

## A PRAGMATIC APPRAISAL OF THE LANGUAGE OF *COVID-19* AND *ENDSARS*

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### **Abstract**

*New terminologies or terms may be created as their need arises in order to fill up a gap or create effect in the course of trying to pass a message across. In creating a new terminology, the context of its use becomes very important. Anchoring on communicative theory of terminology, this paper examines the use of language in creating the terms COVID-19 and End SARS. The two concepts are first presented on the basis of the tenets of Leipzig's glossing rule in order to clearly showcase their smallest morphological units, followed by an analysis using the communicative theory of terminology as a guide. The analysis has shown that the sounds /ko/, /vi/, /d/ represent "coronavirus-2 disease", and "19" pragmatically signifies "2019", the year the variant of the coronavirus disease known as severe acute respiratory syndrom (SARS-CoV-2) was witnessed in the entire world. Also, End SARS might seem to clearly stand for a call for the dissolution of the Special Anti Robbery Squad, but its meaning is extended to express displeasure over Nigerian government's lookwarm attitude to many evils bedeviling Nigeria, like: police brutality on citizens, insecurity caused by boko haram insurgents/banditory, increasing high cost of living. Linguistic cum pragmatic considerations were made in coining COVID-19 and End SARS, and the choice of the terms is for easy communication.*

**Keywords:** language; communication; COVID-19; End-SARS; coronavirus; pandemic

## **Introduction**

The entire world, including Nigeria, was thrown into a state of pandemonium in 2019 following an outbreak of a version of deadly coronavirus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (a.k.a COVID-19). The pandemic reached crescendo in 2020 and has since then claimed so many lives. The devastating effect of this virus has led to shutting down the entire world without embarking on economic activities, and restrictions on movement of individuals within and outside so many countries of the world.

The Nigerian government left no stone unturned in an effort to chase the SARS coronavirus 2 out of the country. The Nigerian government quickly set up a COVID-19 committee to oversee all issues pertaining to the virus. The entire country was totally shut down and people were prevented from leaving their homes. All economic activities were halted, and markets and schools closed down. This resulted into serious hardship and suffering among the citizens as many homes were finding it hard to procure foods for the households.

Almost the same period of the coronavirus pandemic, serious crisis engulfed Nigeria as a result of the youths not being comfortable with activities of a unit of the Nigeria police force known as the Special Anti-robbery Squad (SARS) coupled with their inability to cope with the economic hardship in the country. The youths took to the streets of Nigeria protesting against police brutality on Nigerian youths; and they were destroying government vehicles and buildings. The protest was tagged “End SARS” protest and was simultaneously taking place in all the major cities of Nigeria; it later extended to different other countries of the world where Nigerians reside.

Scholars have studied the medical and socio-economic implications of these two events of 2020 on Nigerians, but the attention of this paper focuses on the language used in coining the terminologies. In effect, the study investigates the pragmatic use of language for coining *COVID-19* and *End SARS*. It intends to find out what the two terms actually represent and the idea behind their use.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 gives an overview of the COVID-19 and End SARS. The theoretical framework guiding the study is discussed in section 3. Section 4 presents the methodology employed in the study. In section 5 is data presentation and analysis, while section 6 is summary and conclusion.

**Explication of COVID-19 and End SARS**

COVID-19 is the name of a sudden and deadly disease that results in the hardness of breathe due to its attack on the respiratory system of its victim, although its effect can extend beyond the respiratory system (Felman, 2021). This respiratory system-attacking disease had been in existence before 2019, but it manifested in different dimension in the globe in 2019 through a version of the virus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Medical News Today, 2020). Medically, experts widely believe that this version of the disease came through bats or pangolins and that its first transmission to humans occurred on December 8, 2019, in Wuhan in Hubei province of China (Amzat, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo & Danjibo, 2020; NCDC, 2023). From China, it then spread to different parts of the world. Although some persons who contracted COVID-19 eventually survived even without medication, the disease had claimed so many lives. In the entire world, the disease had claimed 6,790,827 lives (Worldometers, 2023), and in Nigeria, government official report says the virus has affected 266,463 persons, killed 3,155 persons and 259, 850 persons recovered (NCDC, 2023; Worldometers, 2023). Apart from COVID-19, other diseases caused by coronavirus are severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). There are other variants of the virus known as Delta (B.1.617.2) and Omicron (B.1.1529) in Canada. In tables 1 and 2 are the levels of the effect of the virus in some countries of the world.

S/n	Country	Confirmed Cases	Death	Recovery
1	USA	104,964,592	6,790,827	651,257,162
2	UK	24,341,615	206,246	24,063,419
3	India	44,684,917	530,760	44,152,258
4	France	39,586,293	164,712	39,351,757
5	Germany	38,002,611	167,289	37,585,500
6	China	503,302	5,272	379,053

(Worldometers, 2023)

**Table 1 Effect of the virus in European countries**

The figures in table 1 against the countries covered reveal that the United States of America has the highest confirmed cases of coronavirus disease, while China has the lowest cases. In table 2 are some countries of Africa with their COVID-19 profile.

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S/n	Country	Arrival Date	Total Confirmed Cases	Total Death	Total Recovery
1	Nigeria covid19.ncdc.gov.ng tradingeconomy.com	27/02/2020	266,463	3,155	207,254
2	Eswatini	14/03/2020	74,158	1,423	-
3	Sudan https://sho.gov.sd/corona/index.php	13/03/2020	63,775	5,011	57,891
4	São Tomé covid.ms.gov.st	12/04/2020	6,280	77	-
5	Mozambique	22/03/2020	232,819	2,237	-
	Angola http://covid19.gov.ao	21/03/2020	105,184	1,931	63,295
6	Togo	06/03/2020	39,364	290	39,070
7	Mauritania	13/03/2020	63,667	997	-
8	Cape Verde	20/03/2020	63,237	413	-
9	Togo	06/03/2020	39,364	290	39,070
10	South Africa	05/03/2020	4,060,349	102,595	2,912,506
11	Central African Rep.	14/03/2020	15,368	113	15,200
12	Gambia	17/03/2020	12,586	372	12,189
13	Kenya	13/03/2020	342,874	5,688	337,146
14	Mauritius	19/03/2020	41,698	1,043	39,991
15	Ghana	12/03/2020	171,160	1,462	169,689
16	Mali	25/03/2020	32,895	743	31,997
17	Benin	16/03/2020	27,990	163	27,825
18	Congo	03/01/2020	25,375	386	24,006
19	South Sudan	05/04/2020	18,368	138	18,115
20	Burkina Faso	09/03/2020	22,056	396	21,596
21	Niger	19/03/2020	9,931	312	8,890
22	Liberia	16/03/2020	8,065	294	7,768
23	Sierra Leone	31/03/2020	7,760	126	NA
24	Guinea Bissau	24/03/2020	8,953	176	8,660

(cf. Worldometers, 2023)

**Table 2 Effect of the virus in some African countries**

Table 2 shows that among the countries sampled, South Africa has the highest number of coronavirus disease cases with a figure of 4,060,349, while São Tomé has the least with a figure of 6,280. It could be noted that the figures may not be accurate representation of COVID-19 cases in these countries because some countries are more committed with their disease control policies and have better equipment to test their citizens than some others.

The arrival of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-19 in 2019 created tension throughout the world due to its devastating effect. It made the entire world to remain at standstill with borders of many countries shut down for almost a year. According to Nigeria's Minister of Health, Dr. Osagie Ehanire, the first case of coronavirus disease in Nigeria was recorded in Lagos on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, from an Italian working in Nigeria on his return from Milan Italy to Lagos Nigeria, and it was confirmed by the Virology Laboratory of Lagos University Teaching Hospital (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020; Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2020). The Federal Ministry of Health immediately strengthened measure to ensure that an outbreak in Nigeria is controlled and contained quickly. The multi-sectorial coronavirus preparedness group led by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) was activated immediately.

The SARS-coronavirus 2 spreads through person to person contact. The infected persons are said to expel tiny droplets containing the disease when they sneeze, breathe out or cough; and once these droplets enter the mouth, eyes or nose of a normal person, the person becomes infected. So many persons have contracted the disease ignorantly by touching a surface or an object on which the virus had landed with their hands and eventually putting their hands in their mouth, eyes or nose. That suggests the reason people are warned to thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water, especially running water, regularly or at least, after about 20 seconds; where there are no soap and water, they should always sanitize their hands with alcohol-based sanitizers. People are also warned to avoid close contact with COVID-19 patients, avoid touching surfaces at will, avoid crowded places, maintain clean environments, maintain social distancing and avoid unnecessary movements by staying indoors. Those who already have contracted the disease are self-isolated or quarantined for, at least, fourteen days. Where going out becomes inevitable, people are advised to wear face/nose mask and avoid sneezing or coughing without covering their mouth and nose with handkerchief, tissue or under the sleeve of their shirt.

The identified common symptoms of the COVID-19, according to Medical News Today (2013), include fever, breathlessness, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle pain, chills, and loss of taste or smell, which likely occur in an interval of 2-14 days of exposure to the virus. Among the risk factors are: being in close contact with coronavirus patients, staying in congested areas, the elderly, patients suffering from heart-related problem, kidney disease, obesity, sickle cell, type 2 diabetes, and reduction in body immune system. Since inception of SARS coronavirus disease 2-19, series of awareness campaign had been maintained by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and in Nigeria by the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19. Many scholars have also conducted a lot studies on the virus. For example, Amzat et al (2020) researched on the burden and sociomedical

response during the first 100 days of coronavirus in Nigeria. They discovered, among other findings, that the incidence of the COVID-19 grew steadily in Nigeria, moving from an imported case and elitist pattern to community transmission; that the case fatality stood at 2.8%; and that the country recorded an upsurge of 52% total cases in the transmission of COVID-19 in the short period of relaxing the lockdown. They warned of the potential of imminent overwhelming COVID-19 in Nigeria as the country was attempting to hurriedly open the economy that could sacrifice public health gains for temporary economic gains. Okoroiwu et al (2021) is an account of epidemiological events, response, management, preventions and lessons learned from COVID-19 in Nigeria. Adopting a retrospective analysis of the COVID-19 weekly disease update report by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) covering February 29, 2020 (Week 9) and March 28, 2021 (Week 12) and data curated from the NCDC database, they discovered that as of March 28, 2021, Nigeria was the 5<sup>th</sup> most affected African country and 77<sup>th</sup> most affected country globally with 162, 593 COVID-19 related deaths, that COVID-19 case had been reported in all 26 States and the Federal Capital Territory. They noted that while Lagos had remained the epicenter of the pandemic accounting for 35.4% of the pandemic in Nigeria, Kogi State was the least affected State with 0.003%. They also submit that the trend had shown male predilection and that 35-39 years is the age bracket mostly affected; the attack rate was 78.8 per 100,000 of the population and the cumulative death per 100,000 of the population was 1.0, while the case fatality rate was 1.30. They disclose that approximately 1,778,105 COVID-19 tests had been performed and 923,623 doses of vaccine administered. They conclude that the case trend of the disease showed a bimodal form which could lead to a second wave occurrence. All these studies are health-implicative in nature. The current paper is a deviation as it bases on a linguistic approach to establish the pragmatic implication of COVID-19 terminology.

On the other hand, *End SARS* is the theme of a revolutionary protest by the Nigerian youths in 2020. The origin of the *End SARS* protest is traced to police brutality on Nigerians, which became unbearable to the irate youths of Nigeria. The End SARS represents a mass demonstration staged by the Nigerian youths throughout Nigeria and beyond, in 2020, calling on the Nigerian government to disband a unit in the Nigeria Police Force known as the “Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)”. The demonstration went on simultaneously throughout the major cities of Nigeria as well as other major cities of the world where Nigerians reside. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad had offices at different locations in different States of the federation and the federal capital territory, Abuja. As its name suggests, this special unit was established for the main purpose of ridding the country of men of the underworld, especially people using guns to engage in

criminal activities. The SARS engaged in extra-judicial killing and even shoot armed robbers at sight without being questioned.

At every location there was SARS office, there was cell where criminals were being kept pending the conclusion of investigations, and if found culpable in the end, were executed by firing squad. At the initial stage, this special Unit of the force seemed to be doing well and they instilled fear on the people, particularly the criminal elements in the society. However, with the passage of time, the Unit became bastardized and started losing the confidence of Nigerian citizens because of their nefarious and corruption-linked activities. They became an instrument for settling rifts among family members and non-family members, and they had severally been accused of taking bribes from people to eliminate innocent Nigerians, especially the youths who had committed nothing to warrant such killings, simply because they had no people to come to their rescue. The Unit had had a long record of abuses on the Nigerian people, and a lot of innocent citizens, who were framed up have died in their hands without their families getting justice in the end. Nigerians had become so devastated about the activities of the SARS people, such that the protest received an overwhelming support when it started; and the hunter then become the hunted.

Apart from the unpalatable activities of the SARS people, the protest came at a time Nigerians were finding it hard to eke a living; the prices of things had skyrocketed and unaffordable to many families. The people also felt unsecured following the ravaging effect of the activities of the Boko Haram fundamentalists in the far north and the rampant invasion of farmlands, families, churches and villages in different parts of the country by suspected Fulani herdsmen, with many families and communities displaced from their farmlands and ancestral homes. Also, the bandits were not helping matters as they go to schools to kidnap school children for ransom, and block the highways and rail lines in order to harass and kidnap commuters, many of who had ended up being killed. The people were disillusioned and disappointed with the present government in the country, which seemed to have turned deaf ears to the security challenges facing the nation and bereft of any tangible remedy for Nigeria's present economic quagmire. Akpen Leva had on July 13, 2022, painted the picture vividly, thus:

I am sorry to say that from the promises that were made, this government has taken us so many centuries backward. Because, look at the issue of security, for instance, if you are fortunate to wake up, you don't know what may happen the next day. Even when you are travelling on the road, you're travelling out of fear that maybe they will kidnap you and take you to the forest and if you're not able to pay the ransom, maybe they will butcher you and so on. And this ransom is always in millions (Ejembi, 2022).

One may conclude that the *End SARS* protest was a result of a culmination of many ugly happenings in Nigeria and the serious hardship Nigerians were experiencing at the time. So many government properties across the nation were destroyed during the protest, especially the police stations, offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission, etc. The Correctional Centres were also broken and many criminals escaped. Many police officers died in the process; especially those who were noted to have aided the wasteful loss of lives of innocent citizens, while many Nigerians died in the hands of the law enforcement agents. The choice of the term has created room for the researcher to be suspicious of a pragmatic connotation. This paper, using a linguistic approach, also discusses the pragmatic implication of the *End SARS* terminology. The next sub-section is a review of the theoretical framework that guides the study.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

This paper is guided by the communicative theory of terminology. The theory is a linguistic approach to the study of terms simultaneously as units of language, of cognition and of social function. It is an advancement to the first theory of terminology by Wüster (1968) developed on the basis of his experience in compiling *The Machine Tool. An Interlingual Dictionary of Basic Concepts*. This initial theory motivated further contributions that modulated and complemented Wüster's ideas giving rise to *General Theory of Terminology* (Cadré, 2003: 168), and later, a traditional theory of terminology that Cadré (2003: 175) named the *Extended General Theory of Terminology* in order to avoid confusions with Wüster's theory (Protopopescu, 2013: 4). Myking (2001: 61) summarised the main features of *Extended General Theory of Terminology* as: 1) a theoretical platform characterised by ECLECTICISM; 2) a set of epistemological tenets: INDEPENDENT CONCEPTS; 3) an operational method: ONOMASIOLOGY; and 4) a defined set of problems: STANDARDISATION.

The Communicative Theory of Terminology addresses the shortcomings of previous theories of terminology, and is based on the assumptions that first, terminology is “a set of needs, a set of practices to resolve these needs and a unified field of knowledge”, and second, it operates with terminological units which are multi-dimensional and which are simultaneously units of knowledge, units of language and units of communication (Cabré, 2003: 182). The “terminological units” are viewed as possessing three components: the concept, the term and the situation (Protopopescu, 2013:5). The third component, the situation, represents the theory's pragmatic orientation. Cabré has formulated the theory of doors (Cabré, 1999, 2000), in order to account for the multidisciplinary of the terminological object where the object *term* is a semiotic, linguistic, cognitive and social

unit that can be described from different perspectives (doors) (Cabr , 2002). Thus, on the point of view of this theory, there is the linguistic aspect in formulating a terminology, whereby the terminology is the same as lexical unit, and the context of use of the terminology, which is very pivotal. This suggests that formulation of terms goes beyond linguistic consideration of the lexical element to the social context or situation for the use of such term. This view of term is also captured by Marza, thus:

the term is the updating of certain traits or modules of traits according to specialised communicative situations. It is a unit in use and one of the possible ways of finding a lexical unit in discourse. In consequence, the features and the discursive-communicative situations are what determine the selective activation of information, be it through formally specialised units (units used exclusively and only in specialised contexts although with a potential general value) or through units that are specialised in meaning (lexical units used with a specific sense in specialised contexts and with an open sense in non-specialised ones). Hence, within this proposal it is assumed that in the lexical competence of a speaker neither words nor terms exist, but instead lexical units and semantic traits that may activate (or not) specialised values according to the contexts in which they are found. These traits that can be activated might be general morphosyntactic traits of the unit or specific semantic and pragmatic traits that would describe their specialised character within a given context (Marza, 2008: 140).

In the communicative theory of terminology, terminological units are viewed as ‘units of special meaning’; and the theory operates with one basic principle of the communicative nature of terminology (Cabr , 2000: 50) by which all terminological units “are used for communication, immediately or eventually”, while “the immediate use of all terminological units refers to the fact that they are realized in the form of direct communication or indirect communication.” (Protopopescu, 2013: 5-6). Cabr  (1993: 169) had earlier noted that terms have a systematic side (formal, semantic and functional) and also show another pragmatic side, since they are units used in specialised communication to designate the objects of a pre-existent reality.

The tenets of pragmatics makes it a sine-qua-non that in every communicative situation, the choice of language as well as consideration of the contextual issue involved are very paramount as the first step to effective communication. Consistency with the principle of relevance is required for a successful communication and, as part of that, the use of the right contextual information when processing the utterance.<sup>1</sup> This is because meaning is

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<sup>1</sup> Gutt, Ernst-August. *Pragmatic Aspect of Translation: Some Relevance-Theory Observation*, 1998.

determined by a variety of contextual factors, including the hearer's cognitive processing abilities to infer meaning from context.<sup>2</sup>

In consonance with the tenets the communicative theory of terminology, the coining of *COVID-19* and *End SARS* terminologies seem to have considered their communicative function and pragmatic essence. These their communicative functions and pragmatic essence constitute the driving force of this paper. However, the methodology is first discussed in the next sub-section.

### Methodology

This study is designed to be descriptive and analytical in the sense that the language used for the coining of the concepts of COVID-19 and End SARS is described and analysed. The description and analysis are guided by the tenets of the communicative theory of terminology. The two terms for analysis are first presented based on the principles of Leipzig's glossing rule, followed by analysis.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The data are here presented using morpheme by morpheme glossing rule, followed by analysis.

1. CO/ VI/ D/ -19  
corona/ virus/ disease/ - 19  
'coronavirus disease- 2019'
2. End S.A.R.S  
dissolve special.anti.robbery.squad  
'dissolve the special anti-robbery squad'

The data *COVID-19* in (1) is made of four morphemes represented mostly with their initial sounds. The sounds are "Co" for *corona*, "Vi" for *virus*, *disease* is represented by "D", and "19" stands for *2019*. The joining of the sounds yields "coronavirus 2019", and the presence of 2019 is to pragmatically represent the year the severe acute respiratory syndrom (SARS-CoV-2) variant of coronavirus came into existence. The choice of the term is for sharpness and easy communication. For *End SARS* in (2), 'end' represents 'dissolve/put to an end'; while "SARS" is coined from the initial sounds beginning the words "special", "anti", "robbery", and "squad". Although *End SARS* seems to clearly stands for the dissolution of the Unit of the Nigeria police force, it has a broadened

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<sup>2</sup> Grice, H. Paul. *Logic and Conversation*, 1975.

meaning, and represents putting an end to all the evils happening in the country, such as: police brutality on Nigerian citizens, insecurity caused by boko haram insurgents/banditory, daily increasing high cost of living, incessant kidnapping, and so on. The choice of the term is for easy drawing of the attention of the Nigerian government, and winning of the sympathy of Nigerians and the entire world. With the term, the intended result was achieved as the protest received an overwhelming sympathy of greater percentage of the Nigerian citizens as well as the attention of the entire world.

### Summary and Conclusion

This paper aimed at examining the use of language in creating the terms *COVID-19* and *End SARS*. The communicative theory of terminology served as a guide. The two concepts were presented using the tenets of Leipzig's glossing rule. This has helped to clearly showcase their smallest morphological units, which has also helped to know the reasons for using the two terms for the coronavirus-2 disease and the 2020 protest respectively. The analysis has shown that the sounds /ko/, /vi/, /d/ are coined to represent "coronavirus-2 disease", while the presence of "19" pragmatically signifies the year the variant of the coronavirus disease known as *severe acute respiratory syndrom* (SARS-CoV-2) was witnessed in the world. It is also clear from the analysis that though *End SARS* might seem to clearly stand out for a call for the dissolution of a Unit of the Nigeria police force called *the Special Anti Robbery Squad*, it has a broadened meaning; which includes showing of displeasure over government's lookwarm attitude to many evils bedeviling Nigeria, like: police brutality on Nigerian citizens, insecurity caused by boko haram insurgents/banditory/kidnapping, increasing high cost of living. Hence, in coining *COVID-19* and *End SARS*, linguistic cum pragmatic considerations were made. The choice of the terms is for easy communication.

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