

COVID-19 Pandemic and The Impacts of Neologism on Language Vocabulary

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Abstract

The corona virus disease has impacted virtually everybody in the world today by introducing various changes leading to what has come to be known as the new normal. The paper analyses how the English language has been able to adapt to the changes that COVID -19 has occasioned. Because it is dynamic, language changes to accommodate new happenings in society by introducing or coining completely new words into their vocabulary through word acquiring formation processes such as blending, acronym or through old words acquiring new meaning (semantic shift) or old words gaining currency due to an emerging and trending situation. These word formation processes are examples of neologisms. This paper therefore examines neologism and its Impact on language vocabulary during the outbreak of COVID-19. Through a qualitative method of analysis, the researcher obtains and analyse information on what we consider a trending issue. In this study, the researcher used the term neologism which means the coinage of new words. Neologism played a significant role throughout the history of pandemic. This study however, is on the impacts of neologism on language vocabulary which has helped to explore the creation of new words during the outbreak of COVID-19. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the functional theory proposed by Halliday (2013) which states that language changes according to the needs of its users. Data were collected from articles, social media and newspapers. The findings of this study revealed that with the outbreak of COVID-19, people use new words created in communication, the word-formation is utilized in the form of nouns, adjectives, and verbs. The abbreviations and acronyms are also used which are related to the current situation of COVID-19. Neologisms have however portrayed colourful presentation of word formation which is now used in various social and cultural practices of respective societies.

Keywords: Covid-19, Neologism, Language, Vocabulary

Introduction

The language of a human being is considered as a creative entity. Additionally, it is dynamic and not static. However, these qualities support a language to survive and grow. It is a fact that the lexicons of all languages are developing day by day. Therefore, the new editions are in the form of neologism, i.e. word formation, borrowing, blending and lexical derivation. The same is the case with the discourse of COVID-19 (Jefwa, 2021). The new terms emerged globally during the outbreak of COVID-19. Languages can be adapted to reflect changes taking place in the life and culture of users, and the majority of such changes happen in their vocabulary, because as compared to vocabularies that can change very quickly both in its lexicon and in word meanings, grammatical and phonological structures of language are relatively stable and take time to change (Jefwa, 2021). The term COVID-19 itself is a blending derived from Corona Virus Disease – 2019, giving us a completely new term or word. The term COVID-19 combines the first two letters of three different words and then adds a numeral and uses a hyphen as a linking element. Other examples of blended terms after COVID include: Infodemic is a portmanteau of "information" and "epidemic. Since its advent. COVID19 has brought a totally new approach to people's life over the world and language has not been spared. According to Britannica.com (3) Languages change in their pronunciation, lexicon, and sentences and in meaning. These changes happen gradually and are noticeable across several generations.

The Latin word 'corona' means 'crown'. The virus is called 'corona' because of its crown-like shape and spikes. In the wake of the COVID - 19 outbreak, to define new situations new words have been coined and they are widely used on print and social media. In January and February 2020, there are keywords associated with COVID-19 while, others related to global events (Muhammad et.al. 2021). The keywords reflect the social impact of the virus, and issues surrounding the medical response: social distancing, self-isolation and self-quarantine, lockdown, non-essential (as in non-essential travel), and postpone are all especially frequent are PPE and ventilator.

Vocabulary is a list of words including their meanings and it is used to express our ideas and feeling by communicating it in a language. Hatch and Brown (1995) defined vocabulary as a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of word that individual speakers of language might use. These definitions may make it seem that vocabulary is a pretty straightforward term but this perception will not last long when one takes into account the fact that vocabulary is much more than just single words, that is, vocabulary includes not only single words but also multiword phrases, idioms, and even sentences. That is why vocabulary studies now use the term lexis, which refers to the totality of vocabulary items in a language (Barcroft, Sunderman and Schmitt, 2011).

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only putting a great strain onto our health system, but it also highlights the linguistic change and adoption of new phrases across the globe. The novel COVID-19 infection has deeply affected globally. With the number of people infected by the novel corona virus (COVID-19), which is rapidly, increasing worldwide, public anxieties are elevated in many regions. As the COVID-19 outbreaks is going on, a wave of fear and worry in the society has arisen. No one wants to get infected with a virus that has a relatively high risk of death (Sahu, Mishra and Lal, 2020). On the other hand, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the executive editor of Oxford English Dictionary, Paton stated that it was “a rare experience for lexicographers to observe an exponential rise in usage of a single word in a very short period, and for that word to come overwhelmingly to dominate the global discourse, even to the exclusion of most other topics. “The noun neologism is a coinage from the Greek root neo-, which means ‘new’, and logos, which means ‘word. ‘What stands out in the many definitions of neologism is the fact that involves coining or inventing new words or expressions and how they are used or how old words are used in new senses. Thus, whenever a new word or expression is coined and used or when an existing word or expression assumes a new meaning in language, a neologism is formed. Therefore, any newly formed word or phrase or any word which has gained a new meaning is a neologism (Jefwa, 2021). For example, Covidiot and Covidient emerged during the outbreak of COVID-19 and all the renowned dictionaries of the world defined these terms portmanteau words. Covidiot is a combination of ‘coronavirus’ and ‘idiot’ and it refer to a person who does not follow the directives and orders such as ‘social distancing’ and behaves like an idiot. Covidient is a combination of ‘coronavirus’ and obedient (Muhammad, 2021).

Urbandictionary.com, which coined the word ‘Covidiot’ defines it as “someone who ignores the warnings regarding public health or safety “Here are some examples of how the two word is used in sentences:

- Social Distancing alone can help to contain corona virus. I don’t know why covidiot don’t understand it.
- Tell the covidiot not to take medicine without consulting doctor covidients are the people who strictly follow the directives and orders of the government during the coronavirus outbreak. Examples:
- Thanks to numerous covidients, the curfew was successful.
- We are all covidients and we will cooperate with the government.

Neologism processes to generate new words. Qaisar (2015) argued that neologism helps in creating the form of words and coinage of new words. It spots and facilitates word form and coinage of new words in a language. In the social and cultural context, neologism also highlights the present and modern perspectives. Khan (2013) stated that neologism or coining new words is an important tool to study the variation or change in the language.

Very often we coin innovative words to explain or describe new ideas and things, but importantly when there is no word presently available to more accurately express our thoughts or experiences.

Neologism also represents loan words, acronyms and abbreviations. A neologism is defined as “a newly generated word or lexical item that may be in the process of switching in common life”. However, it cannot be accepted widely as a formal language. This study explores and analyses the neologism in the perspective of the outbreak of COVID-19. People around the world used the formation of different words to highlight their language effectively during the outbreak of Corona virus.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method of analysis. The descriptive data in the form of written words is observed. The process enables the researcher to relate ideas, perceptions, opinions that cannot be measured by numbers but are represented in words. This study aims at obtaining and analysing information on a trending issue of global concern -COVID-19. In 2010, Krishna Murthy proposed the theory of neologism into three parts: word formation, borrowing and lexical deviation. Starting from there three parts, the paper analysis the Vocabulary (lexicon) as a result of borrowing, blending, coinage, acronym, clipping, lexical deviation and explain each neologism respectively (Yingyue, 2022). The study collected data from different sources about language use in the realities of the pandemic. The study analyses a selected number of words and phrases that have been in use during the pandemic. The words and phrase were obtained from social media, daily newspapers and other writings that revolved around the issue of COVID-19. The study analyses neologisms such as blending, the process of acronyms and how it has contributed to the post COVID-19 vocabulary, and words whose meaning has changed (semantic shift) in the wake of COVID-19.

Theoretical framework

There are several theoretical approaches to the issue of neologism. For example, the historical approach considers time as the basic criteria and thus defines neologism as any word whose origin is currently in the memory of the generation of its users. This view is supported by Sipka (2006) who defines a neologism as a word which has only entered the lexicon recently. Rets (2014) identifies what he calls basic theories of neologism which describe neologisms from different perspectives thus the understanding of neologism will differ, depending on the theory and approach adopted. The theories include: the stylistic theory which designate neologisms as words which are stylistically marked by the newness in their usage in the language. The structural theory on the other hand defines neologisms as words with a completely new configuration and shape or has unique audio pattern. However, the Etymological theory interprets that neologisms consist of words already in existence in a language but have developed new meaning in recent years. The lexicography theory characterizes neologisms as words which have not been included in current dictionaries.

The above theoretical approaches have relevance to this study. They were used to account for some of the changes discussed. For instance, some of the neologisms discussed are in terms of style marked by their newness of their usage since they belong to the medical jargon, for example, the terms epidemic, pandemic, incubation period, ventilators, respirators etc. Since neologism occasions language change, this paper adopts the functional theory proposed by Halliday (2013). This theory describes language change as occurring to the needs of its users. Just like this theory, this paper focuses only on lexical change.

Below are some of the neologisms that have come into use due to COVID-19 out breaking by Jefwa (2021):

1. Lockdown: The word lockdown is a compound word made up of two free lexical morphemes or a lexeme containing two or more potential stems. It is a prison protocol used to block people, information or cargo from leaving an area. When put under a full lockdown people are not allowed to move and may not enter or exit a building or rooms within the said building or area. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the term lockdown underwent some form of semantic shift and has been used in relation to mass quarantines. The term lockdown has therefore become a common vocabulary used in day-to-day conversations. For example, Nigeria was placed under-partial lockdown through a dusk to dawn curfew. Places that proved to be hotspots were put on a further partial lockdown within a lockdown through cessation of movement within those areas in order to break the chain of the spread of COVID-19.

2. Home schooling: The term home schooling is a noun compound made up of the noun home the place of permanent residence, especially as a member of a family and schooling which means education obtained at school. This term is an oxymoron due to the inherent contradictions it exhibits. Schooling is done in school not at home according to the literal understanding of the term. However, home schooling is another “new” aspect of its meaning that has been highlighted due to COVID-19. The term itself may not be new but its implementation is new in some countries. If home schooling is the education of children at home by their parents, then this will be largely a new concept. County like US practice home schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. New normal: The term new is an adjective that can mean something that is newly discovered or something brought to light for the first time and has not been in existence before. The word new can refer to something that have been already in existence but has been seen, experienced, or acquired recently or now for the first time. On the other hand, the word normal is also an adjective used to mean conforming to a standard ' that is usual, typical, or expected. Thus, the expression new normal is made by bringing together the two lexemes to give us a new expression. It is a compound adjective. Before the advent of COVID-19, the world had expected standards it was conforming to. However, after corona all this changed and people had to adopt new ways of doing things different from what was considered normal then. The new normal entails the changes that have taken place since the advent of COVID-19 to our prior normal life. Our social cultural ways of doing things have been disrupted, be

it at work, at home, and our social life have all been altered permanently. A “new normal” is about new ways of doing things and about how we live, work and interact with others.

4. Relaxing the restrictions: Relaxing can mean reducing tension or anxiety while restrictions mean the limitation or control of someone or something, or the state of being restricted. Relaxing the restrictions is thus a compound noun. After months of drastic and restrictive measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19, many nations have taken to relaxing the restrictions. A restriction is an official rule that limits what you can do or that limits the amount or size of something. Many rules were put in place at the beginning of this pandemic rules on quarantines. Lockdowns, shelter in place, social distancing etc. However, today some of these rules are being relaxed in many countries have adopted cautious optimism, as they begin to carefully wind back some of the most stringent restrictions imposed during the pandemic. This is being done in a phased approach to avoid new waves of the corona virus outbreak.

5. Flattening the curve: This expression has also been constantly used during this COVID-19. If we view a curve as a noun that denotes a line that bends continuously with no straight parts, and flatten as a verb that means the process of making something flat or level, then we understand that this is verb compound in epidemiology flattening the curve refers to the slowing of a virus' spread so that fewer people may seek treatment at once. A flatter curve is a reflection of what happens when the spread of the virus is slowed down. In other wards even if the same number of people are taken ill, the infections happen over a longer period of time, giving hospitals time and space to treat everyone.

Flattening the curve as a community isolation measure assists in keeping the daily number cases at a controllable level for medical providers to deal with the situation. Measures that can be put in place to achieve this include the use of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, mandatory wearing of masks, regular hand washing using soap etc. all of which minimize and hold up the peak of active cases, thus allowing more time to build healthcare capacity that increases the possibility coping better with patient load. This is also an example of already existing phrase that has gained more currency in their usage during COVID-19.

6. Frontline soldiers: Frontline soldiers are a compound noun denoting the military line or part of an army that is closest to the enemy. Following the analogy of frontline soldiers, nurses and paramedics and essentially all health workers around the world are now frontline soldiers against COVID-19. Like many soldiers, health care workers are also frontline soldiers in the war against COVID-19. They need everyone's support and protection from governments. The expression frontline soldiers associated with the military has undergone semantic shift in its usage under the COVID-19 vocabulary.

However, writing about new vocabulary learnt during the pandemic or rather old words having new meaning (semantic shift) or new prominence happened so fast during the pandemic especially the medical terms that are

now in use in our day to day activities. Kabiru (2020) discusses what he considered as new vocabulary learnt during the pandemic. However, what he discusses are not really new words but rather words that have undergone semantic shift or have gained prominence post COVID-19. Examples of such words or expressions are discussed below:

- **Epidemic vs. Pandemic:** The terms Epidemic and pandemic have also acquired prominence in the post COVID-19 vocabulary. These terms fall under medical jargon. However, in post corona, they have become part and parcel of everyday vocabulary understood even by lay people. The two terms gained prominence on March 11, 2020, when the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic. From this pronouncement, the difference between the two terms started to be clear for most 'lay people. An epidemic disease affects many people at the same time by spreading from person to person in a locality where the disease is not permanently prevalent. A pandemic, on the other hand, is a global outbreak of a disease emanating from a new virus. As compared to an epidemic, a pandemic depends on geographic spread describes a disease that affects a whole country or the entire world. In other words, a pandemic disease is an epidemic that has spread over a large area, or it occurs throughout an entire country, continent, or the whole world. Old terms now more prominent. The two are examples of meta-language or jargon which have been adopted during the pandemic to suit the purpose of the users.
- **Symptomatic vs. Asymptomatic:** The term symptomatic is used to refer to the act of manifesting symptoms or refer to a specific symptom. A Symptom is a sign of disease or injury. Many medical conditions and maladies exhibit symptoms for example a cough can be a symptom of one having an infection of the upper respiratory organs. If someone has symptoms associated with a certain disease or condition, they are considered symptomatic. On the other hand, if one has a disease without detectable symptoms, they are considered asymptomatic. Both of these terms have been used in the meta-language of medical jargon but they apparently gained more prominence during this period of COVID-19. The term asymptomatic is also a product of a word formation process called affixation where a prefix or suffix is added to a base to create a new word.
- **Quarantine vs. Isolation:** Another two terms that are now part and parcel of everyday vocabulary worldwide are quarantine and isolation. The term quarantine refers to a strict isolation regime forced on people to put to a stop the spread of disease. The practice of quarantine specifically involves segregating people or groups of people who may have come into contact with a communicable disease but are asymptomatic, from others who have not been exposed so as to arrest the possibility of the spread of the communicable disease. In contrast, isolation is a noun which specifically refers to the act of completely separating a person suffering from contagious or infectious disease from others. People may be quarantined when they are not currently sick, but have in one way or another have come into contact with a communicable or infectious disease. On

the other hand, they may be placed in isolation if they currently have a communicable disease and can potentially infect others. This act thus separates them from people who are healthy helping to stop the spread of the disease. The term quarantine and isolation are examples of medical jargon that has been used over the years. However, due to the pandemic ravaging the world today as already existing words, they have gained more currency in their use due to the existing social situation.

- **Incubation period:** The term incubation period came into the public eye for most people during the AIDS pandemic. Today however, due to COVID-19, the term is back into the common vocabulary and does not appear to be jargon anymore. In medicine, the term incubation refers to the time from the moment someone is exposed to an infectious agent until the time they exhibit symptoms of the disease. COVID-19 has an average incubation period of 5-6 days, but it can go up to 14 days. During the pre-symptomatic period, someone who is infected can be contagious. Therefore, it is possible that the disease is a pre-symptomatic case before the inception of symptoms or when one is asymptomatic. Incubation period is a compound word made up of two different lexemes with two different bases. As a medical jargon, in the COVID-19 vocabulary it changed its register by moving from the field of medical jargon to ordinary register.
- **Syndromic surveillance:** The word syndromic is an adjective which means occurring as a syndrome or part of a syndrome. While the word surveillance is a noun that refers to a watch kept over a person, group, etc. The term syndromic surveillance therefore is an adjective compound that has gained prominence during the COVID-19 period. The term refers to ways of detecting individual and population health indicators that are discernible before confirming diagnoses. The objectives of syndromic surveillance are the identification of illness clusters early, before confirming diagnoses so as to make reports to public health agencies, in view of mobilizing a rapid response, in effect reducing morbidity and mortality. Syndromic surveillance therefore is one of the strategies employed in the fight against COVID-19 by identifying illness clusters early confirming diagnosis and enabling mobilization of quick responses.

The use of acronyms can be seen within the period of COVID-19 pandemic. An acronym is a word formed from the first letters of different words and pronounced as a word on its own. Examples of acronyms used post COVID-19 are BC which stands for Before Corona and AC for after Corona. The two acronyms are used to denote things that were there pre-corona (old normal) and those that are post corona (new normal) (Jefwa, 2021).

Findings

Below are some of the findings the researcher got as a result of new words /word formation used during Covid-19 pandemic. These new words /word formation were gotten as a result of blending, borrowing, clipping, coinage, lexical deviation and even the use of acronyms.

- i. Blending: This is the processes of combining part of two words or one word with part of another to form a new word. Examples as in;
Covidiot - Corona + idiot. People who don't follow the rules and act like an idiot.
Covidient - Corona + obedient. People who follow the directives during the pandemic
- ii. Borrowing: This occurs when a word or phrase is taken from one language and used in another. Examples as in;
Pandemic- A disease that is endemic nationally or globally
Quarantine- A measure of risk management
Social Distancing - To keep a certain distance from other people
Self- isolation- Staying indoors and not interacting with other people during the pandemic.
- iii. Clipping: A new word derived from a longer original or clipped expression.
- iv. Coinage: A process in which a new word or expression is intentionally or accidentally created example the word Rona is clipped from corona. It is a way of referring to COVID-19
- v. Lexical deviation: This is the process of creating new words that has never existed before. This form of Neologism is found in ordinary discourse. Example are;
Elbow bump- The informal greeting of two people touching elbows, which was popular during the pandemic.
Quarantine and chill- Families in isolation having leisure activities together.
Miss Rona- personification of coronavirus. Comparing coronavirus to a villain person who does not fool around.

Abbreviation and Acronyms used during COVID-19.

Abbreviation	Acronyms Description
WFH.	"Working from home"
PPE.	"Personal protective equipment"
COVID-19	"COVID-19 is the name of the disease that the novel coronavirus causes. It stands for coronavirus disease 2019".

ARDS.	"Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome"
ARI	"Acute Respiratory Infection"
CDC	"Centres for Disease Control"
PUI.	"Patient Under Investigation"
PCR:	"Polymerase chain reaction"
SARS-CoV-2	"Novel coronavirus 2019 is the name of the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2"
CFR	"Case Fatality Rate".
WFH.	(Working from Home) which indicates the fact that employees have been forced to work at their homes rather than work in their offices. This has been made easy through the use technological tolls such video conferencing (zoom) and other collaborative technologies which enables people who work together liaise and stay in touch.

The medical terms have been used frequently during the outbreak of COVID-19. Most of the people were unaware of these terms. These terms are used widely on social media and press conferences of different medical fields globally.

A Glossary of terms related to COVID-19 (Muhammad et.al. 2021):

Corona/Coronavirus/Novel Coronavirus/COVID-19

Outbreak/Epidemic/Pandemic

Quarantine/Self-quarantine/Isolation/Cordon sanitaire

Symptom/Symptomatic/Asymptomatic/Incubation

Spread/Community Spread/Communicable/Contagion

Morbidity/Mortality

Super-spreader/Transmission

Stay-at-Home

Lockdown

Mask

Social Distancing

The examples above are words or phrases that have undergone semantic shifts or gained prominence. Language changes occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic can be accounted for to some extent by the etymological theory which defines neologisms as words that exist in a language but have acquired a new meaning or undergone semantic shift. Most of these words and phrase are part of medical jargon; however, they have undergone change in their register by moving from the field of medical jargon to ordinary register during the pandemic and in a way. it serves to demystify their meaning and usage.

Conclusion

Language change is an occurrence by which alterations are made in the attributes and the use of a language over time. All natural languages can change and these changes are normally reflected in areas of language use. Language changes can be manifested in its sound patterns, its lexis, in semantics, and in its syntax (Nordquist, 2019). During a time of social crises like COVID-19 pandemic, language of social crisis is used and there is normally an explosion of new words and phrases like those discussed above. The neologisms addressed above are useful since they function to help people communicate their fears about the health crisis ever seen in this generation. It collates people around a set of collective cultural reference points -it therefore acts as a kind of lexical “social glue”.

From the above discussed, it is clear that the spread of corona Virus disease has changed the lives of billions of people worldwide. Likewise, it has ushered in a new set of lexicon that encompassing specialist terms from the fields of epidemiology and medicine to the general populace. New acronyms have been created, and words coined to express the societal importance of the imposed isolation and social distancing and also how neologisms occasioned by COVID-19 has made existing words or expressions acquire new meaning (semantic shift) or prominence, the paper therefore indicates that language changes to accommodate new happenings in society like the COVID-19 pandemic.

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