

GLOBAL JOURNAL



(OF)

COUNSELLING AND APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY [GJOCAP]

VOL. 5, NO. 1

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ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL LANGUAGE STRATEGY ON INFORMATION DISSEMINATION ABOUT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Language is a channel for the spread of people's culture, norms, ideas, beliefs, and it is used to create awareness on politics, religion, commerce and health. The language of disseminating of information is very crucial to understand the message properly, especially on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) issue, the native language should be incorporated for adequate broadcasting of information. Therefore, this study investigates the usefulness of the local language strategy on the information dissemination about the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. It was discovered that the COVID-19 information was disseminated more in English than the native language of the audience, it was therefore, recommended that COVID-19 issue should be disseminated through the native language to create awareness and for proper precaution.

Keywords: Assessment, Local Language, Medium, Information Dissemination, COVID-19

Introduction

Information dissemination is imperative in the realisation of any goal set by individuals, groups or government. It is the life wire and valuable resource required in any society. Thus, acquiring and using information on the matter of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is critical and important activities to Nigerian citizens. However, information can be based on health awareness; education upliftment, knowledge

acquisition and even for the political propagation. Thus, information on COVID-19 is health-related. Information dissemination is an essential aspect in human life, and the abilities to understand the information through a familiar language is the process thoroughly associated to learning and problem solving (Peters, 2012).

Ojebode' (2011) attested that information and its appropriate broadcasting are seen as important means for people in every sphere

of life. However, it was submitted that information establishment in rural areas is challenging, and there is information gap occurs between rural and urban settings. Hence, it is important to establish and differentiate between the channel and language of information that will help the individuals or groups on the basis of their dwelling places, and how such information are directed to solve their problems.

Moreover, the spread of COVID-19 as a pandemic in the World is a very alarming situation that needs to be propagated to individuals irrespective of their dwelling places, educational status, occupation, age, gender and religious affiliations. It also needs to be broadcasted widely in the local languages such as Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Urhobo, Efik, Batunu, Nupe, Okun, etc. if the Federal government wants people to decode the information and run away from this deadly disease. By implication therefore, Nigerian local languages should be greatly prioritised in the channels of COVID-19 propagation in Nigeria.

Information is a crucial instrument for the advancement of human and society (Apata & Oguinrewo). Any society that does not have access to the information in its local language would be left behind in terms of health advancement, educational upliftment and technological development. Although information is not immovable, however it needs accessibility and utilisation in its dissemination from one individual to another and from one place to another. It has to be widely disseminated regardless of whether one is an urban or a rural inhabitant. One may conclude that lack of proper dissemination of information through a familiar language is an obstruction to good health, and it may lead to the spread of an epidemic or a pandemic such as COVID-19.

Adeniyi (2013) affirmed that language is informative in function, it is used to notify others, to request people to do certain things and to express feelings, moods, ideas,

experiences, etc. Language is the foundation of human progress, it is therefore difficult to visualise a society without language. The use of a particular language variety identifies individuals as belonging to a particular social group.

Cummins (2008) asserted that the government policies are formulated and executed through a language. Everything thought of and done by the government, individuals, and groups are realised through language. It is the means of communication and instruction among the Government and the governed. Hence, the health workers, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Governors, the Media, and Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 should execute the use of the language of the immediate community of the target audience to bring the news on the pandemic closer to them. Particularly, our National languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are very unique to the citizens and they are the ways of self-expression and socio-cultural distinctiveness. Hence, as the global and wider language is used for the information dissemination on health generally and COVID-19 particularly, the local languages should not be relegated to the background for information to be circulated on this pandemic.

Local Language Strategies through Various Channels on COVID-19 Information Dissemination

Baïngboṣe' (2013) affirmed that access to information and contribution to the matter that concerns people's lives are the essence of a citizen's right in national life. He concluded that if national languages are not in operation, citizens are virtually excluded from national life. Similarly, information on health is very paramount, and it should be offered in a language individuals understand so that it will not lead to failure or even disastrous outcomes. Baïngboṣe' (2013) opined that labels on medication should not be mainly in the official language, but should also be translated into the main Nigerian languages in order for the average patient to

be able to comprehend the prescription of the medication. Therefore, the occurrence of global COVID-19 pandemic has led to a realisation that the war against it cannot produce meaningful results unless it is conducted in a language familiar to the average Nigerian citizens.

Apata (2019) asserted that African societies had their peculiar ways of disseminating information such as the use of town criers and gathering people in premeditated locations in the village such as market square to disseminate information through their local language. They also disseminate information through different signs and objects/symbols. The management of the British introduced the use of Radio to African countries and subsequently they have been using it to pass information from government to the citizen. However, the advancement in information and communication technology has brought other means of information dissemination such as television, internet, mobile phones, fax, telex, telegram among other. Thus, on the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of the indigenous languages in disseminating information through all these channels should be highly considered.

Although the Federal government is encouraging telecommunication companies, media outlets (including social media) such as television, radio, internet, mobile phones, fax, telex, telegram to enlighten people on the matter of this deadly disease, and billions of Naira has been spent, still, it is not bringing

important role in determining the level of understanding and cooperation that would be accorded any health discussion.

The operative means of encouraging the information dissemination on COVID-19 is using numerous channels of communication that are suitable to the individual levels in Nigeria. Federal government may use one-to-one communication (with physical distancing), community mobilisation, mass media fortification, town/village crier (with physical distancing) among others are the various communication methods that can support different levels of people, and achieving the dissemination objectives and the local language of the audience should be considered.

One-to-One Communication Method

would be one of the key methods that can be utilised in order to enlighten individual on the virus (COVID-19) that is ravaging the World. The cause, caution and the prevention would be narrated from one person to another person in their respective local language. Then, the opportunity to ask questions through their indigenous language would be permitted. The person that is disseminating the knowledge on this virus does not need any alien or strange tongue to explain the symptoms, consequences of the virus, and the importance of personal hygiene such as hand washing using sanitiser.

Community Mobilisation can be carried out to strengthen dialogue among community members

the platform to increase community participation and understanding.

Mass Media, Outdoor Media and Folk Media: would be useful to raise mass awareness, bring the issue into the limelight and also help promote critical behaviours and programme information. Simultaneously, they would also provide support and credibility to the interpersonal and community mobilisation efforts. A community like Nigeria needs to be established the use of the traditional and modern as a strategic information distribution on COVID-19. Udousoro (2010) asserted that a holistic communication is needed where both modern and traditional (multimedia strategies) announcement would be operated for maximum advantages of the people. This multimedia system would help the issue of health and medical assessment among the urban and rural dwellers.

Emmanuel (2011) supported this point that Radio is one of the fastest and most influential channels in the rural communities, and it has been used to distribute information to farmers. The information that is passed through the Radio in the local language would help people to learn about their government programmes and policies, this would enlighten the people to know the government intentions and plans to curb COVID-19. In other words, television could be used for the transmission of information in the Urban areas, but the indigenous language should be paramount. The studies had confirmed that most of the rural occupants, semi-literate and illiterate embrace health or educative information that have being broadcasted in their local language more than official language (the English language) because of incapability to comprehend the message (Hajara, 2010 & Emmanuel, 2011).

Town/Village Criers Method: this is another way to provide important information to the community. This medium of information dissemination is active,

inexpensive, modest and reliable. The use of town/village criers is still in vogue in some traditional towns and villages in Africa, this method is traditional dissemination of information and the way of communal communication preceding the modern mass media communication in the societies. Aside town/village criers, Hajara (2010) also itemised some other traditional media in African societies that are useful for information dissemination such as folklore, music and village square meetings. Traditional forms of communication use oral cultures to send important messages to those who might not otherwise receive or understand such messages using the modern communication in the official language.

Apata (2019) observed the activities of the town/village criers that they would use a metal gong and wooden stick to gain the attention of the communal audience, they shouted to the top of their voices, and moved around on foot, donkeys, horses back, but nowadays they can use bicycle or motorcycles. The criers are still functioning in Nigerian villages. Their activities concerning COVID-19 in town or urban areas would be also effective and result oriented, because local language would be utilised in disseminating the information. The people both in the rural and urban settings would like to hear information and teachings on health, thus, the criers (after they might have enlightened them) can play a role of bringing health messages (COVID-19) to the people. For instance, the outbreak of the pandemic, preventive and therapeutic measures, the town crier can communicate all these in their language to the people.

Therefore, the prominent categories of people that are functioning during this COVID-19 period in Nigeria, the health workers, journalist, the NCDC and the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 should use the local people with their local languages for a profitable outcome on immunity boosting, the spread and cure of COVID-19. Therefore, the information on

the COVID-19 symptoms, number of the infected people, those that were discharged and the necessary precautions should be given in the National languages. The unfortunate matter here is that, these people are not taking the issue of local language serious in their communication with the people. Most of the representatives that visited the rural traditional leaders even

spoke the official language (English) when discussing the issue of COVID-19. Even, if the rulers understand the language, there would be some chiefs that could have been the instruments of disseminating information, if the message is clear in their local language. The following are some of the COVID-19 terminologies in English and Yoruba languages respectively.

English	Yorùbá
Quarantine	<i>Isémólé</i>
Self-isolation	<i>Idánikànwà</i>
Coronavirus	<i>Kòkòrò àifojúri kòrónà</i>
Physical distancing	<i>Sọra fún ifara-kinra</i>
Hand sanitiser	<i>Ohun èlò olómi ifowó</i>
Mask	<i>I bòmú-bonu</i>
Gloves	<i>I bówó</i>
Ventilator	<i>Ẹrọ Amúnimi/Ẹrọ Gbémíró</i>
Pandemic	<i>Ajakálẹ̀ Arùn-kárí ayé</i>
Intensive Care Unit	<i>Yàrá itójú alákanse</i>
Fever	<i>Ibà</i>
Cough	<i>Ikó</i>
Sore throat	<i>Qnà ọfun didùn</i>
Tiredness/fatigue	<i>Aarẹ ara</i>
Aches	<i>Ara ríro</i>
High blood pressure	<i>Ẹjẹ ríru</i>
Underlying medical condition	<i>Aílẹra-abénú</i>
Respiratory disease	<i>Arùn éémí</i>
Lungs	<i>Edò fóró</i>
Trachea/Windpipe	<i>Qna èémí ọfun</i>

COVID-19 Sensitisation

Avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes

Physical distancing

Cover your mouth and nose with the elbow while coughing or sneezing

Stay at home if you have fever and persistent cough

Visit the nearest health centre if you have fever, persistent cough and difficulty in breathing

Wash your hands regularly

Itaniji Lóri Arùn COVID-19

Yàgò fún fífowó bọ ẹnu, imú àti ojú rẹ

Yàgò fún ifara-kinra

Bo ẹnu àti imú rẹ pelu igbọnwọ nigbà tí o bá fẹ wúkọ tàbí sín

Dúró ní ilé tí o bá ní àìlera bí ibà diẹ àti ikọ

Tí o bá ní ibà, ikọ àti èémí tí ó nira, wá itọjú ilera ní kiákíá

Fọ ọwọ rẹ nigbà gbogbo

The above terminologies and sensitization statements in local language would definitely allow the people to prepare themselves against COVID-19 and prevent them from contracting this deadly virus. Enighe (2010) supported this point that language is the fundamental of all forms of communication, and the traditional and modern means of communication making use of language to converse, thus, the need for attachment of indigenous language in communication curriculum to capture and improve on traditional communication and linking it with the modern communication is very important.

Some COVID-19 Sensitisation Songs in Local (Yorùba) Language

Òtítọ ní àrùn Korona

Sé ohun tí ó yẹ kí o se

Láti wà ní àlàáfíà

Ohun tí ó tọ, tó sì mú ogbón dá ní

Ní láti dá ààbò bo ara rẹ

Ó sán kí á wà ní àlàáfíà

Jù kí á wà ní ìnira lẹ

Láti wà ní àlàáfíà

Lo gbogbo ohun ìdààbòbò bíi

Ògùn ifipawọ, Ìbọjú-bomú

Yàgò fún ọpọ èrò

Sètò Ìmótótó nínú ilé àti agbègbè

Gbìyànjú láti tèlẹ àṣẹ ijoba tí ó sọ wí pé

Kí o jòkó sílẹ, kó o sì wà láàyè

Àrùn kórónà rí bẹ nítóótọ

Tí a bá wà ní ìṣọkan

A ó ségun àrùn yíi

Coronavirus is real

Do the needful to stay healthy

What is right and wise is for you to protect yourself

It is better for us to be healthy than to be in pain

To stay healthy

Take to all precautionary measures such as the use of Hand sanitisers and face/ nose mask

Keeping social distancing

Home and environmental hygiene

Adhere to the Government's directive of stay at home, to stay alive

Coronavirus is real

If we come together

The virus will be defeated

(News Agency of Nigeria)

Àlò o ! Àlò ! Àlò !

Àlò repete, àlò rakafu

Kín ló kan oba tò kàn ijòyè lówólówó?

Kòró o, Kòrónà ni

Kín ló salágbára dọlẹ

Kín ló mú politisiàn jòkòò sílẹ

Kòró o, Kòrónà ni

Kín ló fa Sòsía- dísítánsìn?

Kòró o, Kòrónà ni

kín ló sọ Sanitáísà dọwọn gógó

Kòró o, Kòrónà ni

Wá bá wa dá sí I jẹ kí kòrónà dọrò ìtàn kálàáfíà Rẹ jọba

Kí Kòrónà dọrò ìtàn, Kálàáfíà Rẹ jọba

Chorus : Riddle! Riddle !! Riddle !!!

Response: Plenty riddle, Plenty riddle

Chorus: What is affecting the king and chief presently?

Repent: It is corona, it is corona

Chorus: What render powerful people powerless?

Response: It is coro, it is corona

What force politician to stay at home?

It is coro, it is corona

What prompt/ necessitates social distancing?

It is coro, it is corona

What makes sanitisers costly?

It is coro, it is corona

Come and intervene, let corona virus be a thing of the past

Let your peace reigns

Let corona be a thing of the past

Let your peace reigns

(By Barr. Akintunde Ogunsanya. AIT Broadcast)

There are various songs composed in local languages to keep Nigerian citizens abreast with COVID-19 pandemic. The above are two of such songs rendered in Yoruba language. The first song emphasises that COVID-19 is real and that it is reasonable to stay healthy. It gives some interpretations against this deadly virus such as washing one's hands with sanitisers, using face/nose mask, keeping away from large gathering and keeping home and environment clean. The song advises citizens to adhere strictly to Government directives of stay at home in order to stay alive. The song believes that if all hands are on deck, covid-19 will be defeated.

The second song started using the opening coda of Yoruba riddle (*Àlò o!*) to draw the audience attention. Adopting rhetorical questions, the song tells that Corona virus affects all and sundry; it renders powerful people powerless and force politicians who usually travel abroad to stay back home. The song recognizes that prices of products such as alcoholic-based sanitizer have risen in the market. The song concludes with a prayer to the Almighty to let Covid-19 be a thing of the past.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study examined the significance of local language strategy on information dissemination about COVID-19. The study concluded that local language is inevitable in disseminating information and keep the people abreast with necessary information regarding the spread of the virus and precautionary measures against contracting the virus. Languages remain a vital tool in conveying messages across to the target audience.

The clearer the language, the easier the communication. However, wrong choice of language can mar communication and renders information ineffective. The study thus recommended that local languages should be the main (major) medium of information about the spread and precautionary measures against COVID19. The study thus recommended that all stakeholders should adopt local language peculiar to the target audience in order to effectively curb the spread of COVID-19.

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