mediates, i.e., the relationship between the sign, the driver, and the pedestrian. This illustrates a culturally

embedded form of semiotic awareness that goes beyond the sign's literal instruction. Yet the pedestrian symbol is among the most routinely disregarded signs on Philippine roads. That many Filipino drivers accelerate rather than slow down at pedestrian crossings reveals more than a traffic violation; it exposes a cultural pattern of a lack of road discipline in which the pedestrian symbol has been stripped of its moral and semiotic authority.

A PDC-trained participant elaborated further:

"I always follow the intersection line to avoid accidents. For pedestrian crossings, I would always slow down. There is nothing wrong with following the rules on the road, so we need to slow down when pedestrians are crossing. Why can't all drivers follow that basic rule?" (FGD-08)

In the Lotmanian semiosphere, shared cultural habits around pedestrian crossings can deepen understanding of traffic signs. However, a crucial distinction emerges: non-TDC/PDC drivers who follow traffic signs often do so out of fear of penalties, while those who were formally trained tend to follow them out of a sense of responsibility, safety, and social order.

"You really have to slow down when you see a pedestrian crossing, because it is bad enough to hit a person, and on top of that, you will get fined for it. (FGD-05 & FGD-06).

This statement suggests an unsettling moral dilemma in which monetary penalty functions as the primary deterrent rather than the far graver consequence of causing physical harm to another person. That some drivers appear more preoccupied with the cost of a fine than with the gravity of hitting a human being is itself a troubling cultural indicator. Striking a pedestrian is not a manageable inconvenience; it is a life-altering event, legally, morally, and humanly, one that places the driver in an entirely precarious and potentially irreversible situation.

Drivers' Interpretations and Compliance

Both TDC-PDC and non-TDC-PDC groups recognised the semiotic elements of traffic signs, but their interpretations differed in depth and precision. Formally trained drivers demonstrated stronger semiotic competence, which is the ability to decode the relational system of traffic signs rather than perceiving each symbol in isolation. In Saussurean terms, these drivers exhibited awareness of the code that structures road communication. They understood that a yellow diamond means "caution ahead" not merely because of colour or shape alone, but because of its position within a system of relational oppositions.

Conversely, non-TDC-PDC drivers and motorcyclists relied heavily on habit, intuition, and informal learning (e.g., "I remember my father told me this when we were driving one time."). Their interpretations often emerged from experience rather than from learned traffic sign systems, which is a semiotic process operating outside formal structures. This is a kind of folk semiosis that operates on the peripheries of Lotman's semiosphere: meanings are improvised, sometimes effective but often inconsistent, and when misunderstandings occur, the consequences can be fatal.

The concept of folk semiosis merits more sustained examination. Within Lotman's (1990) model of the semiosphere, the centre represents the domain of institutionalised, codified meaning, while the periphery is the space of creative, informal, and often unpredictable semiotic activity. The non-TDC/PDC drivers in this study consistently inhabited this periphery, producing sign interpretations that were functional yet culturally improvised, shaped by observation, imitation, and informal instruction rather than formal curricula. This folk semiosis is not merely a deficit condition; it represents an active, creative engagement with the semiotic landscape of the road, in which even trained drivers and motorcyclists seem to embody this. However, its incompleteness, e.g., as evidenced by partial understandings of yellow lights, blue signals, and lane markings, demonstrates that when folk semiosis diverges too far from the institutionalised semiotic centre, the consequences can be immediate and dangerous. A more thoroughgoing investigation of how folk semiosis operates on the actual roads of Davao, perhaps through ethnographic observation of authentic driving practices, would constitute a productive direction for future research.

One TDC/PDC-trained participant articulated the transformative impact of formal training:

"I think it really makes a difference because there are a lot of signs that I had no idea what they meant, but when I took the TDC/PDC training with LTO, I realised a lot of things, and I realised how dangerous it is to drive on the road if you don't have formal training and fundamental knowledge. TDC and PDC are eye-openers. You would know the meaning of even small details like pavement markings or a junction; therefore, to me, undertaking the theoretical and practical driving courses is a must." (FGD-09)

"The things I took for granted before my TDC and PDC training? I now take them very seriously. Every single detail. You will assume that this sign means this, but in reality, it has a different meaning. In driving on the complex roads of Davao and even Manila, you do not assume the role of a driver. You have to learn the basics of driving through formal training." (FGD-11)

In Lotman's semiosphere, this illustrates that the central cultural knowledge produced by formal training is given precedence over the peripheral understanding driven by folk beliefs and intuition, and for good reason. Formal training also appears to shift the motivational basis for compliance.

One participant highlighted that road signs are part of the licensing examination:

"Siyempre kay nagtuon man tag drive so sayun ra gud ang mga road signs. Kay di man ka makakuha ug lisensiya ug dili ka kapasar anang mga tests kay naa man ang mga road signs. Kay part man na sa examination so dapat ang driver familiar gud siya sa road signs." (Respondent 02)

“Of course, since we studied how to drive, road signs are easy [to understand]. You would not get a licence if you did not pass the tests, and road signs are part of the examination, so every driver should be familiar with them.”

This response reveals a productive dimension of the formal certification system, in that the examination functions as an institutional mechanism for internalising semiotic conventions, aligning with Dudek’s (2018) observation that traffic devices operate as norm-enforcing technologies embedded within state-sanctioned structures.

In summary, when folk semiosis is exercised with genuine caution, disciplined intuition, and an earnest commitment to avoiding harm, it can serve as a meaningful, if not provisional, foundation for road navigation among untrained drivers. Yet it remains, at best, an incomplete substitute because the full, confident, and legally grounded command of road semiotics that protects not only the individual driver, but every other user of the road can only be achieved through the structured knowledge that formal theoretical and practical driving course training provides. One without the other is insufficient, and on the roads of Davao City, insufficiency can be fatal.

External and Internal Factors in Compliance

Participants across both groups identified several external and internal factors influencing their compliance. Among TDC-PDC drivers, the visibility of signs, especially at night, was a critical concern. Poor lighting, faded paint, and obstructed signage often disrupted the communicative relationship between the sign and the interpreter, aligning with Lotman’s (1990) notion of boundary turbulence within the semiosphere, that is, communication falters when the material conditions of the sign deteriorate.

“Number one is visibility. I’d like to point out an example at Abreeza, coming from the basement car park. At night, the sign they put up doesn’t reflect our headlights. The paint used was so bad that the visibility of the sign was poor. So, if you turn left [where the sign says ‘No Left Turn’], then you might crash into a vehicle or worse, hit people. It’s so dangerous that I had to tell the management to change the sign.”
(FGD-08)

“Merging road signs placed on an elevated highway with blind spots is a really huge challenge for me and is highly dangerous. This one is an LTO problem, not us. If you are not alert, and all of a sudden two lanes merge due to a poorly positioned road sign, you will definitely put your life and other people’s lives at risk.” (FGD-07)

The interplay between the material condition of road signs and driver interpretation is vividly illustrated in the account of one participant (Respondent 3), whose experience on Diversion Road in Buhangin, Davao City, captures the real-world consequences of semiotic ambiguity:

“I was driving along Diversion Road in Buhangin heading toward Bacaca Road. When I reached the intersection, I took a left turn because everyone else in front of me

was doing the same. What we did not realise at the time was that the lane we were in was actually meant for going straight only. The road markings had already faded from constant use, so it was not clear to us. Because of that, several of us made the same mistake and ended up getting stopped. We tried explaining the situation to the LTO officers, but unfortunately, it did not change anything, and we were all penalised for reckless driving. It was really frustrating, but at the same time, I learned a valuable lesson.” (Respondent 03)

This account captures precisely the semiotic breakdown that occurs when the material signifier, i.e., the road marking, has been physically degraded to the point of illegibility. The lane marking’s intended meaning (“Go straight only”) ceased to function as a sign when its material form became unreadable. Moreover, the participant’s reliance on the behaviour of other drivers as a semiotic cue (“Everyone else in front of me was doing the same”) illustrates what Lotman (1990) describes as the mimetic dimension of semiosis within a shared cultural space, i.e., meaning is not only encoded in signs but co-produced through social behaviour. This account also illustrates a limitation of using abstract sign images in this study’s methodology: such material experiences of degraded, misread, or contested signage are precisely the data that spatially situated, ethnographic approaches to traffic semiosis would yield most richly.

Among non-TDC-PDC drivers, external factors such as traffic congestion, time pressure, and weather conditions frequently led to unintentional violations. Internal factors, including low confidence, overreliance on intuition, and informal mythmaking about driving, also contributed to lapses. These findings suggest that compliance is not merely a matter of cognitive recognition but of situational and cultural negotiation. The sign’s meaning, as de Saussure (1916) would note, is stable in structure but variable in use, and this variability, as perceived by non-TDC-PDC drivers, can be fatal when understanding fails.

The Road as a Cultural Semiosphere

Synthesising these insights, the study reimagines Davao City’s road system as a cultural semiosphere, a dynamic ecosystem in which drivers, motorists, signs, and institutions co-create meaning. Each road user participates in this cultural dialogue differently, depending on their exposure, training, education, and local sensibilities.

For TDC/PDC-trained drivers, formal education acts as an entry point into the centre of the semiosphere, where meanings are stabilised and standardised through institutional teaching. Non-TDC/PDC drivers, meanwhile, operate closer to the periphery, where interpretations are shaped by community practice, imitation, intuition, and experience (termed “folk semiosis”) rather than by structured learning. Yet both groups contribute to the collective meaning-making that sustains road communication. In this view, road compliance becomes a form of cultural literacy, i.e., a shared language that demands caution, safety, and social order.

The findings of this study reveal that the relationship between traffic signs and drivers is not only mechanical and technical but also interpretive, semiotic, and cultural. The Saussurean system of differences explains how signs function structurally, while Lotman’s (1990) semiosphere situates these processes within the social and cultural lifeworld of

drivers operating in the road and traffic ecosystem of Davao City. Together, they reveal that the road is not merely physical infrastructure but a living text that is constantly read, interpreted, and re-negotiated by those who traverse it.

This study thus underscores the need for continuous driver education, not only as technical training but as a cultural communication process. This study is, therefore, an invitation to participate more consciously in the shared language, syntax, semantics, and semiotics of the road.

Conclusion

The road, often seen as a space of transit and movement, reveals itself in this study as a living system of meaning. On this vast and dynamic semiosphere, signs, symbols, and human behaviour continuously interact. Through the combined lenses of Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) structural semiotics and Yuri Lotman's (1990) theory of the semiosphere, enriched by the contributions of Wagner (2006), Jensen (2014), and Dudek (2018), this study uncovered how drivers, trained or untrained, engage in symbolic exchange, transforming ordinary acts of driving into acts of interpretation.

Drivers who underwent the TDC and PDC displayed a higher degree of semiotic competence, consciously interpreting the relational meanings of traffic signs through the structural lens of colour, shape, text, and road symbols. In contrast, those without formal training operated more instinctively within the peripheries of the semiosphere, relying on habit, intuition, experience, and what this study terms as folk semiosis: informal, creative, but structurally incomplete engagements with the semiotic landscape of the road. Yet both groups contributed to the evolving cultural dialogue of the road, each in their own method and register. Nevertheless, those without formal driver training must be encouraged to cross the boundary into the semiotic centre in order to recognise that they have an important obligation to maintain order and safety on the road.

The findings highlight that compliance with traffic rules is not merely a technical obligation but a semiotic and cultural practice. When drivers correctly interpret signs, they participate in what Lotman (1990) calls cultural communication, which is the shared generation of meaning that sustains social order and safety. When misinterpretations occur, they expose the fragility of this shared language, where misunderstanding manifests not in words but in violations, accidents, and moments of danger.

Road communication should thus be understood as more than instruction; it is a language of coexistence, demanding literacy, sensitivity, and competence not only in rules but in empathy, attention, and awareness. The signs we encounter are more than regulatory objects; they are reminders of our interdependence as human beings using roads and highways for movement, and of how individual motion shapes collective safety.

In essence, this study affirms that the road, much like language itself, is a cultural text that is authored by institutions, interpreted by individuals, and re-negotiated through exposure, experience, and education. To drive well is to read well: to understand the symbols that guide us, to recognise the meanings that enable movement, and to participate consciously in the shared dialogue of road communication. As traffic signs constitute the language of the road, to drive is to understand the meaning in motion.

Declaration of Conflict of Interests

We have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Bionotes

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Appendix A
Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. Can you share an experience where understanding (or misunderstanding) a traffic sign affected your decision or safety on the road?
2. Describe your experience in driving around Davao City. What road signs do you see, and how do they influence your driving? How do you understand and apply them?
3. Are the road signs in Davao City easy or hard to understand? Can you describe a specific situation?
4. Are there any circumstances in which the meaning of road signs differs from your understanding? If yes, can you describe the situation and the factors that shaped your interpretation (e.g., how the road sign looks, its condition, or its location)?
5. Have you ever encountered a road sign that confused you or that you found difficult to interpret? What was your reaction, and how did you respond?
6. In what ways has formal driving training (TDC/PDC), or the absence of it, shaped how you interpret and respond to road signs?

Appendix B

Interview (Roadside) Questions for Random Drivers in Davao City

1. Pwede ba nimo isaysay o ihulagway ang usa ka sitwasyon dinhi sa Davao nga diin nakaimpluwensya kanimo ang usa ka road sign sa imong desisyon samtang nagmaneho ka? Unsa ang imong nakita, ug giunsa nimo paghubad o pagsabot diani nga sitwasyon niadto mismong higayona?

("Could you describe or recount a specific situation here in Davao where a road sign influenced your decision while you were driving? What exactly did you see, and how did you interpret or make sense of it in that particular moment?")

2. Kung makasugat ka ug mga road sign sa nagkalain-laing bahin o dalan sa Davao (pananglitan, sa busy mga interseksyon, sa highway, o sa residential areas), sayon ba sila sabton o lisod? Unsa ang mga rason nga sayon o lisod kini sabton?

("When you encounter road signs in different parts of the roads of Davao City, for example, at busy intersections, on highways, or in residential areas, do you find them easy or difficult to understand? What are the reasons why you find them easy or difficult?")

3. Aduna bay mga higayon nga ang meaning o kahulogan sa usa ka road sign lahi sa imong pagsabot kumpara sa tinuod nga meaning o kahulogan niini base sa common nga pagsabot sa komunidad sa mga drivers? Unsa nga bahin sa hitsura, lokasyon, kahimtang o kondisyon sa road sign ang nakaimpluwensya sa imong pagsabot o pag intindi?

("Are there instances when the meaning of a road sign differs from your own understanding compared to its actual, commonly accepted meaning within the driving community? What aspects of the road sign's appearance, location, condition, or state influenced your interpretation or understanding of it?")