

## EFFECTIVE USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN CURBING COVID 19

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### **ABSTRACT**

*During the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic there were a lot of worrisome news flying all over the world on its variant, peculiarities, causes, ways of contact and cure. Communication was the only means to get the right information across to people and the use of language was one of the channels to reach out to the people. Nigeria citizens were not left out on the Covid 19 Pandemic outbreak and English language was one valid means to enlighten them on the way forward because of the multilingual nature of Nigeria with over four hundred languages (400). Language is an intriguing and interesting enterprise from every point of view as it relates to human activities. It is one of the unique attributes that differentiates human beings from other creatures. Language is the most prominent tool of communication and a vehicle through which humans express their thought, feelings, ideas and emotions to one another and also get a feedback whether positive or negative. This study reviewed some effective strategies to consider when communicating to an audience in any giving situation in order to achieve the desired aim for such communication. The strategies reviewed in this study are, The Cognitive Level Strategy, The Persuasion Strategy, The Paralanguage Strategy and The Precision Strategy. The researcher believed that putting these strategies to use in any given communication can aid effectiveness and also yield result for the purpose of such communication.*

**Keywords:** Communication, Language, Strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is an essential tool in human existence. It is a valid means by which human beings communicate their thoughts, ideas, messages, information Feelings, emotions and getting a feedback whether positive or negative. No one kept in isolation can relate effectively to others if no means of communication channel is established. When the world health organization (WHO) declared Covid 19 a global pandemic on 11 of March 2020, there was a lot of panic spread and the best tool to manage any crisis was effective communication. People relied on the information available on social media, radio, television and internet to keep them updated on what to do and not do as people were restricted in movement, social activities and other relationship functions. The pandemic was so intense to the point of a total lockdown all over the world.

The force of language was the prominent tool used to convey information to people as Communication was very important in the sense that people needed to hear an accurate life-saving information and healthcare to follow. In the case of Nigeria, English language was the center language used to convey information swiftly to the masses on the does and don'ts of Covid 19 pandemic because of her multilingual setting. The relationship between language and communication cannot be over-emphasis as Language provides the content of communication. It therefore means that language is a means of communication. Nwaiwu, (2015) is of the view that it is through language we communicate effectively our feelings, thoughts, emotions, values, attitudes, skills etc from one person to another. This means that Language makes communication easy and less vigorous. Communication and language are interwoven in nature; effective communication depends on language as much as language depends on

communication to operate. Sapir (1963) views language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Halliday (1975) is of the opinion that language is an institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral auditory symbols. Language is an integral part of human existence. It is one unique attributes that differentiates human beings from other creatures, it serves as a link between the speaker, the message and the audience for the intended purpose. Mahfouz (2005) explains that language mainly serves to form, deform, inform, reform and transform man and his society. The functions of language cover all aspect of human activities such as communication function, tools of social interaction, commerce and industry, education and documentation etc.

The use of English language as means of communication in Nigeria is a necessity born out of the need to communicate effectively because of the multilingual nature of Nigeria and communication cannot be said to be effective if no feedback or reaction was given. Nigeria is a country with over four hundred indigenous languages (400). There is no way communication can be effective if there is no central language to bridge the gap. English language is the inherited language of Nigeria from their British colony and was widely accepted to bridge the gap of communication in our multilingual settings. In essence Nigeria needs a common language to rule supreme over the various languages she possess to give her occupant a sense of identity and unity. The use of the English language as an official language in Nigeria is for poupose of ease in communication amidst the diversity of languages. English language is a catalyst for nationalism,

political consciousness and inter-tribal comprehensibility.

### **The role of English language in Nigeria**

The importance attached to English language in Nigeria today cannot be over emphasized. According to Onyema,(2010) the English language is seen as the language of national stability. Its adoption helped to contain the political implications of having to choose one of the many languages Nigeria has today. So it serves as a unifying factor for the multilingual nature of Nigeria. English language is the language of national and international communication in Nigeria. It has the authority of government for the conduct of all official functions such as business, commerce, education, law, government activities. It serves ethnic groups in a particular socio-political area.

Communication, through language written or spoken still remains a valuable tool in the fight against Covid 19 by the information provided and the education repeatedly given in the management of the disease and to debunk the numerous false assumptions associated with the disease.

Little (1977) defines communication as a process by which information is passed between individuals and or organizations by means of previous agreed symbols. This means that for any communication to be effective there must be a means in which the source passes the information or message to the receiver. Nwaiwu (2015) posits that communication is a purposive act of sending information to another person with view of influencing the receiver in a predetermined direction Anyachonkeya & Agwu (2000) reviews that communication is the act of passing information or conveying thoughts, ideas and feelings from a given source or person through a medium or channel to another person or group of persons where it is received. Communication is a two way

process involving the sender and the receiver and can have a positive or negative outcome. There are different methods or forms of communication. It can be verbal or non-verbal, interpersonal or interpersonal, intentional or unintentional, traditional or digital etc. for communication to be said to be effective and completed it must have a source or sender, a message, a channel to disseminate the message, a receiver to decode the message and a feedback or response whether negative or positive. The point to underscore is that for communication to be effective there are certain strategies that should be considered by a communicator.

### **Strategies to effective communication in curbing Covid 19 pandemic**

The end product of communication is comprehension. If there is no understanding, communication has not taken place. When a message is not understood it is termed noise. Okeke (2009) reviews that noise is interference that keeps a message from being understood or accurately interpreted. It can be external (coming from the environment), internal (in the minds of the sender-receivers) or semantic (caused by peoples emotional reaction to words. Some of the strategies required for effective communication will be discussed below.

### **Cognitive Level Strategy**

A comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the Cognitive level of the audience is prominent for effective communication. It is important to note that in our Nigeria settings there are literate, semi-literate and illiterate audience. The communicator needs to consider the intellectual ability of the audience, the level of their comprehension and understanding. This will guide on the right diction to use for proper understanding of what is been communicated. The avoidance of ambiguous words or words

with different semantic meanings should be considered in order to limit interference in communication. The right information given with the right use of the English language in its simple form can instill the expected response from the audience in what to do or not to do in curbing Covid 19. Nzerem (2004) is of the view that a good knowledge of the audience helps a great deal in the success of the speaker or communicator. He explains that there is need for one to know the demography and psychograph of the audience by determining the general facts about the audience for which the communication is meant for. Maturation and the age of the audience in the communication chains are very important. The content of what must be communicated should be weighed based on the cognitive level of the listener or audience. Any message passed and there is no feedback whether negative or positive suggests that communication has not taken place. The choice of words and tone use is crucial for effective communication. The educational level of your audience is very important in determining how to present your points. The level of their mastery of the English language is crucial and must be considered. Let the communication process be presented according to the level of mastering. The English variant available can be used for effective communication in this context.

### **Persuasion strategy**

It is important to state that English language is a borrowed language and the level of acceptance varies from persons to persons hence the need for patience and more patience in disseminating information with the use of the English language. There is the need to keep stimulating people by means of repeating of the idea or thought until it is reasonably accepted. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2007) describe persuasion as a process by which someone usually by

reasoned argument or logic appeal to sound judgment in order to attain a set goals. They are of the view that a persuasive language tends to soothe the hearer especially when topics or issues that revolve around problems that affects them are repeatedly mentioned. The point to underscore is that the issue of persuasion is an integral part of communication. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku further explains that effective communication can be achieved through the symbolic action use of the English language in the form of jingles, catchy expressions, witty sayings, proverbial expression, songs, facial expression etc. The message conveyor should bear in mind the level of exposure of the target audience in some of the usage above.

### **Paralanguage strategy**

The hallmark of effective communication lies heavily on paralanguage especially on spoken communication. For communication to be effective the communicator should consider paralanguage strategy in passing information. Getting ones message across is made easier through voice inflection, facial expression and body movements. Paralanguage is the study of vocal cues used by a speaker to communicate meaning. Nwaiwu puts it this way that paralanguage includes oral presentations such as pitch of voice, speed of utterance, the quality of voice as well as the volume of the voice of the speaker. If communication is physical oral presentation or through the radio and television there is need to know whether the pitch is high, low or moderate, If the speed of communication is too fast, slow or moderate and for the quality of the voice if is smooth, pleasant, courteous or coarse, rough and harsh etc. Abercrombie David (1968) is of the view that "we speak our vocal organs but we converse with our entire bodies and the conversational use of spoken language cannot be properly understood

unless paralinguistic elements are taken into consideration”. For communication to be effective especially when it is oral speech it must consider paralanguage measures to intensify the desired aim for the purpose of that communication.

### **Precision strategy**

This is one of the most important aspects in disseminating information. One measure a communicator should take to heart in passing a message to the audience is honesty, truthfulness and accuracy. During the early days of the Covid 19 pandemic, there was a lot of fake news paddled over the Medias and this led to uncertainties and skepticism all over Nigeria. So there should be consistency in the content of the message passed to avoid distrust and doubt and if there is a need for a second opinion on what was communicated earlier, the communicator should be swift in getting in touch with the masses in other to maintain their trust and confidence. There should be transparency in message delivery

and room should be given for feedbacks. Try to understand, evaluate and respond to feedbacks gotten from the audience.

### **Conclusion**

Communication is for the living and it is an important part of human existence. It is very crucial to know ways to communicate effectively in other to get your thoughts across to the audience and also get a feedback. There should be effective strategies put in place in other to get your audience to understand the content of your message. Communication is crucial to curbing Covid 19 and the strategies of Persuasion, Paralanguage, precision and cognitive level amongst others is very vital to the actualization of effective communication in any given discourse. Any message or information passed without comprehension, feedback or response from the audience whether positive or negative is seen as noise.

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