
Lexico-stylistic analysis of Facebook postings on COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract: COVID-19 has been a global menace, hence a lot of awareness is being created in order to defeat the global menace and this awareness is carried out through language. Previous studies exist on lexico-stylistic analysis and the most related one to the present study is the stylistic analysis of a selected election campaign speech of President Goodluck Jonathan. The study looked at the use of words in utterances and their effect in the speech from the lexical, figure of speech, cohesion and context categories perspectives. This current study differs from the previous study because it is not about an election campaign speech but rather it is centred on the role of language in fighting COVID-19 by examining Facebook postings through a lexico-stylistic approach. The study is anchored on the Linguistic and Stylistic Categories by Leech and Short. The survey design was used for the study and data for the study were collected by extracting postings on COVID-19 from the Facebook and this was limited to selected Facebook posts of June and July, 2021 due to time and financial constraints. The findings of the study show that COVID-19 postings on the Facebook are majorly characterised by simple words or words without affixation. They also show that medical registers, figures of speech and collocations are featured in the Facebook postings on COVID-19.

Keywords: Applied linguistics, COVID-19, Facebook, Language, Lexico-stylistic

Biographical notes: Torkuma Tyonande Damkor obtained BA in Linguistics and MA in Linguistics. He is, presently, doing an academic research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of PhD in Linguistics at Benue State University, Makurdi-Nigeria. He specialises in Morphology and Syntax and his areas of interest are: Phonology, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Socio-linguistics. He has been teaching English Language in Nigerian Secondary Schools since 2009. Presently, he teaches English Language at St John Bosco Secondary School, Doma, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. He has published a lot of papers in local and international journals.

1. Introduction

Language is the medium through which human beings communicate with one another. Hence, we would say that language is an essential feature of the society in which human beings live. Removing language from the society will amount to bringing the existence of humanity to an end. Lexico-stylistics is the link between lexicology and stylistics. Darbyshire (Abioye & Ajiboye, 2014) states that the concern of lexicology is to examine the main units of language that have referential meaning. Lexis is considered to a large extent as the collection of words in a given language but it could mean something larger than just this. Lexis could refer to a fixed group of words that are traditionally considered to be words which writers use in a string in order to convey the message. Stylistics, which is combined with lexicology in this study, is the study of choice of language with reference to a particular context or situation.

The study entitled 'Lexico-stylistic analysis of Facebook postings on COVID-19 pandemic' is under the domain of Applied Linguistics. Applied linguistics is concerned with using the knowledge of language to solve (language-related) problems in the society. COVID-19 has dwindled the global economies. This implies that Nigeria is not an exception because her citizens have suffered the adverse effects of COVID-19. The study would not have been carried out at a time better than this because COVID-19 is still a menace to Nigerians, hence the study intends to do a Lexico-stylistic analysis of the Facebook postings on the pandemic.

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Owing to the pervasiveness of COVID-19, social media can also help to fight the global menace. Hence, it is imperative to examine the available social media platform which can facilitate the spread of information on the war against COVID-19 in Nigeria. Despite the existing digital gap, Internet records a wider coverage day in day out in Nigeria, that is to say a large number of Nigerians use the Internet. In 2020, about 98.39 million were Internet users, and 29.3 million were social network users. Of that number, 20.5 million were active on Facebook. Nigerians make use of the social media every day, 75% on Instagram, 85% on WhatsApp, 53% on YouTube, and 54% on Facebook Messenger (Udodiong, 2020).

Previous studies were carried out on lexical analysis and stylistic analysis which are reviewed in the present study. The most related previous study to the present work is the stylistic analysis of a selected election campaign speech of President Goodluck Jonathan (Balogun, 2011). Her study looked at the use of words and utterances and their effect in the speech based on word, non-literal language, relationship between words and phrases and context using the Linguistic and Stylistic Categories by Leech and Short (2007). However, the previous study was carried out on a campaign speech. Also, none of the reviewed previous works was a lexico-stylistic analysis of the Facebook postings on COVID-19 since COVID-19 can be relatively considered as a recent pandemic that has struck Nigerians.

The aim of the present study is to examine the language of Facebook postings in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and its objectives are to: examine the dominant types of lexical items featuring the selected Facebook postings about COVID-19; discover the cognitive relationship that exists among the items used in Facebook postings on COVID-19; analyse the stylistic effect of the lexical items and their contribution to the overall comprehension of the postings.

The study is anchored on the Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework by Leech and Short (Leech & Short, 2007). Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework is a theory that categorises and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to examine their functional roles and meanings in texts. The framework recognises lexical items, grammatical items, figures of speech, relationship between words and phrases and contextual use in the analysis of texts. Hence, the theory enabled the researcher to categorise the words employed in the Facebook postings on COVID-19 into various classes in terms of grammatical units, figurative language and semantic implications.

2. Literature review

Literature review in the study is centered on the previous studies on lexico-stylistic analysis. Balogun (2011) conducted stylistic analysis of a selected election campaign speech of President Goodluck Jonathan. Her study examined the use of words and utterances and their effect in the speech from the lexical, figure of speech, cohesion and context categories using the Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework by Leech and Short (2007). The analysis of lexical items in the speech indicated that Goodluck expressed his grievance for the deceased predecessor and promised a brighter future if he was voted into power as the President of the country. The study was carried out from the stylistic perspective and also centred on an election campaign speech.

Abioye and Ajiboye (2014) carried out a lexico-stylistic analysis of Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* using the methodological approach that lays emphasis on lexemes. The findings showed that the choice of words in *Yellow-Yellow* reflected a bond between the language in use and the environment in which it is used. Hence, the use of language in the text is characterised by the Nigerian style of using English. Despite the relevance of this study to the society, it was not on Facebook postings about COVID-19 pandemic.

Adamu-Soye, Shuaibu and Sharndama (2013) conducted an analysis of the lexical features of the language used by various columnists in Nigerian Newspapers to find out how the columnists select words to meet the needs of the mass audience. The findings showed that columnists use simple words in conveying their messages. The results also showed that columnists choose emotive nouns in order to work on the emotions of the reader and get an immediate response. The study concluded that the choice of words by the columnists depends on the topic and individual writer's experience. However, the previous study was not meant to examine Facebook postings on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sharndama and Mohammed (2013) analysed selected campaign posters in Yola Metropolis of Adamawa State of Nigeria using Crystal and Davy's (1985) Linguistic Stylistic Model of analysis. The results showed that campaign posters which are designed to win the support of the prospective voters for a political candidate vary in terms of appearance and content. According to the study, political campaign posters are important pictorial means of conveying messages in order to get votes during the elections. However, the study was not concerned with the role of language in fighting COVID-19.

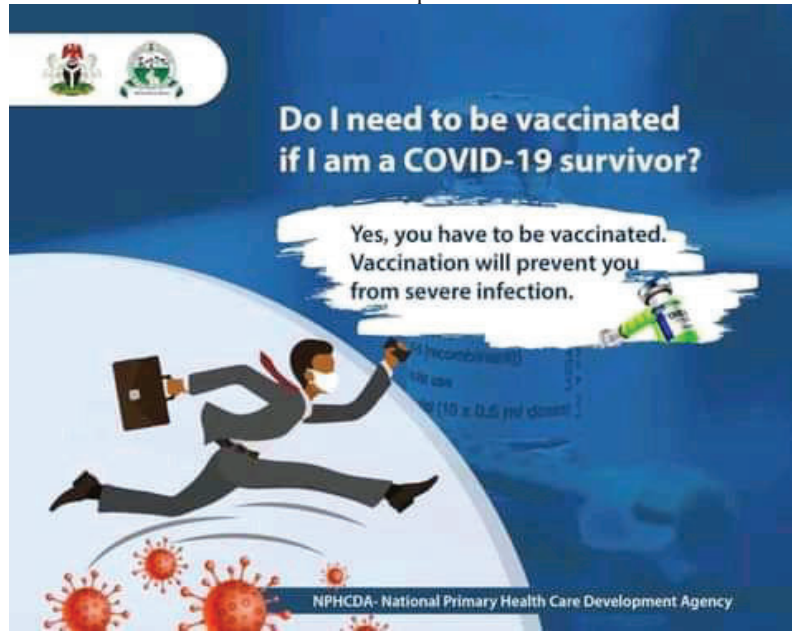
3. Research methodology

The survey design was used to obtain data for the study and the data were collected by extracting postings by National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on COVID-19 from the Facebook. The selection of the Facebook postings was limited to Facebook posts of June and July, 2021 due to time and financial constraints. Analysis of the data was done based on the objectives of the study.

4. Finding and discussions

Analysis of the data is based on the objectives of the study, therefore it covers the shape, category and meaning of words and the style employed in using the lexemes in the selected COVID-19 postings.

Excerpt 1



June, 2021 Post by NCDC.

Analysis

Excerpt 1 is dominated by monosyllabic words such as ‘do, I, need, if, am, et cetera’ however, there are also disyllabic words; for example, ‘COVID, prevent, severe’ as well as polysyllabic words such as ‘survivor, vaccinated’. Morphologically, ‘vaccinated and vaccination’ used in the excerpt share the same base ‘vaccinate’. Medical registers such as ‘vaccinated, vaccination, infection, COVID-19’ are featured in the excerpt. The rhetorical question: ‘Do you want to be vaccinated’ is employed to draw the attention of Nigerians to taking COVID-19. The above examples reflect the lexical class, grammatical class, use of figures of speech and contextual use of language in Excerpt 1. The study confirms Leech and Short’s idea that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework categorises and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to examine their functional roles and meanings in texts by finding out the classes of words used in the post, their components and even the non-literal use of language.

Excerpt 2

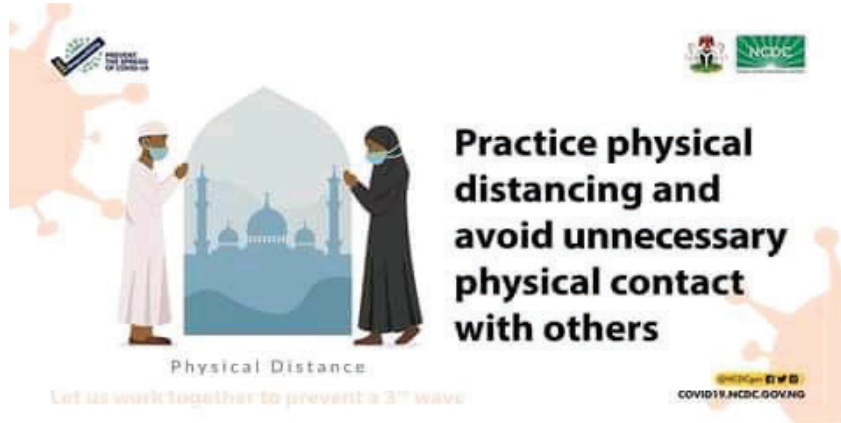


June, 2021 Post on Facebook by NCDC

Analysis

In Excerpt 2, simple words such as ‘stay, safe, defeat, dominate, wear, and mask’ dominate in the post. There is an instance of alliteration in ‘stay and safe’ where ‘s’ alliterates. A lot of simple words such as ‘wear, mask, mouth, nose’ et cetera are featured in the posts so that even an average reader of English can understand the message. The discovery of the study that some words alliterate in the post and the identification of the simple words in the post confirm Leech and Short’s idea that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework categorises and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to examine their functional roles and meanings.

Excerpt 3



June, 2021 Post by NCDC

Analysis

Excerpt 3 shows that simple words such as ‘practice, physical, and, avoid, word, others’ have been employed in creating awareness about the fight against COVID-19. The data portray that the language for fighting COVID-19 is direct and is devoid of figurative expressions. Hence, any literate person can read the posts and understand what they mean, and if willing to protect their life, they will act accordingly. Disyllabic words such as ‘avoid, practice, contact, others’ are used in the COVID-19 post on Facebook which is meant for fighting COVID-19 in Nigeria. The use of ‘physical’ twice in the post is an aspect of repetition. The repetition is meant to lay emphasis on the need of Nigerians to avoid staying close to each other. The study confirms Leech and Short’s idea that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework identifies, describes and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to assess their functional roles and meanings in texts by finding out the classes of words used in the post, their components and even the pictorial representation of the expected physical distancing among Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Excerpt 4



July, 2021 Post by NCDC

Analysis

In Excerpt 4, there is an instance of repetition in the post because the lexeme ‘virus’ is repeated. The awareness message is characterised by monosyllabic words such as ‘as, the, who, are, with, and move. There are also disyllabic words in the awareness campaign message, for example, people, avoid, around. The polysyllabic words in the excerpt include unnecessary, infected et cetera. Apart from ‘virus and infected’ words used in the excerpt are not medical jargons. The diction of the post is simple, hence, the message can be easily understood. The phrase ‘...the virus spreads as people who are infected with the virus move around’ is an instance of imagery, creating the picture of how COVID-19 is spread in the society. In the post, ‘virus’ collocates with ‘spreads’, ‘unnecessary’ collocates with ‘travel’. The above given instances of how language is used in the text confirm that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework identifies, describes and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to assess their functional roles and meanings in texts by finding out the classes of words used in the post and their components.

Excerpt 5

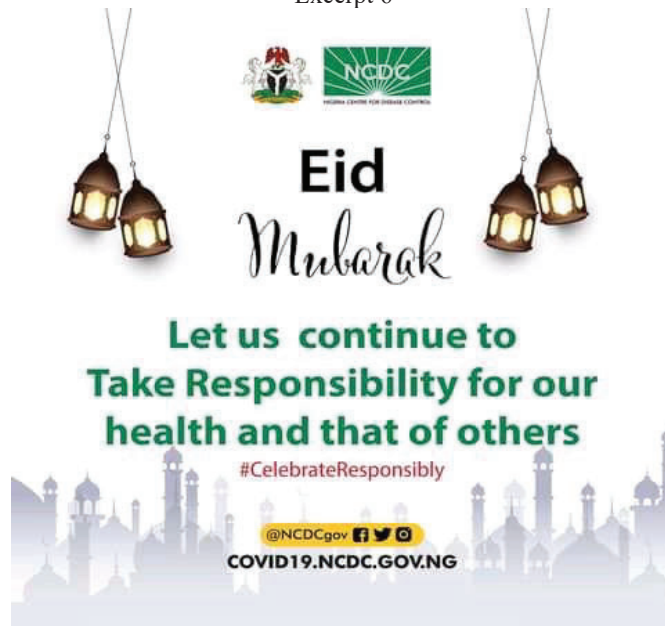


July, 2021 post by NCDC

Analysis

Instances of collocation are seen in Excerpt 5 as in ‘wear’ and ‘mask’, ‘prevents’ and ‘transmission’. Words of various classes such as wear ‘verb’, mask ‘noun’ in ‘preposition’, the ‘article’ et cetera are featured in the post. Words in the above excerpt are carrying denotative meanings because no extended meanings are attached to their usage in the post. There are medical registers in the post as ‘mask, transmission, virus and prevents’. Some words in the post feature affixation, for example, transmission is derived from transmit by attaching the suffix ‘sion’ while prevents is inflected with {-s} to show number in agreement with its subject ‘this’ and spaces is inflected with plural marker {-s} which indicates two or more but not one. The study confirms Leech and Short’s idea that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework categorises and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to examine their functional roles and meanings in texts by finding out the classes of words used in the post and their components.

Excerpt 6



July, 2021 by NCDC

Analysis

In Excerpt 6, the word ‘responsibility’ in the post is characterised by suffixation, in fact, it is a derivative of ‘responsible’ while ‘others’ is inflected with {-s} to mark plurality. The other words are not affixed, for example; let, us, continue, to, health, and, that, of et cetera. The expression ‘let us continue to take responsibility for our health and that of others’ is an instance of metaphor, and it is appealing to Nigerians to observe the protocol meant for fighting COVID-19 pandemic. The study confirms Leech and Short’s idea that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework categorises and places linguistic items in the appropriate levels in order to examine their functional roles and meanings in texts by finding out the classes of words used in the post such as ‘responsibility’ being a noun derived from the adjective ‘responsible’, lexical components such as words having one or more morphemes, for example, ‘other + {-s}, responsible + {-lity}’ and figurative use of language as in the metaphor ‘let us continue to take responsibility for our health and that of others’.

Excerpt 7

Proper use of face masks



July, 2021 Post by NCDC.

The above post is characterised by sentences which begin with verbs. Verbs such as ‘do, wash, dispose, hold’ introduce the sentences in the post. The messages are conveyed using simple words such as wear, close, anyone, nose, face mask, go, hands, mouth, ear among others. So many monosyllabic words are used in the post which include wear, mask, nose, go, catch et cetera. The study corroborates Leech and Short’s idea that Linguistic and Stylistic Categories Framework accounts for the different classes of words which are combined as in wear ‘verb’, mask ‘noun’, nose ‘noun’, go ‘verb’, catch ‘verb’, not ‘adverb’, a ‘article’ et cetera to convey a message based on diction and context.

5. Conclusion

The relationship between lexicology and stylistics is demonstrated in the study. Through the analysis, the study demonstrates that COVID-19 postings on the Facebook are majorly characterised by simple words or words without affixation. It also shows that medical registers are featured in COVID-19 postings on the Facebook. On the part of figures of speech, alliterations and repetitions are discovered in the postings, pictorial creation of awareness, and collocations are observed in the postings. On the whole, the language of Facebook postings on COVID-19 is simple, hence messages conveyed through the postings can be easily understood even by average readers of English.

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