Original Research Article

Re-conceptualizing a Space for Esan Language Use in Lassa Virus Awareness Campaign: A Pragma-Terminological Perspective

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Abstract

This study from a pragmatic perspective makes a case for a complete transposition to the use of indigenous Esan terminologies in the Lassa virus disease (LVD) symptomatic awareness campaign following the recurrent decimals of the virus reported by *The Guardian* on 26 January 2023. The study employs research instruments such as questionnaires, In-depth Interviews and key-formant interviews to examine the knowledge of 105 participants in Esan West, Central and North East on three LVD symptomatic terminologies selected purposively. Results unveil that there is a significant statistical difference between participants with the knowledge of the LVD symptomatic terminologies from those without the knowledge. While some of the terminologies provided by a few participants may be assumed misrepresented, others tend to be linguistically oriented through the heuristic mechanisms of inference, conceptualization, and categorization, amongst others that are pragma-terminologically impelled to achieve meaning significance. Mihesuah and Wilson's (2004) Indigenous Critical Theory and Akmajian et al (2010) perspective of pragmatics is employed as analytical models to support such transposition. The study is not only re-conceptualizing space for indigenous LVD terminological usage but also aims to contribute to Esan orthographical documentation.

Keywords: Indigenous Esan terminologies, The Guardian, Lassa virus disease, In-depth Interview, Key Informant Interview, Mihesuah and Wilson's Indigenous Critical Theory, Akmajian et al (2010) perspective of pragmatics.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the complexities of the Lassa virus disease (LVD) is its recurrent decimals in the Esan regions. Recently, *The Guardian* on 26 January 2023 unveiled Etsako West, Esan West and Esan North East as the most hit regions in Edo state with the LVD malady as they recorded 75 per cent of confirmed cases. The statistical report is of paramount concern not just for healthcare workers in the regions but all stakeholders. As part of the concern, while we commend the government's quick mediation to the affected regions by appealing to residents to comply with health guideline instructions given to them by healthcare specialists to curb the spread of the LVD in the regions, this study complements such frantic effort by advocating a space where the indigenous knowledge of the LVD symptomatic terminologies is advanced. To this end, health guidelines exhibited by various banners, posters, handbills, billboards, and so on in the Esan regions concerning the LVD that are not grounded in the indigenous language of the environment should be deconstructed for effective outcomes. Our conception of '*deconstruction*' augments Mihesuah and Wilson's, (2004, p.2) reconceptualization of "the creation of a space where indigenous values and knowledge are respected". In other words, this study, as ongoing research sponsored by the *Tertiary Education Trust Fund* (TETFUND) re-conceptualizes a system formation that is culturally responsive in valuing indigenous ways of knowing.

Such imperative drive for empirical knowledge pushes to the fore the pragmatic dimension of this study as it avails us the space, first to be acquainted with the natives' experience of the virus and second, to make a careful observation on how the virus equally affects their cognitive system via their different responses. Pragmatics according to Mey (2001) studies the way language is used in communication as shaped by the situation of society. Impelled by the social problem of LVD due to its recurrent decimals in the Esan regions, the study envisages a practical alternative healthcare system where concrete healthcare awareness tips on LVD symptomatic terminologies are indigenously enhanced. To substantiate this, the study approaches it from a bilateral perspective. First, the study through the statistical data unearths the inabilities of a certain group of participants to construct the English LVD terms in the Esan language. Second, the study via simple statistics also showcases the pragma-communicative commitment of the group of participants able to use the Esan language to reconstruct the three English LVD terms purposively selected. This pragma-communicative resilience of the LVD is defined via the heuristic or cognitive mechanisms employed by participants in the language to gain meaning and relevance. The various pragma-cognitive processes foreground language as a requisite constituent in healthcare information delivery (Pugh, 1996; Drennan, 1998; Ainsworth-Vaughn, 2001; Youdelman & Perkins, 2002). The concept of relevance is very crucial as it lends credence to the whole essence of the creation of a spatial phenomenon of LVD terminologies in this wise. Both bilateral perspectives affirm Temmerman & Kerremans' (2003) view on the radical shifts in which terminological discourses have embedded.

2. Methodology

The study adopts questionnaires, in-depth Interviews and Key Informant Interviews (IDI and KII). The IDI and KII methods are utilized simultaneously to complement the questionnaires, especially, where participants find it difficult to respond to the questionnaires directly. Esan West (Ekpoma), Esan Central (Irrua), and Esan North-East (Uromi) constitute the research samples. 120 questionnaires were distributed. However, only 105 were validly accounted for as 15 were returned unattended to by participants following the impassiveness of the natives on the virus. The questionnaires have three sections. The first section is on the background of the participants. The second section conveys the domain of discourse and the third, is to elicit the indigenous cognitive responses of participants on three (3) LVD symptomatic terminologies. This aspect is constructed to facilitate the Esan Language Proficiency Test (ELPT). The data for the study (the three LVD symptomatic terms) is adopted from Solomon-Etefia and Edem's (2020) article on "Language, action negotiation in Lassa fever health discourse in Nigeria". Square brackets, slanted lines and Asterisks are employed by the study to enhance the interpretation of terms constructed by the different participants.

Mihesuah & Wilson's (2004) Indigenous Critical Theory (henceforth ICT) and Akmajian et al (2010) perspective of pragmatics is employed as theoretical models. While Mihesuah & Wilson's (2004) ICT affords us the reconceptualization framework through which the LVD symptomatic terminologies should be indigenously advanced; Akmajian et al (2010) pragmatic conception as a diagnostic means establishes not just how the Esan LVD symptomatic terminologies are indigenously, culturally and intellectually driven, but how they satisfy terminological criteria.

3. DISCUSSION

The discussion is based on the participant's responses to the following LVD terminologies in the Esan language. (i) Lassa Fever (ii)High Fever and (iii)Weakness. With such responsive constructions, we attempt to unveil why the reconceptualization space is essential for the LVD awareness campaign in the Esan regions.

(i) Lassa Fever:

Considering the data garnered, 11 participants out of 105 cognitively responded to the term/ *Lassa Fever* / using the following terminologies in the language:

/*Emiamwhen Lassa*/ --meaning Lassa sickness) is used by 1 participant.

/*Emiamwhen* or *Emianmem ofen*/ efen/ --(sickness caused by a rat) is used by 10 participants

The statistical value implies that 94 participants are without the indigenous knowledge of the term to give us a total of 10.48 per cent of the sampled participants with the knowledge of the term. The statistical percentage is arrived at through a **unitary method below:**

$$\frac{\text{Frequency}}{\text{Total value}} \quad X \quad \frac{100}{1} \quad = \frac{11}{105} \quad X \quad \frac{100}{1} \quad = 10.476 \ (10.48)$$

We commend the progress made so far towards the LVD both in pathogenesis and molecular epidemiology as well as technological appropriateness for prompt diagnosis. However, fraught by this statistical value, neglecting a non-indigenous knowledge of the LVD terminology as conveyed in text 1 will continue to mar the control of the disease. Mihesuah & Wilson's (2004) ICT quoted from Reese (2008) earmarks its significance here as the theory calls for indigenous support for institutional foundations that are shaken. Our perspective of "institutions" refers to a language institutional space such as hospitals, schools, communities and homes among others where indigenous languages supposedly to be used as the basics are no longer valued. The Nigerian space is not an exception as the English language

tends to have dominated various spheres of life ranging from education, economy, and politics to the media. This is apparent from the participants' responses and linguistic proficiency in reconstructing/*Lassa feve*r/ in the Esan language.

While we criticize the non-constructive responses of 94 participants towards the term /*Lassa fever*/, we equally pay accolade to the pragmatic efforts of 11 participants towards the term. Although, one of the participants in his/ her quest to show how relevant the Esan indigenous language could be in LVD construction failed to satisfy what Akmajian et al (2010, p.373) call a conversational presumption of relevance via the use of complex collocation that is incomprehensible or misrepresented in /*Emiamwhen Lassa*/. Akmajian et al (2010) augment Grice's Cooperative Principles by recommending five conversational presumptions that a speaker and hearer need to share in a context to make the communication problem solved or foster information (terminology) relevance. These are *Relevance*---the speaker's remark is relevant to the conversation, *sincerity*--- the speaker is being sincere, *truthfulness*--- the speaker endeavours to say something true, *quantity*—the speaker provides a suitable amount of information and *quantity*—the speaker has enough evidence on what he/she says.

The term / *Lassa* / in /*Emiamwhen Lassa*/ is non-Esan, hence, its conceptual representation validates what Faber et al (2009) deem as conceptual and terminological confusion. Communicative relevance is central to terminological criteria since it craves conciseness and clarity. Hence, the expectation is that when a participant is describing any term in the Esan language, there should be a consistent co-occurrence of words to mollify hearers' understanding of the information towards what Wilson and Sperber (2004) denote as optimal relevance because they believe that an utterance is linguistically an implicit piece of evidence that should lead one to the decoding of meaning.

We are mindful that most African languages do not have an exact term for /*Lassa fever*/, and the Esan language is not an exception. As such, rather than using the term /*Lassa*/ to augment /*Emiamwhen*/ in the language, ten (10) participants employed the cognitive mechanism of conceptualization that augments a conversational presumption that is inferentially driven to transpose a terminological knowledge that helps in disambiguating the use of /*Lassa*/. Conceptualization as a cognitive and pragmatic mechanism in the first instance, initiates an indigenous knowledge that points a certain variety of rats to hearers as the causative factor of the virus infection, consequently, disambiguating the term /*Lassa*/ in the context. The disambiguation further locates the term within the bracket of communicative significance via a conversational presumption that infers /*Efen*/ as /*Lassa*/ in the language. The cognitive and pragma-terminological process indexes conceptualization not just to be fundamental in conveying human thought and endeavour (Crystal, 1987), or meaning comprehension (Golovanova, 2011), but as an essential inferential mechanism towards the construal of terms relevant to Esan LVD health awareness discourse.

As we border on one hand, on the use of /*Lassa* / in /*Emianmhen Lassa* / to be a complex and non-perceivable concept in the Esan language system; on the other hand, the use of /*Emianmhen*/ or /*Emiamem* / ---meaning /*sickness*/ as a term for /*fever*/ situates us within the cultural affinity that exists not just among the participants but Esan natives. Therefore, we acquiesce that creating or re-conceptualizing a space where Esan LVD symptomatic terms are advanced in the healthcare sector is a welcome practice as it can lead to the consolidation of a terminological norm in the language as encoded in /*Emianmhem ofen*/ or /*efen*/; hence, advancing a kind of speech system or tradition among the natives that deters the use of complex structures that are incomprehensible. /*Emianmhem ofen*/ or /*efen*/ seems to have met certain terminological criteria of relevance ranging from its linguistic derivability, explicitness, terminological uniqueness, semantic clarity, precision, analytical completeness, and collocability to discourse domain applicability. To this end, /*Emianmhem ofen*/ or /*efen*/ *as* a term explains and corroborates one of the essences of this study and can be documented orthographically as Esan terminology for /*Lassa fever*/.

(ii) High Fever/

Here, 24 out of 105 participants have the Esan indigenous knowledge of the term /*High fever*/. This means that 81 participants do not know the term in the local language; thus, giving us an approximation of 22.86 per cent. The statistical value like in text (i) is one of the key indexes why this research is initiated in the first place; thus, should elicit great concern. Nonetheless, the participants with the Esan indigenous knowledge employ seven different terminological descriptions for /*High fever*/ that pragmatically interest us in this study. The entire phenomenon advances the use of description in the language as a viable pragma-terminological mechanism for achieving meaning and relevance.

1 participant uses /*Okwo humu*/-- meaning "those who have this, their heads would be hot";
1 participant employs /*Ehirom oni fever*/ to describe one with a high fever;
1 participant used *Emiamen efen* / to conceptualize high fever as caused by a rat.
2 participants use /*Ulilin nor egbe kua or kha*/--as "a fever that makes a body to be hot"
7 participants use /*Emime no kua* /-- meaning a sickness/fever that is hot"
4 participants use /*Egbe no tau*/ -- meaning a hot body.
8 participants use / *Egbe yion*/---- meaning body hotness

Though one may find the first and second constructions a bit problematic due to lack of precision, they are still pragmatically enriching in a sense as meaning creation and meaning transfer are often the subject of a symbolic convergence. However, this convergence is accomplished most times in communication when there is speaker-hearer contextual shared knowledge. This is the situation with /*Okwo humu*/ because of the deictic elements "those" and "this". Mey (2000) maintains that deixis is a means of showing via language that is pointing at things/objects/ persons utilizing special words. Such demonstration awareness most times leads to the choice and invention of the words and phrases used by the speaker as encoded in /*Okwo humu*/. Thus, deixis is all about communication explicitness and description via pointing out specifically referring to the background or environment. This is one of the criteria for terminological achievement. To this end, we can comprehend the meaning of /*Okwo humu*/ not because of the semantic feature of the term but because we share certain contextual knowledge with the speaker or participant. Pragmatically the informative effort of the participant to satisfy hearers' understanding of the term /*high fever*/ is comprehended via the deictics indexes and their referents as the participant showcases information significance ranging from the term to the dreadful effect or outcome of the term itself on people as a symptom of hotness of the head (*their head will be hot*)

The problem with the second construction is complex collocation. The use of /*fever*/ in /*Ehirom oni fever*/ becomes a non-perceivable construct in the Esan language system; hence tends to violate Akmajian et al (2010) conversational presumption *of quantity*, which elicits a speaker to contribute the appropriate amount of information to aid understanding. For /*Emiamen efen* /, the usage may have been borne out of the participant's cognitive assumption that any abnormal body temperature is caused by the LVD. The users of /*Ulilin nor egbe kua or kha* /, /*Emime no kua* /, *Egbe no tau*/, and /*Egbe yion*/ are also various cognitive constructs that advance description in the language as a pragma-terminological mechanism to ascertain communicative relevance. The terms foreground /*High fever*/ to be a very serious health "condition" "Apart from /*Emime no kua* /, all other constructs or concepts employ the body classifier /*Egbe* / which helps to appropriate sickness/ fever to humans.

We also discover the use of inference via the use of /kua/ meaning 'hot' to conceptualize /high/. 'High' and 'hot' in the real sense are two different terms with different meanings. The meaning is inferred here as it rests on the cooperation between Esan language users and the hearers in the context. The inferential model tends to consider a speaker's intention; hence, such communicative significance where the hearers infer 'hot' for 'high' is possible in a sense because there is a speaker-hearer shared inferential strategies which make the hearer 'recognize the utterance or expression of the speaker's communicative intent. Thus, the inferential process showcases a term as a symbol structured to convey certain encoded information assumed to be understood by those with shared information knowledge. The entire phenomenon substantiates the International Organization for Standardization's (2019) definition of a term as a unit of knowledge structured via the combination of unique characteristics. It equally unveils how indigenous knowledge terminological productions are successfully framed via context to achieve a pragmatic importance.

(iii) Weakness

There are 49 out of 105 participants who have indigenous knowledge of the term /*Weakness*/. Mathematically, it means that 56 participants do not have indigenous knowledge of the term in the language thus, giving us 46.67 per cent of the sampled data. Twelve different Esan terminologies are used by these 49 participants to conceptualize text 3---/*Weakness*/ as follow:

/*Ahufoi*/---'lack of strength' used by 1 participant
/*Egbewo*/--- 'body is tired or weak' used by 10
/*Egbe wo me*/--- 'my body is tired' or 'I am tired' used by 9 participants
/*Egbe wole me*/-- 'my body is tired' used by 2 participants
/*Egbe wolo* or *Egbe wole*/-- 'a body that is tired' used by 4 participants
/*Egbe no(r) wole*/--- 'a body that is tired' used by 3 participants
/Egbe woloa/ or /Egbe woloria / Egbe woria/ ---'body is tired' used by 9 participants
/*Egbe lolo*/--- 'the body is tired' is used by 6 participants
/*Uwomwin Egbe*/-- weakness of the body' used by 1 participant
/*Egbe ghemin wome*/-- 'used by 1 participant
/*Egbevbowen*/---- 'My body is weak' or 'I am weak' is used by 1 participant
/*Egbe baa me*/-- 'body is paining me' or my body aches with pain' used by 2 participants

The varieties replicate Faber et al (2009) view of terminological knowledge to be something exciting when varieties of conceptual relations are considered. A close study of the terms represents indigenous anticipatory craving towards reorienting knowledge. They convey how language influences the human reasoning process, consequently, what Gaudry, (2011) and (2018) call "*De-colonial indigenization*" which captures studies that encourage indigenous knowledge as well as determine its significance.

A close study of the terms unveils some areas that are pragmatically enriching. The data conveys that about 98% of the participants employ the body classifier--- /*Egbe*/ as an antecedent to successive terms to drive home the meaning constructed. Thus, the usage as a conceptual representation from the user to the hearer substantiates a sociocultural knowledge or shared beliefs among the Esan people that the body classifier seems to be an enhanced mechanism to communicate the human body illness in the language. The usage of the body classifier in the language also conveys that language initiates a means of encoding a community's knowledge beliefs and values (Holmes & Wilson, 2013). The conceptual usage is creditable for its information relevance as it substantiates Akmajian et al (2010) opinion that linguistic communication should be cooperative problem-solving. To them, a speaker's interest should be that hearers understand what the speaker means or infers. Hence, the use of the body classifier by participants helps in terminological clarity.

Another area of interest that draws our attention is the communicative implication of the use of the morphemes /*me*/ and /*no*(*r*)/ in the language. The morpho-terminological variants showcase how the Esan language categorizes terms to self-define themselves and other participants in the discourse. Categorization in this sense is used as a mechanism to convey how terms or concepts are discerned and understood. Terms such as /*Egbe wo me*/, /*Egbe wole me*/, /*Egbe ghemin wome*/ and / *Egbe baa me*/ through the addition of the post-vocalic morpheme /*me*/ achieve a personalization feat. The mechanism of personalization helps to draw the hearer's attention to the term from an assumed general perspective to a more user-centred perspective. The usage helps informative speakers like the Esan participants to personalize their ideas to help provoke some level of reasoning that livens up the information conveyed. The addition of /*no*/ as an infix in /*Egbe* [*no*] *wole*/--- a body that is tired (actually pointing to someone in a sense) creates a terminological shift from speaker-centred to someone-centred. The non-use of the morphemes in /*Egbewo*/---"Body is tired /A weak / tired body" emphasizes the term from a general sense rather than who the term applies to. With such terminological categorization, hearers' cognitive conceptual understanding of the distinction between / *Egbewo*/, /*Egbe wo* [*me*]/ and /*Egbe* [*no*] *wole*/ is enriched. While / *Egbewo*/ becomes a general term that signals all forms of body weakness, /*Egbe wo* [*me*]/ and /*Egbe* [*no*] *wole*/ are term-specific.

Another remarkable area is the use of /*Egbe baa me*/----"my body is paining me" because of its assumed communicative shift. In terminology, the relationship between a concept and its representation is very important, hence, *Egbe baa me*/, though may seem contextually contestable, has been inferentially proven to satisfy information relevance since knowledge is commonly shaped in a progressive sense. The participant's use of the term may have developed from a cognitive perception that infers pain as a major attribute of body discomfort. Thus, the hearer, on the other hand, via a simple inference tends to make sense of /*Egbe baa me*/ when he/she comprehends pain in the language as a kind of body discomfort and weakness. This is the whole essence of terminology in the first place. The situation shows that inferential meaning is an essential process in the Esan terminological structure.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has showcased that the utmost theme at the heart of every indigenization discourse irrespective of the approach, is the consistent need for change (Gaudry and Lorenz, 2018). As a window, it facilitates healthcare service programmes in the regions. The study has conveyed two essential areas of concern that warrant a reconceptualization of a space that tends to promote Esan LVD terminologies in the healthcare sector. The first borders on the number of participants without the knowledge of the LVD symptomatic terms and the second, as a way of advancing such reconceptualization showcases where the indigenous knowledge of participants is tested or enhanced. This concern venerates Mihesuah & Wilson's (2004) ICT and Akmajian's (2010) pragmatics in this wise. While the former calls for a research space of this kind where indigenous priorities are conveyed and supported, the latter venerates such indigenous priorities or space by attesting to the pragma-communicative significance of the different LVD terms used by the participants in the language. It unveils the cooperative role of these terms between a speaker and a hearer.

The two essential areas instantiated by the study have shown their cogency and importance how the Esan language can be enhanced. While the statistical aspect which conveys the level of LVD knowledge among the natives tends to serve as a window for stakeholders to make a better decision towards healthcare service delivery in the regions; the dimension of the study where participants' knowledge of the LVD terminologies are tested is revered not just as leeway for Esan Language Proficiency Test (ELTP) but as a contribution to knowledge towards human capacity building and development of Esan language vocabulary reservoir and the documentation of Esan LVD terminologies. The linguistic exercise attests to Mihesuah & Wilson's (2004) ICT conception of the creation of an environment that supports research and methodologies useful to Indigenous nation-building.

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