

From Chance to Meaning: Lived Experiences and Sociolinguistic Lexicons of Mothers in Small Town Lottery as Basis for Community-Based Advocacy

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences and sociolinguistic lexicons of mothers participating in Small Town Lottery (STL) within a local Philippine community. Grounded in phenomenology and sociolinguistics, it examines how participants make sense of their engagement and how language shapes these interpretations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve (12) purposively selected mothers and analyzed using thematic and lexical approaches.

Findings reveal that participation in STL is shaped by an interplay of hope, financial need, perceived risk, and maternal responsibility. Six themes emerged: betting with hope, interpreting signs and numbers, community interaction, emotional experiences of winning and losing, and self-regulation. In addition, STL-specific lexicons such as *kalag*, *pake*, and *swerte* function as operational, social, and interpretive tools that reflect shared meanings and guide participation.

The study suggests that STL is not merely a gambling activity but a socially embedded and language-mediated practice. The findings informed the development of an advocacy material aimed at promoting financial awareness and responsible decision-making. These insights contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Keywords: lived experiences; sociolinguistics; Small Town Lottery (STL); mothers; lexicons; meaning construction; financial coping; advocacy; SDGs

INTRODUCTION

Gambling and lottery practices have long been embedded in various societies and are often perceived as opportunities to obtain financial gain through chance. In many contexts, these activities are legalized and regulated to support public services such as health and education. Beyond their economic role, however, participation in lottery-based activities reflects broader social conditions, particularly in environments marked by financial instability and limited access to sustainable income. Engagement in such practices is therefore influenced not only by individual decisions but also by structural realities that shape perceptions of opportunity, risk, and survival (Davis, 2021; Dong et al., 2022). These conditions are closely associated with global development concerns, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Within these conditions, mothers navigate financial decision-making while balancing caregiving responsibilities and constrained resources. Existing studies highlight that mothers frequently manage competing household demands while coping with economic pressure and social expectations (Ross, 2024; Dukelow et al., 2023). In some cases, low-stakes gambling activities, such as lotteries, are perceived as a means of coping or as a possible

source of financial relief (McCarthy et al., 2023). Although often viewed as harmless or recreational, such participation is closely linked to everyday realities in which hope, necessity, and responsibility intersect (Malinga & Modie-Moroka, 2023).

In the Philippine setting, gambling activities are overseen by agencies such as the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR) and the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO). Among the regulated forms is the Small Town Lottery (STL), which was introduced to manage informal number games while generating revenue for public programs. Over time, STL has become integrated into community life, particularly in small towns where it is shaped by social interaction, cultural interpretations of numbers, and economic need. As a result, STL operates not only as a financial activity but also as a shared social practice within local communities.

An important yet less examined dimension of this practice is language. Sociolinguistic perspectives suggest that lexical expressions reflect and shape social experiences, cultural practices, and collective meanings. In the context of STL, localized terms are used to describe betting processes, interpret numerical patterns, and communicate shared understandings of luck and uncertainty (Agustin-Llach, 2022; Papafragou et al., 2021). These lexicons provide insight into how participants construct meaning from their engagement in STL.

Despite growing research on gambling behavior and financial coping, limited attention has been given to the localized lived experiences of mothers participating in Small Town Lottery within Philippine communities. More importantly, there remains a lack of studies examining how STL-specific lexicons reflect and influence participants' interpretations of risk, luck, and financial decision-making. The combined analysis of lived experience and language in this context remains insufficiently explored.

In response, this study investigates the lived experiences of mothers engaged in STL and examines the lexicons present in their discourse. By integrating phenomenological and sociolinguistic perspectives, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed through both experience and language. The findings further inform the development of an advocacy material designed to promote financial awareness, contributing to community-based efforts aligned with SDG-related goals.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in phenomenology and variationist sociolinguistics, complemented by coping theory and symbolic interactionism. These frameworks collectively provide a basis for examining both the lived experiences of mothers participating in Small Town Lottery (STL) and the lexicons embedded in their discourse.

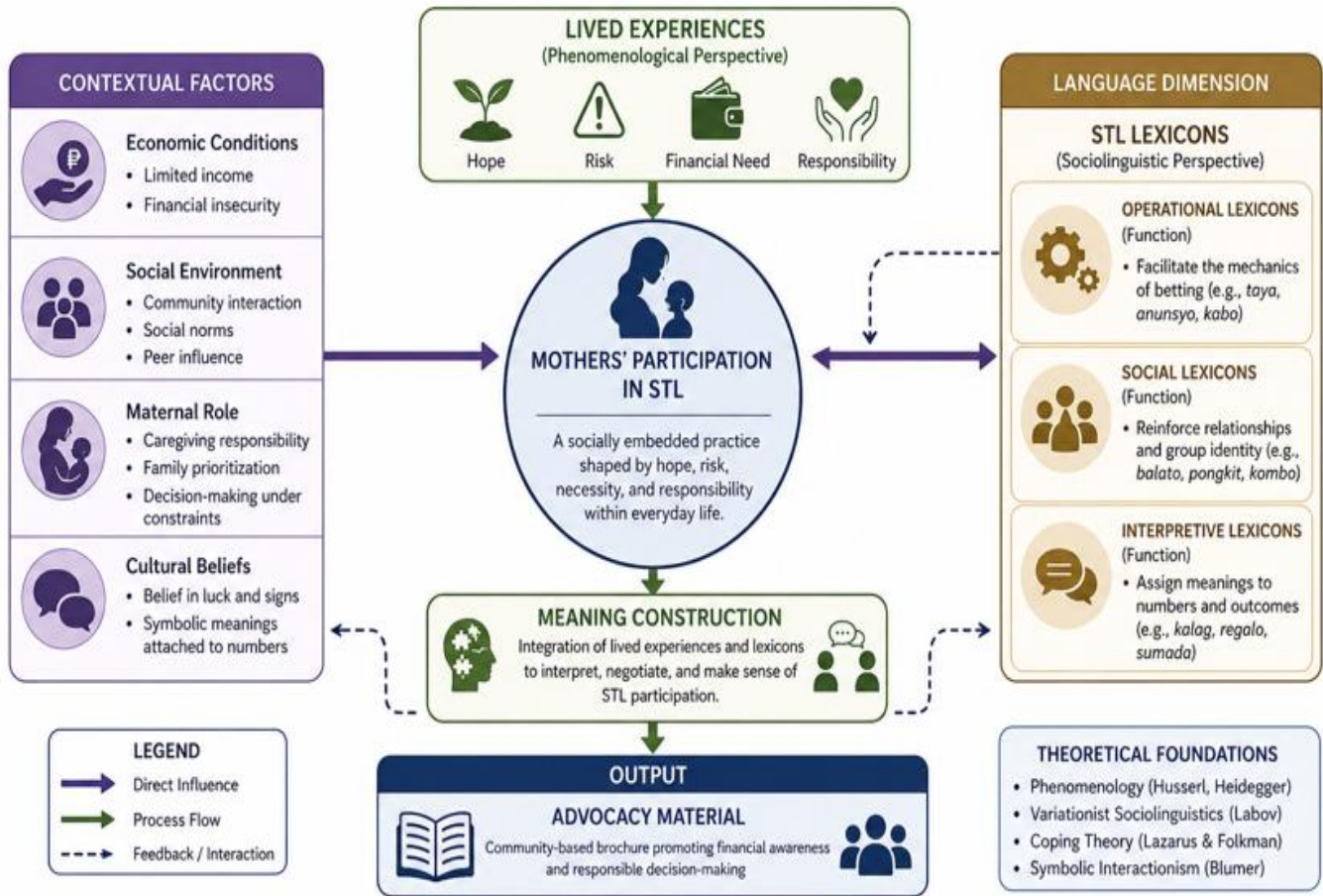
Phenomenology focuses on how individuals interpret and assign meaning to lived experiences. Husserl (1970) emphasized that knowledge is grounded in conscious experience, while Heidegger (1962) situated these experiences within social and cultural contexts. In this study, phenomenology guides the analysis of how mothers construct meanings related to hope, risk, financial need, and responsibility.

Variationist sociolinguistics, as proposed by Labov (1972), examines how language reflects social structures and shared experiences. Within this framework, lexicons are understood as carriers of cultural meaning shaped by interaction. This perspective informs the analysis of STL-specific terms such as *kalag*, *pake*, and *sumada*.

To further strengthen the framework, the integration of these theories is reflected in the key variables of the study. Phenomenology informs the analysis of mothers' lived experiences, particularly how they interpret participation in STL in relation to hope, risk, financial need, and responsibility. Variationist sociolinguistics provides the lens for examining STL lexicons as socially embedded forms of language that reflect shared meanings and community practices. In addition, coping theory and symbolic interactionism support the interpretation of participation as both a response to economic constraints and a meaning-making process shaped through social interaction and language use.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*Mothers' Participation in Small Town Lottery (STL):
 Lived Experiences and Lexicons as Basis for Advocacy Development*



The framework illustrates how contextual factors shape mothers' participation in STL, how experiences and language (lexicons) interact to construct meaning, and how these insights inform the development of advocacy material.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the lived experiences of mothers participating in Small Town Lottery (STL). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences while naturally using STL-related lexicons.

A total of twelve (12) participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) at least 18 years old, (2) a mother residing in Barangay Remedios, Cervantes, Ilocos Sur, (3) with prior or current STL participation, and (4) willing to participate in an in-depth interview.

Interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Lexical analysis was conducted concurrently to identify recurring STL-related terms and their meanings within participants' narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study and interprets the lived experiences of mothers who participate in Small Town Lottery (STL). Using a phenomenological approach, the analysis draws from participants' narratives to capture the meanings they attach to their engagement in STL. The discussion also integrates the sociolinguistic dimension of participation by examining the lexicons used within the betting community, demonstrating how language functions as both a communicative and meaning-making tool. Furthermore, this chapter presents the advocacy brochure developed from the findings, which translates research insights into a practical, community-based intervention material.

The lived experiences of mothers participating in STL reveal that betting is deeply embedded in their everyday routines and socio-economic realities. Participation is shaped by a convergence of financial constraints, social interactions, cultural beliefs about numbers, and emotional responses to outcomes. STL is not merely perceived as a form of gambling but as a meaningful practice connected to daily survival and hope for improvement. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences illustrate how individuals construct meaning based on their lived realities, where economic limitation and aspiration coexist. This aligns with the argument of Paajanen et al. (2021) and Ross (2024), who emphasized that mothers in economically constrained contexts develop adaptive strategies to manage uncertainty and support their families.

One of the central themes that emerged is Betting with Hope, which reflects how mothers engage in STL as a perceived opportunity to improve their financial situation despite uncertainty. Even minimal bets are associated with the possibility of meeting immediate household needs, particularly food and daily expenses. This demonstrates that participation is not purely recreational but serves as a coping mechanism shaped by economic necessity. The use of localized expressions such as *makigasgasat* (trying one's luck) further illustrates how language frames betting as hopeful rather than risky. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which posits that individuals adopt strategies to manage stress, as well as Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), which explains the tendency to overvalue potential gains despite low probabilities. Supporting this, McCarthy et al. (2023) found that women often associate lottery participation with hope for financial improvement, while Davis (2021) argued that individuals may rely on chance-based systems when structural opportunities are limited.

Another key theme, Encountering Signs and Numbers, highlights how mothers attach symbolic meanings to numbers rather than selecting them randomly. Practices such as *kalag* demonstrate how participants interpret dreams, observations, and everyday experiences as guides for betting decisions. This indicates that STL participation involves culturally embedded meaning-making processes rather than purely rational calculations. From the lens of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), these interpretations are socially constructed and reinforced through shared interaction within the community. At the same time, Coping Theory explains how assigning meaning to numbers provides a sense of control in uncertain situations. This is consistent with Redford (2022), who noted that individuals develop interpretive strategies to manage unpredictability, and Malinga and Modie-Moroka (2023), who emphasized adaptive cognitive responses in contexts of economic hardship.

The theme Talking within the Community underscores the social dimension of STL participation, where engagement is influenced by interactions with neighbors, friends, and fellow bettors. Betting is not practiced in isolation but is reinforced through everyday conversations and shared experiences, contributing to its normalization within the community. This reflects the concept of intersubjectivity in phenomenology, where meanings are shaped collectively rather than individually. Social Practice Theory further explains how repeated interactions transform behaviors into normalized routines. These findings align with Goldstraw et al. (2021), who highlighted the role of social networks in managing economic hardship, and McCarthy et al. (2023), who emphasized that women's gambling behavior is significantly influenced by their social environment.

The theme Tasting the Thrill of Winning captures the emotional reinforcement associated with successful bets. Although winning is infrequent, participants describe it as a highly rewarding experience, especially when the winnings are used to support family needs. These moments of success create strong emotional impressions that sustain continued participation. From the perspective of Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), individuals tend to overemphasize the value of gains relative to losses, which explains why even rare wins can reinforce behavior. This is supported by McCarthy et al. (2023), who identified emotional reward as a key factor in gambling persistence, and Davis (2021), who noted that individuals often perceive chance as a pathway for improvement.

The theme Experiencing the Sting of Losing reveals the emotional and financial consequences of unsuccessful bets. Participants express regret and acknowledge that money used for betting could have been allocated to household needs. However, these experiences do not necessarily lead to cessation; instead, they often result in a cyclical pattern of disengagement and re-engagement. This behavior is explained by Prospect Theory, which suggests that individuals take risks to recover losses, and by Coping Theory, which posits that re-engagement

may serve as a strategy to manage negative emotions. These findings are consistent with Misje (2021) and Women Advisory Board (2025), who highlighted how uncertainty sustains repeated participation in chance-based systems.

The final theme, Regulating Gambling with Responsibility, demonstrates that mothers exercise self-control and prioritize their familial roles despite engaging in STL. Participants consciously limit their bets and emphasize the importance of discipline and responsibility. This finding challenges the stereotype of gambling as purely impulsive behavior, revealing instead a nuanced balance between hope and obligation. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns with Coping Theory, which highlights adaptive strategies for managing risk, and Symbolic Interactionism, which emphasizes how values are expressed and reinforced through language. These results are supported by Duister (2021) and Dukelow et al. (2023), who emphasized that mothers actively negotiate financial responsibilities while maintaining caregiving roles.

The essence of the phenomenon can therefore be understood as a continuous negotiation between hope for financial improvement and the responsibility of sustaining family well-being. STL participation represents a symbolic expression of aspiration within contexts of limited economic opportunity. This interpretation supports the argument of Davis (2021) that individuals often rely on chance when structural conditions constrain opportunity, as well as Paajanen et al. (2021) and Ross (2024), who highlighted how mothers make decisions within uncertainty while striving to support their families.

Beyond lived experiences, the findings reveal that language plays a central role in shaping STL participation. The lexicons used by participants serve operational, social, and interpretive functions, enabling communication, reinforcing group identity, and assigning meaning to numbers and outcomes. These linguistic practices demonstrate that STL operates within a structured sociolinguistic system. This supports the view of Agustin-Llach (2022) that domain-specific lexicons facilitate participation in social practices, as well as Papafragou et al. (2021), who emphasized the role of language in structuring human activity.

Furthermore, STL lexicons encode deeper values such as hope, survival, social connection, resilience, and responsibility. Through terms like *swerte*, *kalag*, and *pake*, participants frame their experiences in ways that align with their socio-economic realities. These findings demonstrate that language is not merely descriptive but actively shapes perception and behavior. This aligns with Koenig (2021) and Landmann (2023), who argued that language evolves to capture and construct shared experiences.

Finally, the advocacy brochure developed in this study serves as a practical application of the findings, translating complex qualitative insights into accessible and culturally relevant information. By incorporating participants' lived realities and localized lexicons, the material promotes awareness and responsible decision-making in a non-judgmental manner. This approach is consistent with Gautam et al. (2024) and Kale et al. (2023), who emphasized that effective advocacy must be grounded in empirical evidence and contextualized within the target audience's experiences.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that mothers' participation in Small Town Lottery (STL) is a context-driven and meaning-laden practice shaped by economic constraints, social interaction, and culturally embedded interpretations of uncertainty. Rather than being solely a gambling activity, STL functions as an adaptive response through which mothers negotiate hope, responsibility, and survival in everyday life. The findings also highlight that STL lexicons operate as more than communicative tools; they structure how participants interpret risk, opportunity, and outcomes, thereby reinforcing shared meanings and sustaining participation within the community. These insights position STL as a lived and language-mediated phenomenon in which experience and discourse are closely intertwined. In relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the study underscores the relevance of SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), emphasizing the need for context-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches that support financial awareness and informed decision-making among mothers.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study suggest that advocacy initiatives and community-based efforts may benefit from being grounded in the lived realities of mothers, taking into account the economic, emotional, and social factors that shape participation in STL. Communication approaches could consider incorporating commonly used lexicons (e.g., kalag, swerte, pake) to enhance relatability, while gently encouraging reflection on how these terms influence perceptions of chance and decision-making. Similarly, financial literacy efforts may be strengthened by offering practical and accessible guidance on budgeting, saving, and exploring alternative sources of income. Creating spaces for dialogue and shared reflection within the community may also support a deeper understanding of STL as a socially embedded practice, while reinforcing values of self-awareness, discipline, and responsibility. In this way, such initiatives may contribute to broader development efforts aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in promoting informed choices, well-being, and gender-responsive community support.

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