

CLAUSAL MOOD AS EXCHANGE IN SELECTED COVID-19 MESSAGES FROM THE NIGERIA CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

¹Olayinka, O.O., ²Owese, C.N., ³Ojebisi, K.H. and ⁴Ogundiran, K.F.

Corresponding author-niyiolayinka@gmail.com 08111102705

learnedcollins18@gmail.com

ojebisihk2018@gmail.com

kemifisayo2017@gmail.com

^{1,2,3}Department of English Language, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo

⁴Department of French Language, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo

Abstract

The COVID-19 Pandemic has been a global health crisis, necessitating widespread public health messaging to curb its spread. In Nigeria, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) played a crucial role in sensitizing the public through various communication channels, including short message service (SMS) and social media. This study examines the use of mood and health belief model cues in selected COVID-19 sensitization messages from the NCDC, analyzing their interpersonal meanings and alignment with the Health Belief Model (HBM). Both qualitative and quantitative data analyses were carried out in the research. Being a descriptive research, the study adopted a mixed approach. The qualitative aspect of the study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) with a focus on the interpersonal metafunction, alongside Rosenstock's Health Belief Model (1974), to explore how linguistic choices influence public health communication what the result were also quantitatively represented in pie and bar charts. Data were collected from SMS messages received by the researchers and others, as well as messages retrieved from NCDC's social media platforms. The messages were analyzed based on mood structures and their corresponding health belief cues. Findings indicate a predominant use of declarative and imperative moods, which serve to inform and direct public behavior. The study concludes that mood and modality function as critical discourse strategies in COVID-19 messages, influencing public perception and adherence to health guidelines. The insights from this research contribute to the understanding of language as a tool in health communication and provide recommendations for enhancing sensitization strategies.

Keywords: Mood, Exchange, COVID-19, Sensitization, Health Belief Model

Introduction

The convergence of language, communication, and public health imperatives is crucial in health discourse. It plays a vital role in comprehending the intricacies of health issues and promoting positive health outcomes in communities. Language is recognised as a significant instrument that has a powerful impact on creating perceptions, affecting behaviours, and mobilising societal responses.

In the midst of the ongoing and persistent spread and consequences of various infectious diseases such as COVID-19, cholera and Lassa fever, among other health problems affecting the world, particularly in developing countries, discussions about health have become a crucial battleground in the effort to reduce health risks and strengthen global health security. It encompasses a broad spectrum of communication outlets, including prominent press briefings and popular social media campaigns, as well as local community outreach initiatives and specific public service announcements. Health authorities utilise various channels to not only distribute accurate information but also to combat disinformation and promote comprehension and adherence to crucial public health principles.

Language, by its nature, can occur on both the horizontal and the vertical axis and according to Owoeye (2003), when used on the vertical axis, represents a communication across two divides of social strata, that is, the upper and the lower class or in other words, between a more powerful and a less powerful language users. Firth (1935) viewed language as a medium through which human behaviour is expressed and the instrument used by them to influence the behaviour of others, (Adebusola, 2012). This expression of behaviour as well as influencing that of others is realized through communication. Communications are channeled through diverse mediums and various fields of discourse such as politics, law, education, medicine and/or health. To a large extent, opinions, comments and reactions that communicated messages generate could be influenced by the mood and tenor of the message, (Halliday, 2004).

Covid-19 as commonly referred to, has in recent times become one of the monumental fields of discourse. This is perhaps as a result of the havoc being wrecked by the pandemic on the global community and Nigeria in Particular. According to the Nigerian Centre for Diseases Control (NCDC), it has claimed thousands of lives in Nigeria with well over twenty thousand active cases recorded. This has made the challenge of curtailing the menace and its devastating effect on both health and economic aspects of societal well-being a source of critical concern to various tiers of government across countries of the world. In Nigeria for instance, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), established in 2011 is the body saddled by the government to oversee and coordinate the fight against the spread of diseases in the country, (NCDC, 2022). According to the Director General of NCDC as reported by Guardian Newspaper, “The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), says the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of infodemic management to effectively respond to the outbreak of diseases in the country.” As Part of the organisation’s response to the pandemic in sensitizing members of the public on various precautionary measures to be taken in order to be protected against contracting the virus. This is done through various social media channels such as facebook, telegram, Instagram, youtube, etc. as well as through other media like television and radio jingles, newspaper adverts and short message service (SMS) among many others.

The term sensitisation as defined by Merriam Webster (Online) Dictionary (1928), is the action or process of sensitizing. Meanwhile, the word sensitise could simple be descrbed as an attempt to make something or somebody become sensitive or responsive to a particular situation or stimulus. The need to improve on the sensitisation strategies employed by NCDC was stressed by Dr. Osagie Ehanire as reported by Bukola Afeni who opined that “The right information must be transmitted by the media to ensure that all information they are transmitting is coming from experts to avoid getting information from unconfirmed sources because misinformation can lead to more havoc, more deaths and more suffering”.

The concern, however, is the level of importance these disseminated information are accorded by the citizens who are the supposed primary targets of the messages since language users deploy varying types of mood in conveying feelings, opinion and intentions which can be influenced by the kind of relationships shared by the sender and the recipient. Mood according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) operates within the interpersonal meta-function of language where clause is considered as an exchange which can either be for the purpose of giving or demanding. Mood, on one hand, generally revolves around the order in which the subject and the finite are presented in a clause. Mood is of two broad types namely, the indicative and imperative. They assert further that both mood and tenor occupy the interpersonal deixis which helps to locate the exchange (message, information or idea) within the realm of meaning which they refer to as 'semantic space' between the speaker and the listener. This thus suggests that the choices made by language user (that is, the initiator of the move), as it concerns mood and have the tendency of influencing the kind of reactions message or the main ideas of the information can generate on the part of its recipient. This paper, therefore, seeks to identify and analyse the various types of mood deployed in the selected messages

Statement of the problem

COVID-19 is a well researched discourse field both locally and internationally, (Dabisch et al., 2021; Holshue et al., 2020; Rothamer et al., 2021; She et al., 2020) but virtually all are focused on topical issues such as its spread, variants, implications, hazard and basically on health challenges posed by the virus. Similarly, several areas have also been researched on Mood as an interpersonal meta-function. Astuti (n.d) for instance worked on analysis of mood structure type of SMA textbooks. Noor (2016) and (Akinseye, 2021) among others worked on the last address of Holy Prophet (PBUH) and declarative mood in teacher-student classroom interactions, respectively. There is however, a dearth of research on the mood and power relation as sensitization strategies in the precautionary measures sent to in the form of SMS. It is against this backdrop that this research has been initiated to serve as a corpus-study with the focus on mood choices as being evident of the kind of power relation that exist between sender and the recipients of SMSs deployed for sensitisation purposes by the NCDC.

Aims and objectives

The study is aimed at identifying and analysing mood structures as well as choices and health belief cues in selected sensitization messages by the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control. The objectives of the research are therefore as follows:

- To identify the mood types deployed in selected messages;
- To identify the predominant mood structures used in the selected messages; and
- To identify and compare the mood structures with the health belief cues suggested in the messages.

Research questions

This research is set out to answer the following questions:

- What are the mood types deployed in COVID-19 sensitisation messages?
- What type of mood is predominantly used in COVID-19 sensitisation messages?

- Is there connection between the adopted mood choices and the kind health belief model cues?

Significance of the study

This study is to analyse selected COVID-19 sensitisation messages and sent by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) with a view to identifying the recurrent mood structure as well as to compare the mood types identified with their corresponding health belief cues identified in the messages shared by (the) NCDC and Nigerian citizens (who are the recipients of the SMS). This is expected to serve as a guide to the citizen in interpreting the various the precautionary measures conveyed via the text messages. Thus, findings of this research will ultimately be useful in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 virus and other disease.

Scope of the study

The study was restricted exclusively to only the covid-19 sensitisation messages retrieved from the twitter and telegram handles as well as those received by the researcher during the outbreak of the virus in the Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This article adopted two theoretical frameworks, namely the Health Belief Model (HBM) and the mood system as enshrined in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

Health Belief Model by Rosenstock (1974)

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a theoretical framework used to understand and predict individuals' health-related behaviours and decisions. It was originally introduced by American social psychologist as a post-world war II effort at getting positive health behaviour out of American citizenry on the need to participate in a free medical service offered by the American Government. Irwin Rosenstock is however recognised as a part of its formulation and formal application (Rosenstock, 1974). The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a commonly employed theoretical framework in health communication research. It focusses on individuals' perceptions of health risks and their probability of adopting preventive actions (Rosenstock, 1974). Based on the Health Belief Model (HBM), people are more inclined to adopt preventive measures if they perceive themselves as vulnerable to a health threat, consider the threat to be serious, believe that the benefits of taking action outweigh the drawbacks, and have confidence in their ability to take action (self-efficacy).

In addition, the Health Belief Model (HBM) proposes that people's views on the efficiency of preventive measures are influenced by factors such as their trust in the source of information, perceived obstacles to taking action, and prompts to take action (Rosenstock, 1974). The emotional sentiments conveyed in SMS messages have the potential to impact the level of trust and engagement that recipients have with the information provided by the NCDC. For example, messages that express empathy, reassurance, or hope might strengthen the faith that receivers have in the NCDC's instructions and boost their readiness to follow preventative actions even if they face obstacles. The model has about seven cardinal areas of interest which are but this

dissertation has adopted only six of the which are perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived barriers, cues to action, perceived benefits and self-efficacy.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a linguistic theory that centres on the utilisation of language to fulfil social purposes and communicate significance within particular circumstances (Halliday, 1978). Also, this linguistic theory, particularly its proposed interpersonal meta-function of language helps in identifying the disposition of the speaker or sender on the clause produced. According to Hailliday & Matthiessen (2014) the interpersonal meta-function of language can also be referred to a clause as exchange. To them, a clause is used primarily to perform two main types of exchange and these are to give and demand. This therefore suggest that there are two main function of a clause which culminates into the two broad types moods namely; indicative and imperative moods.

Mood forms an essential aspect of the interpersonal language meta-functions and this is primarily conveyed by the modal element of the verb. When researchers analyse health sensitisation messages using a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, they study the language characteristics of mood expressions, which include different forms of mood, modality, and mood adjuncts. Mood types pertain to the grammatical structures employed to convey different moods, including declarative (statements), imperative (commands), and interrogative (questions). The selection of mood type in sensitisation messages can impact how recipients perceive the message's level of urgency, authority, and planned course of action (Martin & White, 2005). Modality pertains to the level of assurance or probability that the speaker hasregarding the information being communicated. Messages employing modal verbs or adverbs to convey certainty ("You must wear a mask") or probability ("You should consider getting vaccinated") might influence how listeners perceive the credibility and significance of the message (Eggins, 2004). Mood adjuncts are linguistic elements that alter or specify the mood of a clause, such as hedges (e.g., "perhaps,""maybe") or boosters (e.g., "definitely,""absolutely"). Mood adjuncts have the ability to impact the tone, politeness, and persuasiveness of a communication, hence affecting the emotional responses and behavioural intents of the recipients (Eggins, 2004).

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research design such that the research represented the data statistically and equally subjected them to a linguistic analysis. .

Source of Data

The data used in this paper was gathered mainly from the short message service (sms) as disseminated by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. The messages were those received by the researcher during the period as well as others from friends and other acquaintances. To achieve this, the research made request from personal contacts for the release of such sample messages directly from NCDC.

Method of Data Analysis

Data gathered for this research was analysed using the system of mood by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and health belief model (HBM) by Rosenstock (1974) descriptive statistical method by taking a statistical analysis of the mood and modality choices in the sample messages. The mood and the modality would further be subjected to linguistic analysis; taking the mood and modality Systems as postulated by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) as the basis for the analysis.

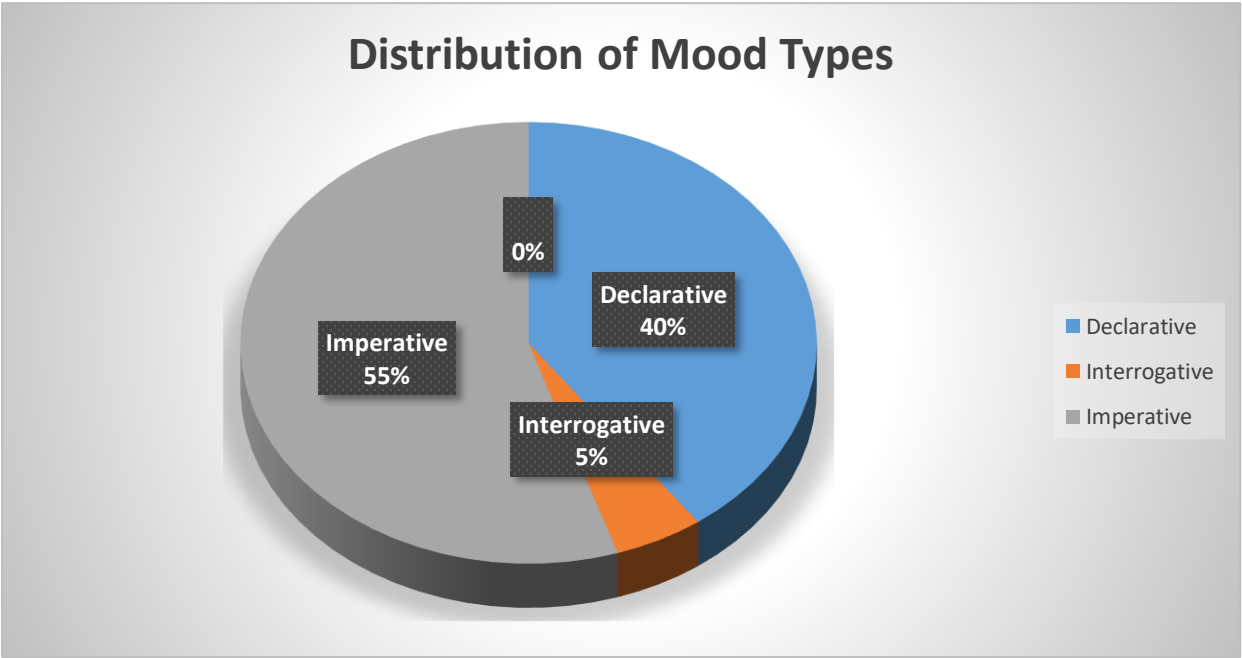
Data and Analysis

Table 1

| S/N | Message | Subject | Finite | Predicator | Complement | Adjunct | Mood Block | Residue | Mood Type |
|-----|---|-----------|---------|-------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1 | The NCDC is aware of a rumour | The NCDC | is | aware | Of rumour | a being shared on social media | The NCDC is | Aware | Declarative |
| 2 | COVID-19 spreads easily from person | COVID-19 | spreads | spreads | from person to person | Easily | COVID-19 spreads | Spreads | Declarative |
| 3 | Have you been vaccinated? | You | Have | been | vaccinated | - | Have you | been vaccinated | Interrogative |
| 4 | COVID-19 is real! | COVID-19 | is | real | - | - | COVID-19 is | Real | Declarative |
| 5 | Please stay safe by worshipping at home | You | stay | stay | Safe | by worshipping at home | You stay | Safe | Imperative |
| 6 | As you worship today, ensure to adhere | you | ensure | ensure | to adhere to all prevention | as you worship today | You ensure | adhere to all | Imperative |
| 7 | Wear a face mask! | you | wear | wear | a face mask | - | you wear | a face mask | Imperative |
| 8 | The virus that causes COVID-19 is more likely | The virus | is | more likely | to spread | in mass gathering | The virus is | more likely | Declarative |
| 9 | We urge Nigerians to | We | urge | urge | Nigerians | - | we urge | Nigerians | Declarative |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---------------|--------------|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| | take responsibilit y | | | | | | | | |
| 10 | Nigerians are advised to avoid non- essential | Nigeria ns | are | advised | to avoid travel | especially to countries | Nigeria ns are | Advised | Declarative |
| 11 | Get tested if you have fever | You | Get | Get | Tested | if you have fever | you Get | Tested | Imperative |
| 12 | Wear a mask in public spaces | You | Wear | Wear | a mask | in public spaces | you Wear | a mask | Imperative |
| 13 | Wash your hands regularly | You | Wash | Wash | your hands | Regularly | you Wash | your hands | Imperative |
| 14 | Take Responsibil ity! | You | Take | Take | Responsibi lity | - | you Take | Responsibi lity | Imperative |
| 15 | Call 6232 for FREE to contact NCDC. | You | Call | Call | 6232 | for FREE | you Call | 6232 | Imperative |
| 16 | Save MONEY Save TIME Save LIVES. | You | Save | Save | MONEY, TIME, LIVES | - | you Save | MONEY, TIME, LIVES | Imperative |
| 17 | COVID-19 is Real! | COVID -19 | is | Real | - | - | COVID -19 is | Real | Declarative |
| 18 | Get tested! | You | Get | Get | Tested | - | you Get | Tested | Imperative |
| 19 | The virus that causes COVID-19 is airborne! | The virus | is | airborne | - | that causes COVID- 19 | The virus is | airborne | Declarative |
| 20 | Maintain social distancing | (you) | Mainta in | Maintain | social distancing | - | you Maintai ng | social distancing | Imperative |

Chart for Table 1: Mood Distribution for Data on COVID-19



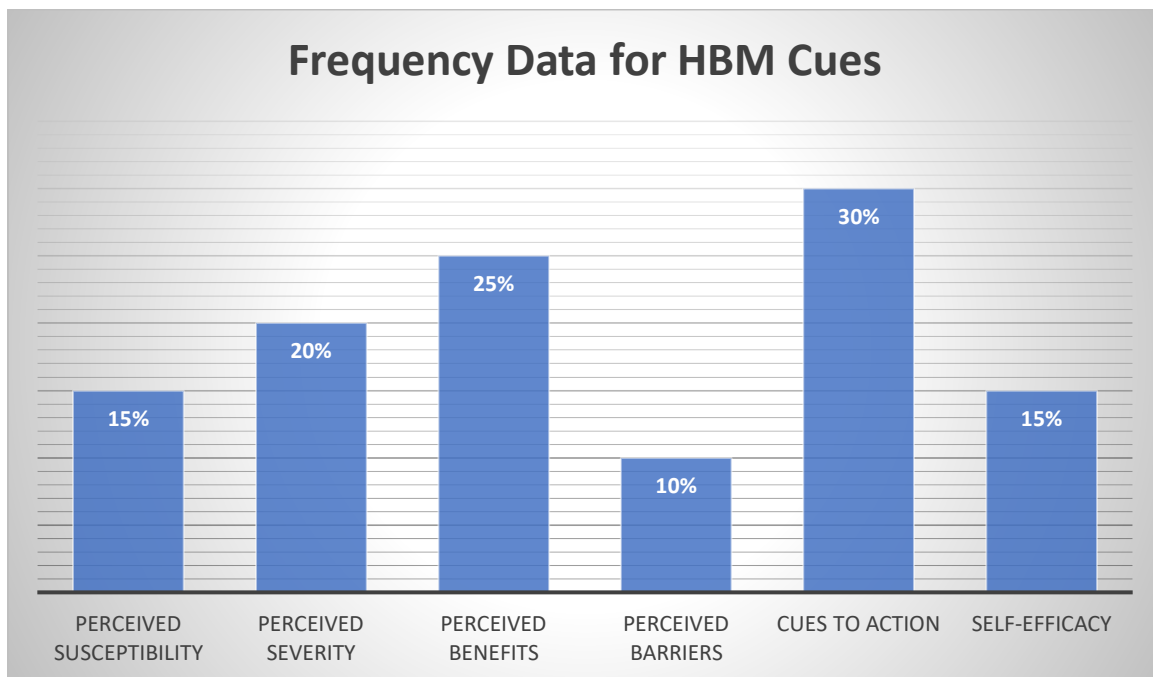


Chart for Table1: HBM Frequency Distribution for COVID-19 Messages

Discussing the Interrelatedness of the Mood Choices and the Health Belief Cues

The correlation between the mood choices in the COVID-19 messages and the components of the Health Belief Model (HBM) reveals a purposeful approach to health communication. The predominant use of the declarative mood aligns with messages that focus on perceived susceptibility, severity, and benefits. Declarative sentences are typically employed to present facts, convey the risk levels, and highlight the advantages of taking preventive measures. For instance, statements such as "COVID-19 is real!" and "The virus that causes COVID-19 is airborne!" are used to establish the reality and seriousness of the disease. By providing clear, factual information, these messages aim to enhance the audience's understanding of the risks and benefits, thereby influencing their beliefs and attitudes. The declarative mood effectively lays a foundation of knowledge that helps build trust and encourages awareness among the public.

The imperative mood is also frequently used, particularly in messages serving as cues to action and promoting self-efficacy. Commands like "Wear a face mask!" or "Get tested!" are direct and straightforward, designed to prompt immediate behavioural responses. The use of imperative mood eliminates ambiguity, providing the audience with clear guidance on what actions they need to take. This approach is particularly effective in health communication strategies that seek to motivate quick and decisive actions. By providing direct instructions, these messages help boost confidence in the audience's ability to perform the recommended behaviours, reinforcing the belief that they can effectively prevent the spread of COVID-19. On the other hand, the interrogative mood was rarely used in the messages, reflecting a communication strategy that is less focused on engaging the audience through questions or dialogue. For example, a message like "Have you been vaccinated?" is intended to prompt reflection but does not actively encourage interactive engagement. The minimal use of interrogative mood suggests that the

strategy prioritizes providing information and directives over eliciting responses or fostering discussion. This approach aligns with the relatively lower emphasis on building self-efficacy or addressing perceived barriers, which could benefit from more interactive engagement to address individual concerns or build confidence.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the mood and health belief cues structures in the selected COVID-19 sensitization messages from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to determine their effectiveness in public health communication. Using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and Rosenstock's Health Belief Model (HBM), the study identified the strategic use of declarative and imperative moods to inform and direct public behavior. Declarative clauses served to establish facts about COVID-19 and reinforce perceived susceptibility and severity, while imperative clauses acted as cues to action, emphasizing preventive measures. The findings suggest that the linguistic choices in these messages are deliberate, reinforcing authority and urgency in public health communication. It was however observed that the limited usage of interrogative mood signifies insufficient direct connection with recipients, which should be enhanced for optimal audience involvement. The study corroborates positions of earlier researches that the role of language in shaping public response to health crises cannot be overemphasized and highlights the need for adaptive communication strategies that balance authority with engagement. Future research could explore the impact of mood choices on different audience demographics to further refine health communication strategies. By enhancing the clarity, tone, and engagement of sensitization messages, health authorities can foster greater public compliance with preventive measures and improve overall health outcomes.

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