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THE INEVITABILITY OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION AS A PANACEA FOR ECONOMIC STABILITY DURING PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the inevitable roles of language and communication towards enhancing economic stability during pandemic, particularly in a multilingual, heterogeneous nation like ours. It begins by examining the concepts of language and communication as veritable tools for promoting economic stability and growth during pandemic. The paper advocates a restraint in the use of emotional, disturbing and panic-induced words that could promote depression, personality changes and cognitive problems. We should rather employ the use of reassuring, hopeful, emphatic, persuasive and subtle languages in order to stem the tide of the pandemic. It further tries to education on the importance of appropriate communication tactics and strategies among the health providers, media organization, family doctors and the patients

The data generation for this study is in two folds, the first one, being historic, is done through the collection of secondary data such as previous researches, journal magazines, newspapers, textbooks, publications and the second, by descriptive statistics using frequencies and percentages used to elicit information from sampled characteristics. It advocated the use of appropriate language (reassuring, mild, reformative) in curbing the rise of coronavirus as well as formulating appropriate policies capable of tackling the increase to enhance economic stability of Nigeria.

Keywords: inevitability, language, communication, economic, stability, pandemic.

Introduction

Concept of Covid-19

Coronavirus belongs to the coronaviridae family in the nidovirales order. It represents crown- like spikes on the outer surface of the virus; thus it was named a coronavirus. It is minute in size (65-125mm) in diameter and contains a single stranded RNA as a nucleic material with its size ranging from 20 to 32kb in length. Coronavirus was first discovered in Wuhan, an emerging economic and business hub, a market where human seafood is sold in China. The disease killed over eighteen hundred and rendered over seventy thousand infected in the first fifty days of the outbreak. As at today, Nigeria has recorded over one hundred and seventy thousand infected cases of covid-19 (National Centre for Diseases Control.) (year 2021) The symptoms of Covid-19 include but not limited to the following: persistent cough or sneezing, Irregular hand washing, staying in crowded in a place. The following precautions are advised as measures of preventions. Regular and thorough washing of hands with soaps, use of alcohol-based sanitizer and maintaining at least one-and a half metres (5 feet) distance to avoid contracting the disease. ([https\online librarywiley.com](https://online.librarywiley.com).) The recent spread of coronavirus and the emergence of the second and third waves of the disease is a signal that the global community has not come out of the Covid 19 pandemic problem. The pandemic has destroyed the world unities of comfort, wealth, technological developments and social entertainment being enjoyed before its uncelebrated arrival. (Alenikov and Kurochkin2020) submit that the coronavirus has aggravated the social problems and replaced the unities with a threat to human extinction. The disease started spreading from East Asia, Europe and North America in early 2020, and later got its way to Africa and Latin America. Nigeria recorded the firs confirmed case in February, 2020. Though, on 31st, January,2020

WHO had earlier listed Nigeria as one of the 13th African Countries prone to the spread of the virus on The government of Nigeria responded actively through the health authorities to prevent the spread through the systems of identification of the victims, testing, tracing and isolating, to avoid general and community transmission of the disease. People were ordered to wear facemasks, observe social distancing as well as decontaminate the social environment to curb its spread. The Federal government also took various measures against the spread of the disease demand of the pandemic through boarder restrictions, schools' closure with many states prohibiting the gatherings of over fifty people at the wedding ceremonies, conferences, sporting events, recreational centres all to lower the spread of the disease. The places of worships of the two religions were not left off the hook as they were only permitted to hold services subject to limitations and permissions by the state authorities. The governments also embarked on the distribution of food items and cash as palliatives for the vulnerable groups, to reduce the effect of lockdown that restricted the movement of goods and services.

At the present, the government has eased the restrictions placed on goods and services due to a favorable response and attitudes of the people which reduced the level of fatalities in Nigeria. The pandemic is still a health challenge that has brought untold hardship and disastrous impacts on the and global community. The pandemic has not only caused medical fatality but has also been a reason for the growing rise of xenophobia around the world, as some citizens from certain countries were banned from visiting the other countries of their choices even for tourism purpose. It is responsible for massive evacuation and terrible care among the people of the world. Its chronic nature and lack of success in its treatment in the last one year is giving to the global community sleepless night!

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study includes:

- i. examining the influence and roles of language and communication on the stability of the Nigerian economy during Pandemic.
- ii. evaluating the effect of the alarming tone used by the mass media as against the use of persuasive and reformative language that could promote economic stability and improve the status of the Covid-19 patients during pandemic.

Statement of the Problem

The challenges confronting the Nigerian economy is very enormous and diverse in form. The deplorable state is disheartening given the enormous material resources the Supreme being endowed us with Segun (2016) opines that this economic disaffection has led to indeterminate expectation, weak education system, high unemployment rate, astronomical growing inflation rate, high maternal mortality etc. All these, as listed, are features of under developed economies which are linked to systemic and institutional failure. Nevertheless, the aforementioned, the inevitability of language and communication on economic stability remains the core of this paper. This is corroborated by the UNO (2008) which declared (2008) as an International Year of Language with the slogan "Language Matters". Language is described as so because it defines our humanity and our humanness.

Research Questions

1. What are the expected roles of language and communication on the economic stability of Nigeria during the pandemic?
2. What is the dominant tone frequently used by the media newspapers during the coverage of Covid-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will enable the general public, readers, doctors, nurses, government functionaries, NGO and other health providers to understand the purpose of using appropriate, reassuring language to communicate to the public and the victims of Covid-19. It will also assist the researchers and the media practitioners to appreciate the therapeutic effects of the use of persuasive and emphatic language choice of words on the health wellness of the victims of the pandemic.

The Concepts of Language and Communication

Language and Communication are two inseparable concepts. While communication deals with the process and content, language on the other hand remains a vehicle for transmitting the process and content of communication. Ogunsiiji (2013) defines language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communication ideas, emotions and decisions by means of arbitrarily- produced symbols. He submits further that language exercises certain influence on its users and this influence can be social, psychological, cultural, educational, the configuration of all these constitute the power of language. Language is interactional and It is a universal possession of human being and a major distinguishing factor between man and the lower animals. Languages defines our humanity and humanities. This is corroborated by the United Nations Organization, which declared in 2008 as language as the international year with the slogan “Language Matter”. (Ibitokun, 2003) also lends credence to this in his paper “The Word Predaces the World” to show that language had existed before man. Even the creation story illustrated in the bible started with dialogue or conversation which are all parts of communication This view is amplified by Bello (1999) who asserts that language has much influence and power because its existence is dated back to the commencement of human creation. It is described as a psychological behaviour (Alo 1998;19). Opoola (2010), listed the functions of language as an instrument of persuasion, aggression, facilitation, entertainment, fabrication, integration and a vehicle for social modification and direction of people’s behavior. Language has some characteristics such as: conventional, structure, dynamic, systematic variable, creative and elastic, arbitrariness, cultural transmission etc. Language is a tool for achieving effective communication. It is a universal mark of man which distinguishes man from the lower animals. It regulates behavior and helps to create new ideas. Adeleke (2013) describes language as a psychosocial interactive measures which builds human society together in communities and linguistic groups. This view is supported by Sesan (2010) who conceives language as the only sole machinery always used by man to manipulate and control his bio-cultural sphere and linguistic domains both at the micro and the macro levels.

Communication, on the other hands, is a highly-complex activity. It is described as the process of creating, meaning by sharing of thoughts, feelings, information with other people through the use and interpretation of speech, writing or non-verbal cues. (Okesipe 2013). Communication lies in the very heart of all human activities either consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or intentionally. Ojebuyi (2012) describes communication as an engine that drives human relation and a veritable pivot on which the society stands. The need for effective communication is one of the important factors needed for curbing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic victims are affected, marked, stereotyped, discriminated against, viewed negatively and suffered unexpected status loss in our society. The communication strategy to be used must be effective, proactive, innovative, constructive, imaginative and polite to enhance economic stability of the nation and to effect behavioral changes among the vulnerable groups and the general public. Communication, if properly used will help to improve the physical and psychological domains of the perceived victims. The goal of effective communication during pandemic must be geared towards providing clear thought and fact to the general public. Communication involves adequate information dissemination to avoid overspreading of rumour and dispel false information, mis information that characterized the present day social media users of the pandemic era. Expectedly, the digital communication has come to replace physical contacts or interactions, office meetings, students-teachers’ interaction etc. The digital communication devices include: E-mail, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, Twitter, New dusts, LinkedIn, You-Tube. These new communication media have helped

the society to create awareness on the causes, update and consequences of COVID-19 pandemic. It must be noted that despite the technologically-friendly environment created by these media, the influence of the social and cultural factors such as: gender, generational interests of the audience, language inclination, strict convictions, religious beliefs and the literacy are all the factors militating against effective communication during pandemic. On Nigerian scene, the federal government created a dedicated portal to keep the people informed of the pandemic, the risk associated with it as well as best practices with relevant adverts related to its reduction through other non-verbal forms of communication. These include jingles, caller tunes, audio-clips, paintings on walls, roads, billboards, newspapers and all other social media. Millions of marginalized people who lack the basic information about the disease are being taught what to do and how to prevent it (handwashing, face masking) particularly those who are suffering from low literacy, minority language syndrome, inadequate language and limited access to communication. These people must be educated, informed, and communicated through their preferred channels that are available and accessible to them.

Language and economy: an overview

Economic stability is associated with fundamental growth and sustainability of its development and this involves putting up different monetary and fiscal policies that would entrench economic fortunes and discourage political instability and bad governance. The challenges of economic instability are caused by enormous and several factors which are the hallmark of underdeveloped economies in the world, traceable to failure in economic planning and poor implementation. Nigeria's economy has witnessed erratic growth in the recent past and therefore cannot be said to have stabilized well or moved towards stabilization. Available data indicate that Nigerian economy has remained stagnated despite many consistent development plans from successive government to tackle our various economic challenges. These policies have not yielded the desired results and has only lopsidedness in the Nigeria economy though mostly traced the deplorable state to the operation of mono-economy (oil dependent) and neglect of other sectors such as agriculture, solid minerals, tourism and hospitality, unfriendly business environment, ethnics bias, lack of comprehensive policy, weak institutions, poor economic management, over reliance on foreign aids and planning and strategy without data, underdeveloped human capital, language problems and many others as the main causes of Nigeria's economic instability. These problems have led Nigerians to indeterminate expectations and unrealized dreams as we continue to wallow in poverty with low access to quality health, education and employment.

Mass media and COVID-19 emotional language experience

Apuke (2020) describes the mass media as a powerful force that shapes how we experience the world and ourselves. They allocate importance to an issue which in turn determines the reactions of people to it. In other words, the media determines what should be important in the society through their style of coverage and rendition. This assumption is supported by evidence in literature (Gever & Coleman 2017, Zhou 2008, Okoro & Odomelam 2013, Nwafor & Ogbodo 2015, Yanga & Ishak 2012). He hinged his work on the agenda setting theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw that asserts that there is a significant relationship between media report and peoples ranking of public issues as evidenced in the prominence given to the report through headlines, display, pictures, layout in newspapers, timing on radios and televisions which show the powerful influence of the mass media reportage in the society. The role of the mass media in the nations growth and development cannot be underestimated. The media have contributed immensely and patriotically to the economic stability of Nigeria. Though, the health challenge of COVID-19 has become a frightening episode for Nigeria and her citizens. The mass media serve as a source of health information during the heat period of the pandemic and have helped to shape the way people act and react towards the Covid 19 issues. The mass media have created awareness and mobilize cooperation with authorities to fight against pandemic. It has influenced the attitudes of the public towards the disease and enhanced their self-practising awareness with a view to changing people's behaviour and adhering to necessary precautions to reduce the spread of the virus. It informs of the outbreak and its severity on the people and the society. However, the media average of COVID-19 pandemic evoked a lot of emotions.

Some news items are alarming and induce panic in the mind of the patient and the general public. However, some stories or news are rendered on a broader perspectives and reassuring language. Therefore, downsizing the risk involved with the disease. For example: reassuring headlines like COVID-19 is not a death sentence” ‘COVID-19 can be managed and prevented”, ‘COVID-19 is treatable” are soothing to the mind as against “More Nigerians to die of COVID-19 Complications”. “Lagos recorded the highest number of death rates of COVID-19 today”. COVID-19 may wipe out this generation” while phrases like ‘deadly’, ‘extremely contagious,’ ‘killer virus’ are not persuasive but rather frustrating, alarming and could only lead to chronic stress, disorders, anxiety, despair, depression, cognitive problems, personality change that may have dire consequences on the health of the victims and the general public. Abayomi (2020) submits that misinformation from the media can predispose people to serious psychopathology and increase global stress and mental health burden if the emotional language being used is not checked

Non-verbal cues and new communication etiquettes: a change in communication culture and practice

Non-verbal communication refers to a form of communication without the use of words. (Amusa 2020). It includes the use of gestures, body languages, paralinguistic cues, facial expressions, eye contacts, touches, vocal nuances, dressing: all for communication purposes. Recent studies and observations have shown that the new pandemic has altered the usual traditional form of communication and brought about new etiquettes. Jones (2020) opines that the virus has created and built a new set of norms in the young and the old people. Coronavirus has provided alternatives to our old practices of greetings, exchanging pleasantries, gestures that are entertainment in nature, religious worship etc. For instance, the idea of expressing pleasantries by handshake in greeting has been substituted with elbow bumps. Social distance has limited global social relation which is the bedrock of the human society. Using face mask has denied the usual face to face interaction mechanism and served to disrupt the information flow of message as against when the face mask is not used as we were forced to look elsewhere for attention and interest with face mask on as a result of COVID-19 protocols and measures to curb the spread. The religious worship styles have been forcefully changed as a result of Covid 19 observance of guidelines and rules. For instance, the Muslims adherents were used to observing their prayers closely but now they have to give social distance its pride of place to avoid COVID-19 (<https://news.temple.edu>) news.com

Methodology.

Research Design

A quantitative analysis was done to study the four National Newspaper reports on Covid-19 pandemic. The selected papers are The Guardian, The Punch, The Sun, and Nigerian Tribune. They were chosen because of their national outreach and readership strength. They were mostly within the South Western part of the country. The coverage period was from April, 2020- June, 2020. The period was chosen as this appeared to be the heat period of the pandemic. The search involved eighty online articles and stories from the four major national newspapers. They were used as samples for the study. Oberiri, (2020) in his previous study on Nigerian newspapers report on Covid 19 categorised the tones of the news coverage into three types; which are alarming, neutral, and reassuring. He described an item of news to be alarming when it is relayed in terms of the risk involved. Such is done by giving updates on the number of casualties or fatalities, hospitalization, quarantines, etc. On the hand, a news is reassuring when the risk involved is downgraded to restore hope to the victims and the general public through the news coverage or caption. A neutral tone is used in a broader perspective or when a reporter is rather undecided.

Data Analysis

Apart from this paper being historic, the authors employ the use of descriptive statistics using frequencies and percentages to describe the sampled characteristics of the data collected from the newspaper to allow for a

meaningful understanding of the relationship between language and economic stability. The data collected were also subjected to Anova and Chi-square, set at 00.5 significance level as the illustrated in the table set below.

RQ1: What are the expected roles and functions of language and communication on the economic stability of Nigeria during the pandemic outbreak?

RQ2: What is the dominant tone frequently used by the media newspapers during the coverage of Covid 19 pandemic?

Media Tone

Newspaper	Neutral (%)	Reassuring (%)	Alarming (%)	Combined Total (%)
The Guardian	6 (5.8)	13 (14.8)	60 (79.2)	81 (100)
The Punch	4 (6.0)	11 (16.2)	76 (82.1)	97 (100)
The Sun	7 (6.2)	12 (10.5)	82 (84.6)	76 (100)
Nigerian Tribune	5 (5.8)	10 (10.1)	64 (85.3)	90 (100)
Total	22 (6.0)	46 (12.9)	282 (82.8)	344 (100)

The table demonstrates the dominant tone used in the coverage of Covid-19 Nigeria. Results indicate that most of the stories on Covid-19 had an alarming tone ($n = 282$; 82.8%) $m = 4.72$, $S D = 1.78$ signifying no significant difference across media usage of the tone ($f(2, 344) = 15.21$, $P < 0.05$, overall, only a few stories ($n = 46$, 12.9%) $m = 2.75$, $S.D = 1.73$ were reassuring ($n = 22$, 6.0%) $m = 2.32$, $S.D = 1.34$.

Discussion

Our study investigated the roles of language and communication in achieving economic stability during Covid-19 in Nigeria with a special attention on the functions and importance assigned to language and communication particularly in an economically-disorderly nation we find ourselves. Human beings and the type of language they speak in their day to day communication remain the epicenter of economic development. The authors examined the effect of the media tone used during the pandemic and the implication of their use on the general public. By implication, it could be deduced that the Nigerian media showcased their interest on the virus with the use of headlines and stories that evoked danger or threat instead of persuasive, reformative and therapeutic ones to guide the public and Covid-19 victims. Only very few of the stories were reassuring, pleasant, comforting and suggesting that Covid-19 is a treatable disease that can be effectively managed if the measures and other conditions set are strictly followed. Though, an alarming tone can be used to create awareness of the virus, but justifiable efforts should be made to give priority to preventive measures and refrain from news that may cause prolonged emotional distress of the victims as well as to discourage public health anxiety syndrome among the would- be victims of Covid 19 and the general public.

Conclusion

We conclude that language and communication no doubt, has a lot of roles to play in ensuring economic stability for Nigeria. Moreso, nothing can be done out of language and communication isolation. While we contend that

the Nigerian media industry had created awareness and responded responsibly, the idea of using alarming media tone which otherwise suggests panic reporting needs to be jettisoned for sustainable economic stability. For any nation to achieve economic greatness, the human development is a sine-qua-non that must be nurtured through effective language and communication. This study has shown that the prevalent wave of COVID-19 requires strategic planning through an effective use of language and communication which are persuasive and reformative in nature

Recommendations

The health and economic challenges in Nigeria have assumed a frightening dimension for the government and her teeming population. This paper therefore advances the following recommendations in order to enhance economic and health stability through the appropriate use of language and communication.

Nigerians, especially the mass media, the news reporters, special media users, and the government agencies should cultivate the habit of employing persuasive, reformative and positive language without negative polarity to express opinions, create awareness during and after the pandemic. They should refrain from panic-induced report and stories to avoid creating unnecessary fear that may destabilize the public and create more chaos, stress and anxiety.

Government should continue efforts at the early detection, identification and tracing strategies of the virus as well as continue to provide emergency reliefs such as food distributions, subsidized transportation, medical equipment and support for public health services. The government should ensure the provision of alternative jobs or employment opportunities to those who had lost their jobs as a result of the societal invasion of COVID-19 virus.

Moreover, government should tighten the food chain security to enhance mass development of crop production, and ensure uninterrupted continuity of agricultural supplies to cities, villages and the vulnerable groups.

On the economic front, though government has opened all Nigerian borders to ensure free flow of goods and services, they should continue to increase their intelligence and vigilant services on immigrants while the fourteen-days quarantine period should be maintained to forestall community transmission.

In the long term, government needs to expedite actions on diversification of our national economy from oil to agriculture and other formal and informal sectors and stop paying lip services to frequent un-implemented policies to enhance our nation's economic stability.

Lastly, all stakeholders, both in the health and economic sectors should understand the need for appropriate use of language for the growth and development of our socio-political and economic activities in order to maintain and protect the hard-earned peaceful co-existence of th

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