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Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Lassa Fever Reportage in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract

This study aims to carry out a semantic analysis of words associated with Lassa fever reportage in selected Nigerian newspapers. The main objective is to analyze the contextual meaning of words with dangers, words with signs and symptoms, and words with prevention, control, and management discussed in the reportage of Lassa fever. The main instrument used for the collection of the data in the study is Documentary Source. A corpus of sampled Nigerian newspapers from Sunday Vanguard, The Nation, Daily Trust, Daily Sun, Sunday Punch, The Punch, Daily Independent, This Day, The Triumph, and Aljazeera Nigeria have been selected for the study. Descriptive Research Design and Descriptive Method of data analysis have been employed to conduct the study, using the Context of Situation based on Halliday (1985). The finding reveals words that show the danger of Lassa fever, the symptoms of Lassa fever, and the precaution and control of the disease.

Introduction

Lassa Fever, Ebola, Coronavirus and Leptospirosis have certain things in common. Apart from bringing fear in man because of the manner they rapidly spread among populations, they are difficult to control, they are easy to cause death and most importantly, they are diseases that transfer from animals to humans. Lassa fever is a transferable disease, which moves from one person to another. People usually get into contact with this disease through eating, drinking or handling objects spoiled by

the saliva, urine or faeces (stool) of a rat carrying the disease. The disease lasts for about one to three weeks, after coming in contact with the human body, before it shows its physical appearance. There are two signs of it, soft and difficult signs. The soft signs include slight fever, weakness, headache and not feeling better at all, while the difficult ones include respiratory illness, severe vomiting, facial swelling, chest and abdominal pain, and hearing loss. Experts are of the opinion that one should avoid contact with



rats. Food should be stored in closed containers and adequate cleanliness at home be observed to discourage rats from entering block holes and other places where rats can pass to enter the house. People should avoid spreading foods and other grains outside the house where rats can spoil them, avoid contact with patients with the sign of the disease, use of gloves and protective clothing by hospital staff to protect them from having contacts with the patients' body fluids and other things, educate people on how to reduce rats populations and to protect themselves.

About a year ago, 15 countries across the world gathered in Abuja, Nigeria, for the first Lassa Fever International Conference in Nigeria. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, NCDC, and other partners hosted this two-day event on January 16-17, 2019, to mark fifty years since the Lassa fever disease was first discovered in Nigeria. The Lassa Fever International Conference presented an opportunity for the Scientific Community to reflect on what is known about the Lassa disease, identify gaps that exist in knowledge, and prioritize a research agenda for the control of Lassa Fever. The conference was also an avenue to set targets for

Nigeria's Prevention, Preparedness, and response to Lassa fever outbreaks and other public health emergencies.

Statement of the Problem

The Language used in the reportage of Lassa Fever is prevalent in the Nigerian newspapers. This coverage has been followed up with the description of some words and styles that are used uniquely and are meaningful to the users. Some of these words are technical and difficult while others are simple and easy to understand. However, Lassa fever reportage has come up with some messages that need to be analyzed. Therefore, this study wants to explore lexico-semantic features of Lassa fever reportage in selected Nigerian newspapers.

The study aims to carry out semantic analysis of lexical items in Nigerian newspapers. The main objectives are: to describe the contextual meaning of words with dangers used in the reportage of Lassa fever, to identify the contextual meaning of words with signs and symptoms discussed in the reportage of Lassa fever, to examine the contextual meaning of words with prevention, control and management discussed in the reportage of Lassa fever and



to explore the lexicon semantic features of the identified words.

The research selects any of the following Nigerian newspapers, based on purpose, in the three regions, the North, South, and the West: *Sunday Vanguard*, *Vanguard*, *Sunday Punch*, *The Punch*, *DailyTrust*, *The Nation*, *The Triumph*, *This Day*, *Aljazeera Nigeria*, *Daily Independent*, *Daily Sun*, etc. Besides words on dangers of Lassa fever and words on prevention and control of Lassa fever have been analyzed. Additionally, this study covers 2020 Nigerian newspapers from January to April because it was the time that the pandemic of Lassa fever had returned, and almost all the newspapers talked about it or covered the stories.

Literature Review

Adeoti (2023) studied a pragmatic analysis of selected newspaper coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory. According to the author, data for the study were collected from Nigerian newspapers such as *The Punch* and *The Vanguard*. The findings revealed that journalists use news headlines to perform several acts of warning, sensitizing, informing, and exposing. It indicates that

Nigerian media performed well in terms of covering the pandemic, which in turn created awareness.

Tyonande (2022) analyzed Facebook postings on the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were collected by extracting postings by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) on COVID-19 from Facebook. The findings of the study show that COVID-19 postings on Facebook are majorly characterized 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.

Deji et al (2021) examined the headlines of COVID-19 reports in selected Nigerian newspapers, using Halliday's functional stylistic theory. Thirty newspaper headlines were sorted from three daily Nigerian newspapers. The findings showed that journalists do not use full stops at the end of headlines and they use declarative sentences more than any other type of sentence.

Etefia (2017) researched a communique made by the Ibadan catholic bishops to the congregation on the Ebola epidemic: Mey's pragmatic acts theory and Saussure's model of semiotic signs as the theoretical



framework. The study shows that the communicate is an information-motivated discourse on Ebola which comprises direct acts that make use of the contextual features of shared situational knowledge, inferences, relevance, shared cultural knowledge, and references thereby exhibiting the cautioning, commanding, and counselling and threatening, and the semiotic sign signifies the body and blood of Jesus Christ, it signifies spiritual cleansing and it signifies love and unity among the people of God in the church.

Adetoro and Adeyemo (2019) researched "Dehumanization and Exploitation: A Lexical Semantic Analysis of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*". The researchers identified nominal groups, adjectival groups, and verbal groups on dehumanization and exploitation in the novels.

Alege (2018) researched "A lexical Semantic analysis of the language of sports reporting in Nigerian Sports Magazines". The researchers identified lexical words used in sports reporting like idioms, figurative expressions, inflexions, extensions, etc, and their meanings.

Amos (2017) researched "A lexico-Semantic analysis of selected obituaries in the Daily Nation Newspapers.

The researcher identified lexical items like nouns, adjectives, and verbs and the meaning they represented.

Kaimuri (2017) researched "A lexico-semantic analysis of the language of the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender communities in Nairobi city county, Kenya". The researcher identified and described the lexical items used in specific ways by the LGBT speech community. Odoemenam, Ordu & Omoghie (2017) carried a research on "A lexico-semantic explication of J.P. Clark's *Night Rain*". The researchers identified the use of metaphor, the use of Onomatopoeia, the use of Hyperbole, the use of imagery, the use of simile, the use of Alliteration, and the use of Assonance.

Ajom (2015) researched "A lexico semantic Analysis of Military Language". The researcher identified some lexical items used by the military and their meanings.

Chimuanya and Awonuga (2015) researched "A lexico-semantic study of culinary terms in Nigerian English: the question of intelligibility revisited". The researchers identified lexical words used in Nigerian English with their meanings.

Language of Newspapers

The language of newspapers helps people learn a wide



range of topics. Its language serves primarily as a means of conveying information. Besides persuading and entertaining the people, this is what makes its style special. Its vocabularies and sentence structure have to be chosen efficiently to affect all readers. That is why most people regard the language of newspapers as a complete, sufficient, and fulfilling source of current information and 'the central function of a newspaper, to inform' (Crystal and Davy, 1969). Furthermore, they agree that the newspaper style is one of those styles acknowledged to be peculiar. They perceive the style of a newspaper as an interrelated lexical, phraseological, and grammatical means whose purpose is to deliver information to the reader. He distinguishes four distinct styles in newspapers: the language style of brief news and communiqués; the language style of newspaper reports; the language style of solely news articles; and that of notices and advertisements. The language of advertising, like every other field or discipline, has a language of its own, very often it does not follow the grammar or logical rules of the everyday language. It is a kind of language that functions and familiarizes itself with the context in

which it is used. Disciplines such as law, Journalism, Arts and Humanities etc have kinds of languages peculiar to them such that the linguistic features employed to know the field that such language use belongs. This clearly shows the inevitable power of language and its capacity to influence people and their behaviours. This is also true in the field of advertising where the choice of language affects the way messages are composed and conveyed; and the way of possible inflections and usages that language lends itself to.

Lexis

Jackson & Amvela (2000, p. 11) defined Lexis as 'the stock of words in a given language'. It is made up of the words of a language, which is called vocabulary. The term 'lexis' originated from Greek and it means 'word', Jackson & Amvela (2000, P.1)said 'The lexis of any language is made up of lexemes. These lexemes are the words contained in the vocabulary of a language.

Semantics

Semantics is the branch of linguistics that studies meaning in language. Saeed (2009) defines semantics as "meaning communicated through language". This means semantics is concerned with the meaning of linguistic entities such as



words, phrases, grammatical forms, and sentences but not with the meaning of actions and phenomena (Sebastian, 2002:1).

Theoretical Framework

A Theory of Context was first developed by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1923/1935). The influence of Malinowski is visible in the theories of many scholars, particularly in those of J.R. Firth, one of his colleagues at London University, and of Halliday who followed both Malinowski's and Firth's ideas in the development of his Theory on the Context of Situation. When the study of meaning became a linguistic discipline, the main interest of semanticists was in the technical level of language and the major focus was represented by the single word. A different view of the relationship between language and meaning was provided by Malinowski (1923) at the beginning of the 20th Century. The meaning of language was interpreted in terms of the context of culture and the context of the situation. Malinowski's theories influenced linguists such as Firth (1957) and Halliday (1985) and language came to be considered meaningful only if considered within the language events in which it is

used. For this reason, language started to be analyzed only in authentic contexts: the focus of interest is not the single word anymore but the meaningful relations words enter into with the other words around them (Sinclair 1991/1996). Words do not occur in isolation. The words of a text are surrounded by their linguistic environment, called co-text; the text takes place in a broader environment, called context. Both co-text and context are of utmost importance in the identification of the meaning of a text. Therefore, this study adopts the Context of the Situation based on Halliday (1985).

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative paradigm, specifically a descriptive research design which is the most appropriate research method for this study. The descriptive research method generally documents events as they are and does not involve the manipulation of variables (Ifidon and Ifidon, 2007:30-31). The population of this research is the entire vocabulary, with connotational and denotational meanings in the Nigerian Newspapers. The non-probability Sampling technique, using purposive sampling has been used in



deriving the sampling size of this study. The study selected vocabulary with connotational and denotational meanings from some Nigerian Newspapers. The nature of this research makes it unnecessary to employ the use of questionnaires, interviews, surveys, or any other research but rather documentary sources were used. According to Attah (2015), a documentary source of data in research is where the required information is gathered from existing documents like textbooks, novels, poems, newspapers, magazines, radio and television broadcasts". After the researcher has selected the Nigerian newspapers based on their regions like the Southern part, Northern part, and Western part of the country, read the Newspapers critically and analyzed lexical features used in the reportage of Lassa fever.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1 Words that show dangers of Lassa fever

1. We'll **fight** Lassa fever to its knees 19
2. 50 years after Experts **Lament** lack of Lassa fever vaccine 29
3. Lassa fever **killing** Nigerians more than COVID-19 5

4. **Silent Killer** in Nigeria 5
5. Lassa fever can be **sexually transmitted** 5
6. Lassa fever has been a **recurring health** challenge in Nigeria
7. Declare war on Lassa fever 48
8. Lassa fever: A **pestilence** and emerging trends
9. Medical personnel are believed to be at risk of getting infected and some **deaths** have been reported.
10. Lassa fever **scourge**, which is **endemic**.....6
11. An outbreak of emerging infectious diseases, novel and **highly infectious pathogens** 6
12. Lassa fever as an **epidemic** has taken many lives 25
13. Lassa fever which ravages Africa's most populous country yearly 17
14. Lassa fever is an acute febrile illness, with bleeding and death in severe cases 34
15. Lassa fever as one of the priority **pathogens** that require urgent vaccine development 29
16. Every parent should know that Lassa fever is **real and deadly**.....25
17. The spread of this killer disease may not be easily curbed 17
18. The **bubonic plague** or "**Black Death**" killed as many as one-third of Europe's people in three long years (1347-1350) 34



The Table above shows words that are used by journalists to show how dangerous Lassa fever is to human beings. It shows the lexical items that are used to tell readers how to take measures in tackling Lassa fever in order not to spread and get infected. Additionally, measures taken, at home, school, workplace, community, and general places, should help prevent it from spreading. It is something that needs to be taught for people to know what Lassa is all about.

Table 2 Words that Show Control and Prevention of Lassa Fever

1. Yahaya said another woman, who tested positive for the disease had been receiving treatment at the Kankia General Hospital. 7
2. The health commissioner, Yahaya Danja, said the state had adopted strategies to curb the spread of the disease in the state. 7
3. ...the state government to assist it in the fight against Lassa fever. The state also procured life-saving equipment, ventilators and personal protective equipment... 11
4. ...the food items at the point of sale or requesting them to be sold in a safe and healthy wrapper. 17
5. We should deploy the best practice of food storage to prevent contracting and spreading of diseases that could be avoided by simple hygiene practices at home. 17
6. The director of NCDC under his leadership has invested so much in strengthening capacity for the detection of diseases of public health importance across the country. 19
7. The Lagos state government yesterday confirmed a case of Lassa fever outbreak in the state, saying the patient has been isolated. 44
8. ...the patient was in an isolation ward at the Lagos University Teaching Hospital(LUTH), Idi-Araba. 44
9. To avoid contact with excreta, people are advised to always wash their hands before handling and eating food. 24
10. Therefore, to prevent such a future outbreak of Lassa fever, the towns needed to be fully deratised. 24
11. Following this cycle, immediately after the planting season ends, decontamination and quarantine should be deployed to identified hotspots, with the primary aim of preventing a wholesale invasion of rats from farms to human habitats. 24
12. ...stressing that health officials are doing everything



- possible to curtail the outbreak. 19
13. He further said that the 15 samples of the suspected cases have been sent to the National Disease Control Centre in Abuja for testing to authenticate them...19
14. Dr Oladejo urged effective personal hygiene such as frequent hand-washing practices, the use of hand sanitisers as well as proper environmental sanitation. 29
15. Medical experts have advised people to prevent the spread of the disease by not spreading foods along the road, keeping food in tightly sealed containers, and wearing protective clothing such as masks, gloves, gowns and goggles when caring for patients' secretions. 5
16. So, people should avoid hunting rats for meat because if they avoid handling the rats, they are not likely to get exposed to the virus. 54
17. 'We are aware of the outbreak and have taken measures by deploying doctors and tools to ensure we curtail further spread of the disease,' he said. 6
18. Every parent should know that Lassa fever is real and deadly, therefore we must all know that adequate cleanliness and sanitation is important. 25
19. To protect our children in the schools and the community against Lassa fever and other diseases, the government must take all precautionary measures to ensure that epidemics are kept at bay. 25
20. He said screening centres had been created at various points and a team known as the Disease Surveillance Team had been created in the 34 LGAs to report any case of the disease

The style is used in the newspapers is that of words that show control and prevention of Lassa fever. The control and prevention of the disease can be done through these processes. Firstly, equipment like ventilators, gloves, masks, hand sanitisers etc can be used to protect oneself from contracting the disease. Secondly, one can physically isolate oneself from getting physical contact with other people who did not contract the disease to avoid spreading it to them. The next one is to keep away water, food, or any eatable thing from rats so that they will not contaminate them. As a result of all these measures, Lassa fever will be minimized, people will be protected from it and the spread of the disease to others will stop.



Table 3 Words that show symptoms and signs of Lassa fever

1. Lassa fever is an acute febrile illness, with bleeding and death in severe cases. 34
2. Fever, headache, muscle, nausea vomiting and joint pain are common in mild cases. 34
3. In severe cases, deafness, tremors, and bleeding from body outlets such as nose, mouth, eyes and ears may occur. 34
4. The illness is characterized by a sudden onset of fever and general weakness. Other symptoms include headache, sore throat, muscle pain, chest pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, cough and abdominal pain. In the most severe cases, individuals may bleed from the mouth, nose, eyes or other parts of the body and eventually die. 5
5. Lassa fever can cause sore throat and redness of the eyes. It can also cause altered sensorium, bleeding from body orifices and it is an illness that can affect every system of the body. It can manifest in a lot of things, including diarrhoea and vomiting. 54

Lassa fever is real. It is not something that is hidden and cannot have signs physically. Something like 'bleeding', 'vomiting', and 'diarrhoea' are physical symptoms of

Lassa fever because they can be seen and nobody can deny its occurrence. Some of the signs are mild like 'headache', 'fever', 'vomiting' etc while others like 'bleeding', 'deafness', 'tremor', and 'death' are severe cases in the issue of Lassa fever. Therefore, all these signs show the existence of Lassa fever and it is something that needs quick action to be taken instantly.

Findings

The result reveals how nouns, verbs, and adjectives that are predominantly and uniquely used in the reportage of Lassa fever tell us how the disease contains words that show dangers like (nouns) *bleeding, scourge, pestilence, menace, bane, havoc, rampage, pathogen, plague*, etc (verbs) *befall, infect, ravage, contaminate, contract* etc (adjectives) *precarious, contagious, toxic, unwholesome, ravaging, lethal, virulent* etc. It contains words that show precautions like (nouns) *caution, surveillance, evacuation, prevention*, etc (verbs) *avert, prevent, curb, desist, protect*, etc (adjectives) *protective, prompt, testing*, etc. It contains words that show management or control of the disease like (nouns) *hygiene, wholesomeness, diagnosis, cure, sanitiser, isolation, safety, sanitation*,



ventilator, antibiotic, etc
(verbs) *quarantine, admits,*
treat, devastate, curtail, clean,
deratised etc (adjectives)
sanitary, hygienic, treatable,
vigorous, curative etc.

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