

**LANGUAGE USE IN THE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST COVID-19 IN A
DEMOCRATIC STANCE**

ENEREMADU, QUEEN ESTHER C. (PhD)
Department of English Language & Literature, School of Languages,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.
queenotti435@gmail.com@gmail.com +2348033376704,

DURU, LILIAN OLUCHI
Department of English Language & Literature, School of Languages,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.
duruoluchi1234@gmailcom +2348065832140

&

UDUSHIRINWA, IJEOMA
Department of English Language & Literature, School of Languages,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri.
ij.udushirinwa@gmail.com +2347062140369

ABSTRACT

COVID 19 has been a prevalent issue that has been ravaging the whole world today. In a bid to salvage the situation, awareness in form of campaign became paramount. This study investigated the language use in the campaign against COVID-19 in a democratic environment, such as Nigeria. It examined the different ways in which COVID-19 campaigns are carried out in a democratic stance. It exposed the new words and their meanings for easier understanding. The study was couched on the speech Act theory on "How to do things with word" by the Oxford Philosopher J.L Austin in1975. This theory sees language as acts, performance and actions. Many Linguists study Speech Act as a way to better understand human communication. About ten phrases/excerpts were used to show how language use can inform, persuade and educate the citizenry against the spread of COVID-19 in a democratic stance. It was discovered that the language in the campaign of COVID-19 is usually short, precise and devoid of ambiguity such that a layman can easily understand it. The researchers recommended that, democratic speeches/jingles should be well funded to reach the grassroots. Also the COVID-19 adverts can be interpreted in various languages for wider reach.

Key words: Language, Communication, Covid-19, Campaign, Democracy and Institution.

Introduction

Language is a vital tool that remained ever current in human existence. It has received non-stop attention by scholars. Language is specie specific. Osuafor (2003) in Osondu and Nzeakor (2018) refers to language as the strongest means of social control, that permeates the entire social structure, which has to do with the study of the people's language can be used to reliably predict the social structure, that the situation under which the language is generated. This means that language plays the role of regulating and controlling the society. Halliday quoted in Emmanuel et al (2015:325) define language as "a sophisticated tool for accomplishing a number of central tasks such as the need to represent the world to others and ourselves, and the need to interact with other humans in the environment one finds himself/herself linguistically and socially. Emezue (2016:19) asserts that "Language is one of the distinct qualities that mark out human beings

from the lower animals.” It is believed that such animals as gorilla, chimpanzee and their likes can be trained to perform certain acts that human beings are capable of. But no matter the degree and sophistication of training, these animals cannot use language as human beings do. Language is a vital element in human relationship as it is the means of communication. It is a medium of communication and communication is one of the functions of language. Mbaonu (2015) opines that as a vehicle of communication, language remains a vehicle of communication. Communication which is the interaction between people can be written, spoken or non – verbal. Whatsoever form or mode of communication, it’s main aim is to achieve effective language use, so as to make the content of communication intelligible. As the world is being ravaged by the deadly COVID –19, it is paramount for a democratic institution to create awareness campaign to enlighten the citizenry on how to reduce the spread of this deadly virus to its barest minimum. This awareness campaign is done through various means, which include the following; announcements, billboards, jingles, handbills etc. where the citizens are persuaded to adhere to the COVID-19 guidelines.

This paper therefore, attempts to enlighten the citizens on the dangers of COVID-19 through effective language use so as to create more awareness campaign against the virus in a democratic stance. It can be erased by highlighting different ways in which COVID-19 campaign are carried out, which will in turn expose the neologism of COVID-19 and their meanings for easier communication and understanding. COVID-19 pandemic awareness campaign is a vital element in human relationship as it is a means of enlightenment and information. Language as an Act, enables the members of a society to socialize and understand one another and that is the hall mark of every communication.

The various definition of language recognize in one way or the other that it is used in sharing experiences. Halliday (2003:107) posits that language is because of the function that it performs. Anagbogu, et al (2003:107) see language as a means devised by human beings for communicating ideas, feelings, desire etc through complex vocal or written symbols. This means that language is very important in human existence. Language is a means by which human beings communicate with one another, they exchange their views, take decisions etc. Language is a veritable tool to create awareness against COVID-19 in a democratic stance. Language performs various functions. Obi-Okoye (2011:10) opines that language perform the function of information sharing, social communication, politics, empowerment as well as instrument of thought, Education, rational, creatical, logical or propositional thinking and learning.

In line with the above, Crystal (2007:22) captures the importance of language thus: Language has both ‘mystical’ and magical powers for capturing the breath of human thoughts and endeavors. Language can be used to persuade the citizens into engaging in certain behaviors-- such as always wear your facemask, keep social distancing, always wash your hand etc, it can also be used to dissuade the citizen from caring out certain behaviors such as no hand shaking, node your head instead, also, ‘AVOID TOUCHING MEN’’, follow WOMEN instead, as acronyms for COVID-19 campaign are represented below; “MEN” stands for; mouth, Eyes and Nose.

The citizens should avoid touching these areas of the body to avoid the spread of COVID-19. “WOMEN” stands for;

W- wash your hand

O -- Obey directive

M- Move away from crowded places

E --- Exercise regularly

N ---Never ignore warning signals

The acronym W.O.M.E.N is a preventive for campaign against the spread of COVID-19. Hallwork (1971:12) posits that, language is an instrument of action for information, as well as a thought process. Language as a medium of communication can be put to different uses for a Layman to easily understand. The language of covid-19 is mostly devoid of ambiguity.

**CONCEPT CLARIFICATION:
COMMUNICATION:**

Often times, language and communication have been used interchangeably. Through the definition of some scholars we will see how close both are. Uzozie (1992:10) sees: communication as the possible method of conveying or passing information, ideas, feeling, etc from one source to another in a systematic way using channels recognized and accepted by all the participants in the communication act, by means of pattern sign, signals or symbols with which predetermined meanings have been encoded. This implies that communication is a method of sharing information, ideas etc.

Onuigbo. (2019:24) defines “communication as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another”. Communication is an interaction in one form or the other, either by auditory or visual symbols. It involves the interaction of one or more people saying or doing something which attracts reactions from the other person.

COMPONENT OF COMMUNICATION

There are six components that make up communication processes: These are:

- (1) Sender/ encoder- This is the initiation of the communication process. He/ She encodes the message.
- (2)Receiver : The receiver is the other party who receives the message, it can be an individual or the whole audience .
- (3) Message : This is the most crucial component of communication. There are different ways in which messages can be sent. It can be by presentation , written documents or an advertisement. The message is transferred from the sender to the receivers.
- (4) Channel: The message travels from the sender to the receiver through a medium that is known as channel. Channels such as newspaper, television, radio etc.
- (5) Feed Back: This is the response of the receiver. The receiver has to give his response either by asking question or by making comments. Feedback helps the sender to know how his message has been decoded or interpreted. It might be positive or negative.
- (6) Noise: Noise is an interference that affects the effectiveness of a communication activity. Noise reduces and affects the quality of the message at any stage of the communication processes.

Language and communication are related because language is a medium of communication, without language there will be no communication.

Corona virus

The concept of Corona virus refers to the crown-like projections on the pathogen’s surface. “Corona” is Latin meaning “halo” or “Crown”. In humans, corona virus infection most often occurs in the winter and early spring, but they can happen at any time. Corona virus can cause a wide range of illness, including the common cold and COVID-19, respiratory system, through they can affect other systems too. The epidemic of COVID-19 just like many other epidemics naturally permeated the human society effortlessly with little or no scientific resistance at the onset. The epidemic was discovered in November 2019 in Wuhan, China when the first case was recorded. It was officially named corona virus disease in 2019. Hence the COVID-19 for shirt because of the year of attack.

Corona viruses are present in many species, including Camel and bats. Some of these viruses can be deadly. A person may have a high risk of developing severe symptoms, if they are older, have a weakened immune system, or have another health condition. This illness results from infection with acute respiratory Syndrome, Corona virus 2 (SAR-COV2). These diseases became so deadly that it became known as COVID-19 Pandemic. The disease spread through droplet from cough, sneezing, or breathing. The droplets may land on another person, on an item such as a door handles and other surfaces. If someone else touches the handle, the Virus may pass on to the person; people were advice to avoid touching their mouth, nose or eyes. It was a result of these that the slogan of avoid MEN and follow WOMEN became popular.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTION AND THE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

Leeds(1978:89) asserts that the term democracy is derived from two Greek words demo meaning “people”, and kratia signifying “rule of or by”. The layman’s definition of democracy is the government of the people by the people and for the people. Nigeria as a democratic institution takes into cognizance the right of its citizens. As much as COVID-19 is a deadly virus, the Government tries as much as possible not to use force on its citizen in order to abide by the rules guiding the spread of the disease. That is why, it is paramount to devise means to create awareness campaigns that will persuade the citizenry against the spread of COVID-19. These awareness campaigns help to persuade the citizenry against COVID-19. These awareness campaigns are carried out through the use of jingles, social and physical distancing, hand bills, posters of people using face mask, washing their hands using sanitizer etc, announcements in radios and televisions etc. For the fact that Nigeria is a democratic institute, government tends to keep appealing to the citizenry instead of using force or compelling them to do it compulsorily that is why even the vaccines are not taken by the majority of the citizen due to one conspiracy theory or the other. Some believe that, if they take the vaccine their body will be magnetic; some say the vaccine is a strategy the government wants to use in order to reduce the population of the country. So many conspiracy theories surround the campaign against COVID-19. Within the last decade, Nigeria has faced several public health challenges, Ebola came in 2014, and Monkey pox came in 2017, Yellow fever was in 2017. And almost every year we record outbreak of Lassa fever, measles, yellow fever, cholera etc. The government has really devised the use of awareness campaign to take care of each of these situations. The problem of not achieving 100% adherence from the citizen is because a country like Nigeria is a democratic state, where the rights of the citizens are paramount. In order to achieve their aim of enlightening the citizen, awareness campaign becomes inevitable.

DATA PRESENTATION

5th February, 2022

Source: Update from World Health Organisation.

Caption: Takes care of you and your co-workers

IF YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF YOU TAKE CARE OF US.

Work Contact

You can get Covid -19 when:

Sneeze or cough in front of you without covering your nose and mouth, all touch contaminated surfaces.

You stay workspace with a confirmed or suspicious person for more 10 minutes, less than 1.5 m away, without a mask or protective glasses.

The adverts above were retrieved from World Health Organisation (W.H.O) on 5th February, 2022. It analyses that everyone should take precaution of the rules guiding the spread of covid-19. As an individual, you need to take proper care of yourself but I'm asking up keeping at least 1.5 m away, coughing into your elbow and frequent washing of hands, by doing so, you are directly taking care of your co-workers. Another captivating caption from the advert above which is written on the right hand side, work contacts: you can get Corbin it when:

This caption tries to enlighten us on various ways we can get the virus.

1. When you share the same space with a confirmed person, no we do not wear our face mask properly, when they cough in front of us, etc one can easily contact the virus.

12th February, 2022.

Retrieved from Nigeria Centre for Disease Control.

You get vaccinated against covid-19. If you are menstruating on the day of your appointment, you should get vaccinated against Covid-19 in if you are menstruating on the day of your appointment. Menstruation isn't a medical reason not to get the Covid-19 vaccine.

This awareness is specifically for the women between the ages of 30 to 50 and also for the **Girl/Child** between the ages of 18 to 29 years, who made think that they can't be vaccinated on the appointment today because of their menstrual flow. From the advert above NCDC has educated is today that we can be vaccinated even if we are menstruating stating clearly that menstruation is not a medical reason not to get the Covid-19 vaccine.

The language is so clear, simple and educating. They try to pass the information in a language we will understand even to the lame man covid-19 awareness, posters, handbill, adverts, have saved a lot of people from the dangers of covid-19 virus. The decode their language in any way everyone understands. Through their adverts they have equally enlightened us health-wise maintaining self hygiene, staying away from physical and social communication as well to sum it up, being vaccinated is a great weapon to fight against Covid-19.

9th February, 2020.

Source: Nigeria Centre for Disease Control

Caption: We can all win against #covid-19 if we:

- ✓ Get VACCINATED
- ✓ Keep a STATE DISTANCE and avoid crowds
- ✓ Wear a face masks PROPERLY
- ✓ Keep indoor spaces WELL VENTILATED
- ✓ WASH HANDS often
- ✓ Cough and sneeze into our elbows
- ✓ Disinfect frequent touch surfaces

#TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Discourage sharing personal items discovered shaking of hands or hugging not all infected persons show symptoms avoid unnecessary travel.

Since the missing 4/19 has been discovered, health workers have been encouraging us to get vaccinated, that it will post to the spread of the virus they have made it compulsory for all the government workers to get vaccinated for our own safety and for the safety of our loved ones.

The second points keep safe distance and avoid crowd. This has been the regular one in from the onset of this virus in December 2019. They have as well educated us to keep both physical distancing of at least 1.5 m away and maintaining a social distance of not more than (10) people and sit 2 m away from each other.

Wear a face mask properly as you can see from the advert properly was written in capital letter. A lot of citizens don't wear their face mask properly. Some of the citizens cover only their nose or only their mouth, such a person is intended to get the virus once anyone cough or sneeze close to you. To wear face mask properly, one has to cover both the nose and a mouth, because the virus can be contacted through the nose or through the mouth. If you cover up properly, you are on the safe side.

In our various homes, we have been advised to keep the rooms well-ventilated to avoid the spread of the virus. Right from toddlers we have been taught of washing of our hands and the teaching of hand still exist.

An insane person limits to hand washing before or after meal or after using the restroom. But today, we are being taught to wash our hands often not limiting it to whenever we want to eat or after meal or using the toilet. Often can stand for regularly or frequently.

The next point, cough and sneeze into our elbow. When we cough or sneeze into the air or in front of our friends, the tendency to contact the virus is very high. But when we sneeze or cough into our elbow, we are saving our life and the lives of people living around us.

We should always this affect touched surfaces like hand doors, drawers tables etc. If we abide by these rules we are staying safe.

The next subtitle # Take Responsibility.

We should be responsible for our health status. If you want to stay safe, you are responsible for that, whichever way you want to live your life.

Take responsibility by discouraging sharing of personal items. like comb, face mask, protective glasses, when you take caution of that, you are thereby being responsible for your health status. We have been warned several from hugging, you should always be guided from shaking of hands and hugging even to our close relatives, because not all infected person's show symptoms.

Avoid unnecessary with the hearts listed above we are responsible.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speech act theory was propounded by J.L. Austin in 1967. This theory views that meaning that holds the linguistic expressions can be explained in terms of the rules governing their use in performing various speech acts.

Speech acts theory domains was three levels of utterances; locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary act is the performance of an utterances which simply contain a meaningful statement about objects.

Illocutionary act is performing an intentional utterances like stealing, denying or asking. The utterances can be expressive or directive illocutionary acts.

A perlocutionary act is getting somebody to do something with words like persuading, convincing, scaring, amusing etc. Its objective is to direct someone else.

Speech act theory aligns with this topic in view that it will explain how utterances are being made in a sentence. It will further describe, if a sentence is in locutionary act, illocutionary act or perlocutionary act. It also sends a directive or expressive message to the listener. Speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication. We perform speech acts when we offer an apology, greeting, request, complaint, invitation, compliment or refusal, suggestions. From all these words, we will definitely see them in our utterances and we will be able to describe the exact act, whether locutionary, illocutionary or perlocutionary act. This study will be a happy treat for the analysis of our work.

SUMMARY

This study has exploited some definitions an functions of language and communication patterns taking into account locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts especially as Austin J.L (1962) perceives it. It examined Covid-19 and its gingles/campaign as a way of luring citizens to do the needful things to avoid the contact of the virus.

The study equally discussed democracy and environment especially in the use of sample, gentle words that can make people to understand and key into Covid-19 instructions to be safe in an environment that is mixed up with literate and illiterate people. The syntactic and semantic elements inherent in the gingles adverts, announcement were analysed grammatically. Text for analysis were got from excerpts from the print media (Newspapers and magazine) while oral media (radio and television) were not left out.

CONCLUSION

It was discovered that language use has different patterns individuals according to the context of use employing different linguistic styles like pragmatics, discourse analysis, paralinguistics, phatic communion etc.

Osuafor (2001:136) stipulates, “what discourse analysis does is to treat rules of grammar as a resource for meaning, conforming to them when it needs to, but departing from them when it needs to, but departing from them when it does not “

The discourse analyst then exploits the physical environment of the creature work in order to arrive at the message of the text. The implication of the above is that is COVID-19 text messages/audio are creative and coined to convey the message as the situation demands.

Parry (1967) in Otti (2005) writes “Words are not little demons with blow-pipes and poisoned darts but instruments of thoughts and expressions which can be well or ill used according to the users percipience.” The onus of the above is that words are organized to express thought to facilitate effective communication. The choice of words for COVID-19 gingles and campaigns are done in a special way to create awareness, arouse interest and consciousness of the citizen for mutual intelligibility of the virus and its effects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

COVID-19 gingles/campaigns should be given a wider coverage.

It should be extended to the rural areas using town-criers, village gathering etc

Gentle persuasive measures should be employed to make the people adhere to COVID-19 instructions in our democratic state.

REFERENCE

- Appadarai, A (2003). *A Substance of Politics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Emezue, G.I.N (2016) *Understanding Discourse Analysis*. Samdrew Production Enugu, Nigeria.
- Halliday, M.A.K (2014). *Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Revised by Christian M.I.M Mathiessen. 4th ed. London: Routledge.
- Leeds, C.A (1978). *Political Studies*. Hazal Watson & Viney, UK: London.
- Mbaonu, C.N. (2005) *Language: A Curator and Vehicle of Culture*. In I Kamalu & I,Tamunobelema (Eds.). *Issues in the Study of Language and Literature: Theory and Practice*, pp.675-682. Ibadan: Kraft books Ltd.
- Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, Retrieve 12th April, 2022.
- Obi-Okoye, F (2011). “*A Preview: Language man’s Unique Gift from God*”. In F. Obi-Okoye (Ed). *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics; from Theory to Practice* (pp.1-29) Onitsha: D-Bell Graphic Press Service.
- Osuafor, C. (2001). *Literary Discourse 2*, Owerri: Versatile Publishers.
- Otti, Q. (2005). *Language Use in Print Media Advertising*. Owerri. Imo State University-M.A unpublished Dissertation.
- Osundu, P.A & Nzeakor , N.C (2018). *Politic Language for Positive Nationhood: Disquisition of President Buhari’s speech at the 2018 Nigerian Bar Association Annual Conference*, A paper Presented at the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. 2018 Annual Conference of the School of General Studies. 14th-17th November, 2018.
- Onuigbo, S. (2019). *Language and Power in our Common Humanity*. An Inaugural Lecture of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Uzoezie, R.U (1992). *Phonetics and Phonology of English*. Onitsha: Hybrid Publisher.
- Wallwork, J.F (1997). *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction to the Study of Language*. London: Heinemann.
- www.India.com/viral/avoid-touching-men-follow-women-instead-covid-19-class-

[rules-go-viral-know-what-they-men-4/3/48/retrieved](#) 20th March 2022.