

A PRAGMATICS ANALYSIS OF COVID 19 ADVERTS BY NCDC**Kanu, Chika Mercy****Department of English, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam
Campus, Anambra State, Nigeria***Email: kanuchikamercy@gmail.com***ABSTRACT**

This work investigates the COVID-19 adverts by NCDC. The challenges of ensuring that different layers of meaning are well enacted in the written text have motivated this present study. This study is aimed at interrogating how COVID-19 advertisements by NCDC are framed. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act, as well as the level of abstraction, vocabulary, and how it affected the readability of NCDC COVID-19 adverts. The theoretical framework is anchored on Austin, J.L Speech Act Theory. The textual data for this study were drawn from adverts published on the NCDC website: www.covid19.ncdc.gov.ng. The choice of these adverts was based on the simplicity of the speech acts embedded in the adverts. It was discovered that NCDC adverts used multimodal speech acts which include texts, icons, and symbols to enact meaning in their campaign against the spread of COVID-19. It was also discovered that short sentences in the framing of the advertisement make the message apt and straight to the point. It was also discovered that some of the adverts were very ambiguous, misleading, and illogically framed.

Keywords: Pragmatics, advertisement, speech acts, locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act, readability, linguistic framing, multimodality, miscommunication, communication gap.

INTRODUCTION

Communicative awareness is deemed successful when it transmit straight forward, easily understandable messages that resonate with target audience. The COVID-19 pandemic is accompanied by great rumors, a spread of disinformation and misinformation making it difficult to find accurate life-saving information. Accurate information about COVID-19 such as on hygiene, physical distance, quarantine and prevention must reach everyone, including indigenous people and language users. As COVID19 spreads to vulnerable countries with high levels of poverty and malnutrition and other disadvantages affecting indigenous people, it is critical to join efforts and cooperate closely to ensure the sharing of correct life-saving information and resources about COVID-19 in lesser-used, minority and indigenous languages. Languages matter during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they are intrinsic part of human rights and fundamental freedoms of their users, including access to accurate life-saving information and healthcare. As a result of misinformation and false dissemination of information concerning the pandemic, so many departments for awareness creation came up with informative and motivational slogans These slogans and messages appear ambiguous, vague and difficult to interpret and the linguistic means to break down these languages contextually using feasible linguistic theories like pragmatics and speech act to vividly convey the messages on advertisements to the grass-root viewers and listener is yet to achieve full materialization. This contributed greatly to the total disbelief among great number of people as to the existence of the pandemic.

Pragmatics is the basis for all language interactions and contact. It is a key feature to the understanding of language and the responses that follow. Pragmatics helps with the understanding of intention and meaning. Thomas (2017) has considered pragmatics as the negotiation of meaning

between speaker and listener, the context of the utterance and the potential meaning of an utterance.

Advertising is referred to as a form of discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. Advertisements are social communications, that are intended to inform and, in many instances, to persuade recipients to adopt a certain attitude or behavioral disposition. These adverts on COVID 19 by NCDC serve as source of data for this work

COVID 19 has been a scourge the global world has felt deeply that it made headlines and breaking news in various mass media outlets (both print and online). All manners of media are employed as effective means of global enlightenment and information dissemination. NCDC adopted so many means of mass sensitization as one of the ways to combat the pandemic: audio-visual, jingles, print media reportage, flyers, use of local health workers, even town criers. However, there is a crack between the language of these media and that of the viewers or listeners evident in incessant spread of the virus due to misinformation and inability to decode what is advertised. In affirmation, media frames, metaphor, and lexical choices that are ambiguous and terms that are new to the viewers or listeners that demand contextual investigation as most people find it difficult to believe the existence of the virus till date because of adequate factual information. For instance, many people, especially the illiterate and semi-literate, find it difficult to differentiate between isolation and quarantine, respirator and ventilator; asymptomatic and symptomatic; coronavirus and Chinese virus; vaccine and booster; difficult concepts like flattening the curve, epicenter etc.

The objective of this study is to undertake a pragmatic analysis of COVID 19 advertisement, interpret and analyze the message as found in the adverts and to classify the messages on the advert into their respective illocutionary act and their resultant perlocutionary act .

Review of Related Scholarship

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is called the logic of conversation (Grice 1975 cited by Omera-Okeke 2015). Pragmatics examines the process of constructing meaning and how speakers convey implied meaning that transcends the literal interpretation of their words within a given context. (Yule 1996 as quoted by Omera-Okeke 2015), defines pragmatics as the study of intended speaker meaning. This work hinges on pragmatic to unveil the real meanings and messages conveyed contextually in the NCDC adverts. The intended meanings behind the adverts under reviews will be exposed to curb the trouble of misinformation.

COVID 19 and Language

Massive amounts of information and data are being released and shared at a scale that has never been seen before. In the midst of that, new lexicons are tucked into a trend among language users. Many new lexicons related to the COVID-19 pandemic have sprung up and circulated globally. The lexicons are used to describe different situations. However, if the lexicons are understood and interpreted differently, the meaning of the lexicons will be incorrect. Therefore, it is important that language users well understand the new lexicons. The forms of new lexicons related to COVID-19 include acronyms, abbreviations, synonyms, English terms, etc, as confirmed by the results of Oktavia (2020), revealing the variety of language terms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some examples of popular new lexicons are lockdown, swab test, rapid test, social distancing, physical distancing, suspect, isolation, nose mask, etc.

COVID19 Advertisement

Civico (2021) affirms the fact that there were great unguided informative adverts during the heat of COVID19 which led to misinformation or lack of information about the crisis due to language barriers; misinformation or lack of general information due to the crisis and language barriers;

overall reduction in the provision of general services (including language services) due to the crisis. There was information dissemination about the health care situation (e.g. about the coronavirus, the vaccines, social distancing rules) and other collateral information like travel restrictions and closure of borders. Language and advertising have a significant overlap as language plays a crucial role in creating effective advertisements.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on speech act theory. The Speech Act theory as postulated by J.L Austin claims that all utterances perform a specific act in addition to whatever they mean (Mey, 2009). To this end, he introduced a three-fold distinction to speech act according to Huany (2009) including:

- a. Locutionary act: the production of a meaning linguistic expression
- b. Illocutionary act: the action intended to be performed by a speaker in uttering a linguistic expression under the conventional force associated with it either explicitly or implicitly.
- c. Perlocutionary act: this brings about consequences or effects on the audience through the uttering of a linguistic expression.

From the foregoing, the locutionary act is an utterance, the illocution is the message or the social function the speaker intends to perform in a text while the perlocutionary act is the intended or the actual effect of the utterance on the addressee or the receiver of the message.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were drawn from adverts published on the NCDC website: www.covid19.ncdc.gov.ng. The sampling techniques adopted by the researcher is purposive sampling. This choice was made so as to carefully choose texts that provided the best information. A qualitative approach was used in this paper and the researcher uses speech act, particularly illocutionary act and perlocutionary acts are employed to show the actions performed by each data excerpt and effect. Textual data were analyzed following the theoretical framework adopted for this study.

Data presentation and analysis

The researcher considered five data. They are analyzed in a tabular form to show their pragmatics interpretation and the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts analysis.

1. Advert by NCDC

S/N	Data ncdc.gov.ng(2019)	Pragmatic Interpretation	illocutionary and perlocutionary act analysis
1	Corona virus	Killer-disease, a threat	Threatening is the illocutionary act and the viewers are threatened to take the message serious
2	Prevent Covid-19 spread	A declarative sentence thus commanding the audience in this context	Has illocutionary act of commanding and instructing. Viewers are commanded and instructed as effect.
3	Wash hands with soap under running water or use alcohol-base sanitizer if water is not available.	A guide to prevent the spread of Covid-19; directives on how to do that; washing hands with soap under running	It has illocutionary act of instructing, directing and educating. The viewers are instructed, directed and educated perlocutionary act.

		water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.	
4	NCDC	Stands for the advertisers in this context.	Has illocutionary act of informing the viewers about the speaker. Has perlocutionary act of been informed.
5	Image of pre-hand washing and after hand washing and exemplifying water with liquid soap	Establishes the practical step in hand-washing.	Has illocutionary act of instructing and directing. The viewers are informed and directed - perlocutionary act.

2. Advert NCDC

S/N	Data ncdc.gov.ng(2019)	Pragmatic interpretation	Illocutionary and perlocutionary act analysis
1	NCDC	Stands for the advertisers in the context	Has illocutionary act of informing the viewers. Has Perlocutionary act of been informed
2	Corona-virus (Covid-19)	Killer disease: threat	Has illocutionary act of threatening. The viewers are threatened: perlocutionary act
3	Prevent Covid-19 spread	It's a declarative sentence thus commanding the viewers in this context	Has illocutionary act of commanding the viewers. Viewers are commanded - perlocutionary act
4	Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, disposed of the used tissue	A guide to prevent the spread of covid-19, a directive on how to do that: cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and dispose of it instantly	Has illocutionary act of instructing, directing and educating. Has perlocutionary act of been instructed, directed and educated.
5	Image to show how to cover your nose and use tissue while coughing/sneezing	Establishes the practical steps to cover your nose and mouth during coughing and sneezing and dispose of used tissue paper - not demonstrated: a lapse.	Has illocutionary act of instructing and directing. Has perlocutionary act of been instructed and directed.

3. Covid-19 advert by NCDC

S/N	Data	Pragmatic analysis	illocutionary and perlocutionary act analysis
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1	NCDC	Stands for the advertisers in the context	Has illocutionary act of informing the viewers. Has Perlocutionary act of been informed
2	Did you know? with a bright electric bulb beside	Arousal interrogation. Tells the viewers there is something they need to know	Has illocutionary act of interrogating and attracting. Viewers are interrogated and attracted - perlocution
3	Covid-19 affects people differently depending on age and underlying health status .	Assentation of the fact that age matters in covid-19 effects; and health status	Has illocutionary act of asserting, informing and educating. The viewers are informed educated and the point is asserted
4	Images of five humans of different ages from a crawling baby to and old man.	Practical demonstration of age variation in covid-19 analysis, severity and effects.	Has illocutionary act of informing and educating. Has perlocutionary act of been informed and been educated
5	Take responsibility	Commanding; obliging the viewers	Has illocutionary act of instructing, and viewers are instructed - perlocutionary act
6	Wear your face mask	Obliging the viewers to wear face mask	Has illocutionary act of instructing; the viewers are instructed --perlocutionary act
7	Observe physical distancing	Obliging viewers to observe social distance	Has illocutionary act of instructing ; the viewers are instructed
8	Wash your hands frequently	Obliging viewers to wash their hands frequently	Has illocutionary act of instructing; the viewers are instructed

4. Covid-19 advert by NCDC

S/N	Data ncdc.gov.ng(2019)	Pragmatic analysis	illocutionary and perlocutionary act analysis	Function performed
1	NCDC	Stands for the advertisers in this context	Has illocutionary act of informing the viewers. Has Perbcutionary act of been informed	Functions to authenticate the message content
2	Vaccines are one of the best tools we have to improve health and well-being around the world.	Promoting the need to be vaccinated	Has illocutionary act of encouraging and motivating viewers; viewers are motivated, encouraged and persuaded -pelocutionary act	Functions to promote covid-19 vaccine; to encourage people to take it.
3	World immunization week	To get the people prepared for covid-19 immunization	Has illocutionary act of informing and alerting. Viewers are informed and alerted -perlocutionary act	To inform people the time and date of immunization

4	Image of a hand injecting vaccine that prevents against covid-19. Tetanus, yellow fever, mumps Rubella, polio, Diphtheria, measles tuberculosis and meningitis	A motivational assertion that the vaccine is multipurpose	Has illocutionary act of persuading, convincing and enticing. The viewers are persuaded, convinced and enticed as many have taken the vaccine	Functions to convince and pressure the people to be vaccinated.
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5. Covid-19 advert by NCDC

S/N	Data Ncdc.gov.ng(2019)	Pragmatic analysis	illocutionary and perlocutionary act analysis
1	What are severe complications from this virus	Educative question to sensitize the people	Has illocutionary act of interrogating and arousing. The viewers are interrogated and aroused to be educated perlocutionary act
2	Most patients will experience mild symptoms, severe illness is mostly experienced in the elderly and those with chronic conditions.	Not everybody suffers severe symptoms but the elderly	Has illocutionary act of educating, informing and advising. viewers are educated, informed and advised - perlocutionary act.
3	Image of a woman at the left and man at the right standing and sitting respectively; separated by thermometer indicating fever	Practical display of how the virus could be transmitted	Has illocutionary act of educating and informing. The viewers are educated and informed - perlocutionary act
4	Sneezing/coughing under the woman to show her action	The virus is transmitted through sneezing and coughing	Has illocutionary act of informing and educating. Has perlocutionary act of been informed and been educated.
5	Fever, just below the thermometer reading 39 instead of 37 normal body temperature.	Infected people suffer severe fever.	Has illocutionary act of informing and educating. The viewers are informed and educated - perlocutionary act.
6	Breathing, comes beneath the man breathing	The virus is transmitted through breathing too.	Has illocutionary act of informing and educating. The viewers are informed and educated – perlocutionary act.
7	Take responsibility: in two places	Obliges the viewers to be active and responsible	Has illocutionary act of directing and instructing. Viewers are directed and motivated -perlocutionary act
8	Prevent the spread of covid-19	Obliging the viewers to prevent the virus from Spreading	Has illocutionary act of instructing and obliging. The viewers are instructed and obliged - perlocutionary act
9	NCDC	Stands for the advertisers	Has illocutionary act of informing. Has

perlocutionary act of been
informed

Discussion of Finding

The findings of this study as shown in data 1-5 reveals that NCDC adverts used multimodal speech acts which include texts, icons, and symbols to enact meaning in their campaign against the spread of COVID-19. It was also discovered that short sentences in the framing of the advertisement make the message apt and straight to the point. Also there is consistent repetition of words and phrase to show how important they are. The researcher also discovered that some of the adverts were very ambiguous, misleading, and illogically framed, making people start doubting the existence of the disease.

CONCLUSION

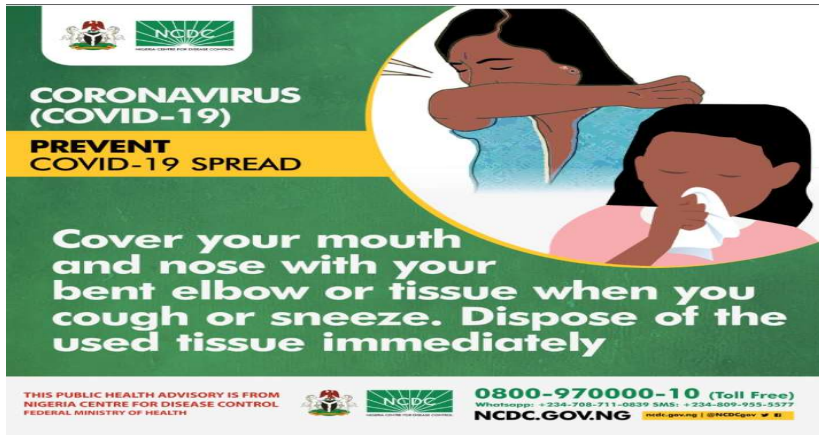
Covid-19 is indeed a dreaded disease that its effect will never be forgotten in history. The language-use by NCDC in relation to covid-19 prevention, causes and treatment is at average but clear, sufficient and concise enough to halt the pandemic from spreading further. The major challenge is the fact the adverts are not informative enough; the advertisers are not sincere enough to win the hearts of the masses which reduces covid-19 to mere conspiracy theory as many in Nigeria find it difficult to believe the existence of the pandemic due to the fact that information disseminated contradicts reality! The researcher thus calls on NCDC and the government to be honest, straight-forward and sincere with the people in terms of information dissemination with regards to the virus.

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Appendices



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)
PREVENT COVID-19 SPREAD

Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of the used tissue immediately

THIS PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY IS FROM NIGERIA CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH

0800-970000-10 (Toll Free)
Whatsapp: +234-708-711-0839 SMS: +234-809-955-5577
NCDC.GOV.NG ncdc.gov.ng | @NCDGov

The poster features the NCDC logo and a central illustration of a woman coughing into her elbow and a child sneezing into a tissue. The background is green with a yellow banner for the title.



CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)
PREVENT COVID-19 SPREAD

Wash hands with soap under running water OR use an alcohol-based sanitiser if water is not available

THIS PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY IS FROM NIGERIA CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH

0800 97000010 (Toll Free)
Whatsapp: +234-708-711-0839 SMS: +234-809-955-5577
NCDC.GOV.NG ncdc.gov.ng | @NCDGov

The poster features the NCDC logo and a central illustration of hands being washed with soap and water, and a hand being sanitized with a green bottle. The background is green with a yellow banner for the title.

