

LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION IN MANAGING THE CHALLENGES OF PANDEMICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores language as a tool for communication in managing the challenges of pandemics. Language is a medium of communication that helps us express and convey the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of two individuals. A language is a communication tool used by everyone in their daily life as a means to convey information and arguments to others. In this case, language cannot be separated from society because language represents its nation and has a close relation to the attitude or behavior of groups of speakers of the languages. Language communication paved way for the society at large in relating and managing the challenges of the widespread pandemics that occurred in our society. The paper further reveals the concepts of language, language as a communication device, functions of language, the role of language as a communication tool, communication, components of communication, the purpose of communication, pandemics, challenges of pandemics, managing the pandemic and theoretical framework, etc. It also suggested that Language should be taught from birth to enable everyone to be carried along in society, there should be constant communication through social media or other means to reach out to people for more updates and the masses should also be educated or enlightened to avoid the continuous widespread of the pandemic.

Keywords: Language, tool, Communication, Challenges, Pandemics.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores language as a tool for communication in managing the challenges of pandemics. The pandemic introduced economic and social crises that are posing huge challenges across the globe. Introduction In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. This disease has had a great impact on morbidity and mortality worldwide, and the level of infection overloaded health systems, resulting in diverse alterations in care provision, the interaction between people, lockdowns, etc. Communication has played a fundamental role in society by relating with society through various means to pass information to them. This communication must be suitable to the needs of the patients, their families, and health professionals. Communication skills are a key competency for medical professionals to relate with the inflicted as it is indispensable for establishing a relationship of support, safety, and quality of care provided to society. It has been observed that using a language with good communication skills is fundamental for managing the challenges of pandemics.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Concept of Language

Every human on earth speaks one language or the other. Without language speaking, communication will not take place. Language has been defined in many ways and some of them are going to be explained below.

According to Fasold and Connor-Linton (2013), language is a finite system of elements and principles that make it possible for speakers to construct sentences to do particular communicative jobs. In the opinion of Ogunyemi (2020), language is productive because human beings are capable of producing an indefinite number of utterances that have sometimes not been previously heard. Every language is capable of accommodating new expressions often occasioned by social and technological growth in society. Language itself consists of some functions which are to give information, deliver messages, express feelings, persuade people, entertain people, and share an opinion (Trudgill, 1974:99).

Furthermore, Chaer and Agustina (2004:26-29) suggest 16 kinds of distinctive human language, as follows:

- 1) The language uses a vowel auditory pathway. In this case, there are similarities between communication systems owned by many animals, including crickets, frogs, and birds.
- 2) Language can be spread in all directions, yet receptions are directed. Spoken language sounds can be heard in all directions due to noise or sounds of the language that propagates through the air, but the receiver or listener can tell exactly from which direction the sounds of language came.
- 3) The language symbol in the form of a sound that can disappear once pronounced. This is in contrast with other symbols, such as the footprints of animals and heroic statues that can last for a long time. Because of the rapid loss, people always try to preserve this symbol of language sounds in written form and sound recordings.
- 4) Participants in communication with language can communicate with each other. This means that a speaker can be a symbol sender and a symbol recipient at the same time.
- 5) The language symbol can be complete feedback. The speaker as the sender can hear their language symbols whereas, in some kinetic communication (movement) and visual (sight) as the bees dance, the sender information is not able to see the important parts of the dance.
- 6) Communication languages have their specialty. Humans can talk without having to do physical movements to support the communication process. Whereas communication in bees they are physically forced to dance to deliver messages they intended to.
- 7) Sound symbols in communication language mean and refer to certain things. For example, the word horse refers to a type of quadruped that can be ridden. The sentence "Chaedar kick the ball" means someone named Chaedar doing actions that hit the ball with his leg.
- 8) The relationship between a language symbol with its meaning is not determined by the presence of a bond between the two but is determined by agreement or convention between the speakers of the language.
- 9) Language as a tool of human communication can be separated into the certain unit, i.e sentences, words, morphemes, and phonemes.
- 10) Reference or something being discussed in the language not always is at the present place and time. Human language can be used for something in the past, in the future, or distant places. Even that is only in fantasy.

- 11) Language is open. It means symbols of speech can be made according to human needs while the language of animals is closed, unchanged from the first.
- 12) Skill and finesse to master the rules and customs of human language derived from the learning process, not through genes inborn. Animal language generally is congenital.
- 13) The language can be learned. Someone who was born and raised in a particular language community will be able to learn other languages that are not used in their community.
- 14) Language can be used to express the truth and not be true, or logically meaningless. Humans can use language to say the right things and that is not true. Only people can use language to lie or deceive others.
- 15) Language has two subsystems namely the sound subsystem and meaning subsystem that enable language to have an economic function. Economics diversity occurred through functional sound units that can be grouped and regrouped into meaningful units, e.g. phonemes into words.
- 16) Language can be used to talk about language itself.

Language as a Communication Device

Language is used in our everyday life in communication. There is no way you communicate with someone without speaking a language. Generally, language can serve in so many ways in communicating with people. Language is a means of communication between members of the community in the form of symbols of sound produced by the speech organ. Language is also a tool of self-expression and served as a tool to show their identity as well. Through language, we can show our perspective, our understanding of the matter, the origin of the nation and our state, our education level, and even our character. Language becomes a mirror of us, both as a nation and as a self. For the communication to go well, both the sender and receiver must have to master their language. According to Gorys Keraf (1997:1), language is a means of communication between members of the community in the form of a symbol of sound produced by the speech organ. Perhaps there is an objection to saying that language is not the only tool for communication. They argue that two persons or parties communicate using specific ways that have been agreed such as through paintings, smoke, the sound of drums or casks, and so on. But they should also recognize that when compared with the language, all communication devices contain many weak aspects.

Language has certain functions that are used according to the needs of a person, i.e, as a tool for self-expression, as a means to communicate, as a tool to organize and adapt to social integration in the environment or circumstances, and as a tool for social control (Keraf, 1997:3)

Here is presented the role of language as a communication tool:

- 1) Language as a tool to interact with others. The condition for the communication that occurred is need involvement of two or more persons conducting talk to each other. In this case interaction process is emphasized to allow interchange feedback between the speaker to his interlocutor, and vice versa.
- 2) Language reflects a person's level of education. An educated person would be recalled better than uneducated people; the higher a person's education, the higher their speech wisdom. The emergence of this opinion is because the interaction is often done by people who are well educated, influenced by the environment of residence, as well as the school environment or the working environment. So that educated people tend to interact with the

environment that supports the use of language quality, more than those who are less educated.

3) Indicates authority. A leader would have to be able to speak with well-rewarded subordinates. This is related to one's mastery of the language, if a leader can speak well, then he can express his ideas in a clear and straightforward so that shows the authority of the leader.

4) As the force of law. With language, a person can identify the language of self-defense or rivalry; someone who speaks, even to escape easily from the case addressed to him. This suggests that language can be implemented as an ability/skill in communicating.

5) Attract the customer. Language of good and interesting ads will make consumers interested in trying your product. In communications, advertising language is included in the scope of advertising. To convey the benefits and efficacy of the product, the process of communication cannot be released from the distribution of a product to consumers.

6) Indicates a person's social standing. With language, one can reflect on his position in society. The diversity of languages mastered by one will certainly differ from one to another; it is influenced by the language acquisition from the environment. So people who have a high diversity of languages, and be able to communicate well be seen as privileged in society.

Functions of Language

Jakobson in Holmes (2001), classifies language functions into six types. They are expressive, directive, poetic, phatic, referential, and metalinguistic functions. Those six types of language functions will be explained as follows:

1. Expressive Function: It means expressing the speaker's feelings. This focuses on the addresser; it means that a speaker addresses a message. The expressive function aims to convey the speaker's emotion or expression. The aim of a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned. It means that the addresser's own towards the content of the message is emphasized.

2. Directive Function: It means an attempt to get someone to do something. It means that language is used to cause (or prevent) overt action. This function is most commonly found in commands and requests. Directive function focuses on the addressee; it means that the speaker needs the reaction from the hearer or to make someone perform a particular action. The directive function aims to convey the speaker's commands.

3. Referential Function: It means providing information. Essentially, the referential function is the communication of information. This function affirms or denies propositions, as in science or the statement of fact. These sentences have a truth value; that is, the sentences are either true or false. Hence, they are important for logic. Referential function focuses on the context; it means the referent or subject matter of discourse, and what it refers to. The referential function aims to convey information.

4. **Metalinguistic Function:** It means to comment on the language itself. This function is the use of language to discuss or describe itself. It focuses attention on the code itself, to clarify it or negotiate it. This is the function of language about language. The metalinguistic function is also predominant in questions like “Sorry, what did you say?”, where the code is misunderstood and needs correction or clarification. The metalinguistic function aims to convey the code analysis.

5. **Poetic Function:** It means to focus on the aesthetic features of the language. It is in which the particular form chosen is the essence of the message. Messages convey more than just the content. They always contain a creative ‘touch’ of our own. These additions have no purpose other than to make the messages ‘nicer’. The word poetic does not refer to the ability to write poetry, but the ability to manipulate language creatively. The poetic function aims to convey pleasure.

6. **Phatic Function:** It means expressing solidarity and empathy with others. The phatic function helps to establish contact and refers to the channel of communication. It opens the channel or checks that it is working, either for social reasons. This function is used for sociability. Therefore sometimes vernacular words are used in this function. The phatic use of language is characteristic mainly of speech, however, in certain types of writing it can also be noticed as in letters for example, where the beginning Dear Sir/Madam and ending Yours Faithfully also serve that purpose.

Communication

Communication comes from the Latin word *Communicare* or *Communis* which means the same or belonging together.

Communication has numerous definitions (Marume et al.: 2016, pp.26-32):

1. **Sharing:** of meanings, ideas, opinions, facts, feelings, experiences, and information between a sender and a receiver.

2. **Meeting of Minds:** mutual understanding or agreement between the sender and the receiver on common issues. Communication occurs only when the message has been understood, and understanding occurs in the mind of the receiver. So we should speak to people according to their level of understanding to get our message across to them.

3. **Understanding:** Effective communication happened when the receiver understood the message.

4. **Getting feedback:** feedback or response is critical to ensure that an accurate understanding of the message has occurred. A simple definition of communication is the process of exchanging ideas, feelings, opinions, facts, information, and experiences between the sender and a receiver verbally (spoken, written and nonverbally, sign language, and body language.) through a channel of communication. To understand the human communication process, one must understand how people relate to each other.

According to Mutua (2014), “communication can be defined as giving, receiving or exchanging information, facts, opinion or ideas by writing, speech or visual means, so that the message communicated is completely understood by the recipient” (page 5).

The definition above shows that communication is a process involving the sender, the message, the channel, and the receiver of the message.

Components of Communication

Consequently, Ogunyemi (2020) identified the following components of communication.

(a) The source/sender/encoder: This is presumably the initiator of the message. He thinks of what to say, encodes it most appropriately, selects the most suitable channel, and transmits the message to the receiver.

(b) The message: We said earlier that communication involves the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver. The message, therefore, is the information sent from one person (the source) to another (the receiver) to elicit a response.

(c) Medium/Channel: This is the means through which the message is sent. This could be the print media, verbal, non-verbal, electrical, or digital.

(d) The receiver/decoder: This is the person to whom the message was directed. He is the one who receives, decodes, and acts upon the information received. It should be noted that the receiver and the sender often interchange roles during the communication process. After receiving the message, the receiver is sometimes required to give verbal feedback. Thus the receiver becomes the initiator of a new message while the sender of the initial message becomes the receiver of the new message (feedback).

(e) Feedback: This is the message sent from the receiver of an initial message to the sender of the initial message as a response to the initial message. The feedback could be a verbal or non-verbal response.

(f) Noise: For the communication process to be successful, the receiver of the message must interpret the message by the intention of the sender. This implies that the sender and the receiver must share the same level of understanding. However, some factors may hinder the receiver from correctly decoding the message. These factors are known as noise factors. Simply put, noise is anything that distorts the accuracy of the intended message. It is the barrier or hindrance a message encounters before getting to the receiver

Purpose of Communication

According to Hewitt (1981), the purpose of communication can be described as follows:

1. Explore or teach something.
2. Influence a person's behavior by expressing feelings
3. Explaining one's behavior or the behavior of others
4. Connect with other people
5. Solve a problem or problem.
6. Reach a goal.
7. Reducing tension and resolving conflicts
8. Stimulates interest in self or others.

For language and communication to blend well, communication must be effectively done. That is why it is crucial for communicating successfully with others. It enables people to build and maintain relationships and accomplish goals, jobs, and tasks. The primary characteristics are as follows (Jureddi & Brahmaiah: 2016, pp.114-115).

1. -Using language that is appropriate to others' level of understanding.
2. making sure others receive the information or knowledge.
3. Developing relationships with others.
4. Talking with others in a way that facilitates openness and honesty.
5. Completeness of the message.
6. Clarity of the message.
7. Integrity of the message.
8. Conciseness of the message.
9. Consideration of the physical setting and the recipient.
10. Courtesy to be maintained.
11. Correctness of the Message.

Pandemic

The word "Pandemic" originates from the Greek word pan meaning "all" and demos "the people". The word is commonly taken to refer to a widespread epidemic of contagious disease throughout the whole of a country or one or more continents at the same time (Honigsbaum, 2009). There was the emergence of a viral infection called corona virus (COVID-19) in December 2019. Nnebedum, Obuegbie, and Nwafor (2021) stressed that human existence has been threatened by the corona viruses (Covid-19) virus which originated in the Hubei province of China in December 2019 and subsequently spread across the world in three months. Symptoms of the virus are fever, tiredness, sore throat, dry cough, respiratory problems, and pneumonia among others. The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Health on 27th February 2020 and this was the case of an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February, 2020 (Agbele & Oyelade, 2020). The rapid rate of spread of COVID-19 led to the closed down of educational institutions from pre-primary to tertiary education levels in Nigeria. Similarly to this, Adeoye, Adanikin, and Adanikin (2020) asserted that COVID-19 has disrupted the global educational system as most countries around the world have resulted in the temporary closure of all educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the pandemic. On March 20th, 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria ordered the closure of all educational institutions as a precaution to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the country (Oladipo, Fashola, Agboola, Adisa, Oyekanmi & Akinsete, 2020).

Challenges of Pandemics

Many challenges are accosted with pandemics, some are: limitations of direct contact with people, movement restrictions, lockdown businesses, increased hunger and death, restrictions on movement, and fear of the future.

- a. Limitations of Direct Contact with People: The pandemic brought limited contact with people because of the high rate of death and the widespread. The government had to restrict movement for the benefit and safety of the masses.
- b. Restricted Movements: Movements were restricted to the barest minimum also to reduce the people contacting the disease and internal travel constraints.

- c. Lockdown businesses: Governments have imposed international border shutdowns and internal travel constraints and longer periods of quarantine. Businesses were also shut down because it was a worldwide issue that needed to be addressed squarely thereby leading to businesses being shut down to avoid contact.
- d. Increased hunger and Death: The global economy has been very badly affected, especially the agro-livestock industry, hitting its lowest growth rates across various countries. A decrease in inputs availability and a decrease in agricultural production during the pandemic affected food security as well Hunger and death were on the high side because of the disease. There was the scarcity of food which led to hunger and a shortage of the right drugs led to the death of many.
- e. Fear of the Future: The disease also brought fear into the lives of many because it affected the world at large and anxiety due to the economic shocks of recession. Everyone was trying to be careful to avoid such a nightmare befalling the world again.

Managing the Pandemic (Post-COVID-19)

The African Union (AU) estimates that, under its “realistic scenario,” Africa’s gross domestic product (GDP) will shrink by 0.8% in 2020, resulting in 20 million job losses across the continent (African Union, 2020) the occurrence or effects of the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for the use of technologies and innovations to improve healthcare in Nigeria (Onyeji, 2020; Ozili, 2020) as the challenges of the COVID-19 response are a reflection of the reality of the Nigerian public health system. Although every critical measure needs to be taken in reversing the escalating trend of COVID-19 in Nigeria, ultimately one of the solutions to this crisis is a positive transformation in the public health system (Plan International Nigeria, 2020). In Nigeria and across the world, the services of a team of professionals, including social workers, are required to minimize the debilitating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, given the bio-psychosocial focus of the social work profession, many practitioners would be instrumental in this regard (Amadasun & Omorogiuwa, 2020; Isangha et al., 2020). Without language, communication will not be possible in passing information or relating with people accurately. This is the application in whole ramifications of life across the country.

Components of a Communication Plan

Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (2009) listed some components of a communication plan that will assist in making work in the society and health sector easier through communication. Some of them are listed below;

- a. The health issue, problem, or scenario based on various pandemic phases.
- b. Goals—to inform, persuade, motivate, and save lives.
- c. Objectives that are specific, measurable, assignable, reasonable, and time-related and that focus on specific targeted audiences.
- d. Strategies and tactics that support the achievement of goals and objectives.
- e. Key audiences prioritized in order of importance.
- f. Partners, including their resources, strengths, and weaknesses.
- g. Preferred channels of communication – for example, through news releases, news conferences, the Internet, toll-free telephone line, brochures, radio announcements, special events, door-to-door canvassing, and media interviews.

An Effective Pandemic Influenza Communication Plan

These are some effective means of communication to manage the pandemics in society

- a. Inform and educate
- b. Enhance knowledge and understanding
- c. Establish and maintain trust and credibility
- d. Position the organization/agency as the main source of information and expertise
- e. Engage the public
- f. Encourage collaboration and cooperation
- g. Encourage constructive dialogue
- h. Gain support for policies and plans
- i. Create informed decision-making
- j. Address rumors and misinformation
- k. Encourage appropriate behavior (Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization 2009)

Seven Key Risk Communication Concepts

1. When health risks are uncertain, as likely will be the case during an influenza pandemic, people need information about what is known and unknown, and interim guidance to formulate decisions to help protect their health and the health of others.
2. An influenza pandemic will generate immediate, intense, and sustained demand for information from the public, healthcare providers, policymakers, and the news media. Healthcare workers and public health staff may need training in media relations and public health communications.
3. Timely and transparent dissemination of accurate, science-based information about pandemic influenza and the progress of the response can build public trust and confidence, particularly when such communication efforts are guided by established principles of risk communication.
4. Coordination of message development and release of information among federal, state, and local health officials is critical to help avoid confusion that can undermine public trust, raise fear and anxiety, and impede response measures.
5. Guidance to community members about how to protect themselves and their families and colleagues is an essential component of crisis management.
6. Information to public audiences should be technically correct and sufficiently complete to encourage support of policies and official actions without seeming patronizing to the public.
7. Information presented during an influenza pandemic should minimize speculation and avoid over-interpretation of data, overly confident assessments of investigations and control measures, and critical comments related to other jurisdictions.

Theoretical Framework

Communication Theory

Communication is the essence of life. It is a necessity. To express themselves, human beings need to communicate. An individual has to communicate to express his feelings, pass on information to other human beings and share his thoughts and feelings.

Communication theory was proposed by S. F. Scudder in the year 1980. It states that all living beings existing on the planet communicate although the way of communication is different.

Plants communicate their need to be taken care of and watered immediately through visible changes in the color of the leaves and the falling of leaves and flowers. Animals communicate by sounds, and several movements to indicate that they are hungry or unwell or need medical attention.

A mother would never understand that her child is hungry unless and until the child cries. Crying is again a form through which the child communicates that he is hungry and needs food. The same applies when he is injured, where he uses crying again as a tool to communicate his pain and need for urgent medical attention.

Thus the universal law of communication theory says that all living beings whether they are plants, animals, or human beings communicate through sound, speech, visible changes, body movements, gestures, or in the best possible way to make others aware of their thoughts, feelings, problems, happiness or any other information. If a child scores fewer marks in examinations, parents would not speak to the child for some time- again an effort to communicate that the parents are angry over the child's performance and he needs to buck up for his further examinations. Try to irritate a stray dog, he will surely bark at you - again an animal's way to communicate that he is angry and should not be irritated further.

Like human beings, animals also communicate among themselves through gestures and body movements. Monkeys always carry their babies with them wherever they go, again a way through which the mother tries to communicate that their babies are safe and the mother is there to take good care of them. During the mating season of animals, communication through gestures plays a very important role in bringing them close, the same way a peacock dances to attract its partner.

Another model of communication says that communication is simply the process of transferring information from the sender to the recipient where the recipient decodes the information and acts accordingly. A large number of people also support this model of communication.

Communication Theory Framework

Let us examine communication and communication theory through the following viewpoints:

Mechanistic - The mechanistic viewpoint says that communication is simply the transmission of information from the first party to the second party. The first part is the sender and the second party is the receiver.

Psychological - According to the psychological viewpoint, communication is simply not the flow of information from the sender to the receiver but the thoughts, and feelings of the sender which he tries to share with the recipients. It also includes the reactions, and feelings of the receiver after he decodes the information.

Social - The social viewpoint considers communication as a result of interaction between the sender and the receiver. It simply says that communication is directly dependent on the content of the speech. "How one communicates" is the basis of the social viewpoint.

Systemic - The systemic viewpoint says that communication is a new and different message which is created when various individuals interpret it in their way and then reinterpret it and draw their conclusion.

Critical - The critical viewpoint says that communication is simply a way with the help of which an individual expresses his power and authority among other individuals. To summarize the communication theory proposes that to survive, every living entity needs to communicate with others and also among themselves. Communication is a dire need for survival.

Conclusion

In summary, language is a very strong tool in communication and if appropriately used can be used in managing the challenges of the pandemic. The study concludes that the world is facing unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic, and hence some approaches are needed for pandemic management. To contain the spread of the virus, communication needs to be well-activated for people to be carried along in the pandemic. This is because, without communication, many things will go wrong and will affect society at large negatively.

Suggestions

With language being a tool for communication in managing the challenges of pandemics, some suggestions have been made to tackle the issues. Some of them are;

1. Language should be taught from birth to enable everyone to be carried along in society.
2. There should be constant communication through social media or other means to reach out to people for more updates.
3. The masses should also be educated or enlightened to avoid the continuous widespread of the pandemic.

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