

## A Survey of Terms and Expressions Adapted in Local Communities for Creating Awareness About the Coronavirus in Kenya

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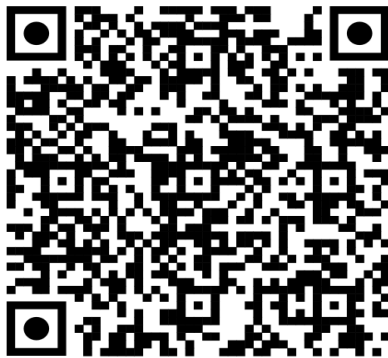
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### Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate terms and expressions that were adapted in local communities for creating awareness about coronavirus in Kenya. Language is dynamic. It changes to conform to society's needs. A society's language is confined within its culture. When the language change, the culture also changes. Language change may happen at a faster rate or a lower rate. However, it all depends on the mode of dissemination. Due to technological advancement, language changes spread very fast. People share on different mediums, and the information could be very within a very little time far. There are several causes of language change. Some of them are political, cultural, foreign influence, technological and societal factors. This change has made it easy to evolve new terms for corona. Some of these terms have been adopted by society and have been made part of the culture in most of these societies. Change helps people in society to communicate effectively, which can make it a very good thing. The reason why corona language had to change is to enable people to communicate with others having in mind that the word was new to most cultures. The change in language and thus making it part of the society's environment has enabled people to take part in them and thus conforming to the WHO's advice and the Ministry of Health's instructions in combating the spread of the virus.

**Key terms:** Corona, culture, environment, language.

## INTRODUCTION

Language changes with time due to many reasons. Language changes in terms of vocabulary, phonological connotation, morphology and syntax. Languages change, some flourish, some expand, and some languages die. Language is a system of rules and symbols used for meaningful communication. Over generations, pronunciations evolve, new words are borrowed or invented, the meaning of old words drifts, and morphology develops or decays. Jones and Singh (2005) note that changes in language vary from one place to another or region to region. Further, they note that the changes may come faster or slower with respect to the environment. However, the change of language also happens within a culturally accepted context. Condon (1973) argues that culture can be defined as a way of life. Culture may include skills, ideas, tools, arts and customs that give the characteristics of a group of people in a given period; it is also the beliefs, values and material objects that create our way of life.

Culture influences individual estimation and attitudes, and can also have an effect on practical aspects of life. Culture is also a matter of habit, which is within a given society. Habits gradually develop and become a tradition, and through tradition, a group's culture is developed. Condon explained further that stereotypes assign group characteristics to individuals purely based on their cultural membership. Cultural stereotypes affect people's thinking, speaking, actions, and interactions with each other. Samovar et al. (1981) also said that communication and culture are inseparable since culture not only dictates who talks to whom, what they talk about, and how the communication gets along but also helps in determining the encoding of messages, the messages meanings they have, and the circumstances and conditions under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed or interpreted. In other words, culture is the foundation of communication. Language and culture are profoundly related and affect each other. Language and culture have a deep and symbolic relationship. Language stands for the whole culture because language represents a culture in its speakers' minds. Conversely, culture is summed up in a country's economic, religious, and philosophical systems and

symbolises language. Whenever language changes, the culture also changes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Language changes for several reasons. Some of the reasons are political aspects, social and cultural reasons, environmental and moral reasons. The change in language takes on lexical, syntactic, semantical and phonological aspects. Language change has political roots, such as human migration and invasion. For example, when people relocate to a new country and learn its language, they imperfectly learn their adopted language. Then, they pass on these slight imperfections to the people in their social circle and their children, and eventually alter the language (Aitchison, 1991).

Besides the changes in language brought about by migration, politics plays some roles in language change in more immediate ways through the debates of the public. For instance, increasing environmental policies and environmental awareness in recent decades have led to some new words and phrases such as “eco-friendly”, “carbon footprint”, “greenwashing”, “tree-hugger”, “locavore”, “eco-terrorism”, and “green-collar jobs.” In addition, in political debates, just four years ago, in the U.S. presidential election, “the common citizen” or “average Joe” was suddenly replaced by “Joe the plumber” due to one of the thousands of candidate-voter conversations (Powell & Cooper, 2008). The struggle for women's liberation and gender equality has also brought about critical language changes. For instance, student writers are being encouraged to use gender-inclusive and gender-neutral nouns and pronouns and to treat men and women in a parallel fashion—for example, a police officer for a policeman, a firefighter for a fireman and humankind for mankind.

Technology has kept language users on track with new vocabulary and expressions for technological terms. Language change usually takes a gradual process, but due to technological invasion, changes in language take place at a higher rate than before. As a result, new word formations spread very fast due to technology. For example, some completely new words like the verb “Facebooking”, “to Google”, and several other words have come into widespread use and are

not yet in the Oxford English Dictionary (Duffy, 2003). However, not all these new words and slang will survive forever. For example, over a decade ago, the term 'floppy disk' was considered a brand-new lexical development. Still, now it is rarely used or featured in today's conversations as it has been replaced with 'memory stick' (Wu & Ben-Canaan, 2006).

Often, people online show how brilliant they are by manipulating the language of the internet, which causes computer slang to develop even faster than one's imagination (Kleinman, 2010). The language used in text messaging is something new; the abbreviation such as LOL, BFF, IMHO, and OMG (that's laughing out loud, best friends forever, in my humble opinion and oh my God) have recently been added to the Oxford Dictionary, legitimizing the terms used by millions in texts, emails and instant messages (Yoskowitz, 2011).

Changes in technology, economics and politics normally result in social changes. Changes in language are produced by social changes. In other words, once there is a change in society, language change produces special effects. Some people have money, social prestige, and power in almost every community, while others have little of these commodities. Typical variables include occupation, level of education, income, and type of residential dwelling, with ranked levels within each variable. People with different levels of social status respond and perceive things differently, and use vocabulary and phrases differently (Finegan & Rickford, 2004). For example, for poor individuals who cannot afford an education or grew up in a rural area where proper grammar was not encouraged, their speaking skills will not be as fluent as those of higher education.

There are variations according to a speaker's gender, age, and ethnicity because no two individuals converse identically, even within the same small community. People, through interactions, pick up new words and integrate them into a new way of speaking. Some spread through the population and slowly changed the language (Facultad de Informática de la Universidad Politécnica de Madrid [UPM], 2011). As a result, the words and phrases we are using right now may never be the same as those our parents or

grandparents used. One of the reasons one language borrows from another is that it needs to refer to things and notions recently introduced to its speakers. For instance, the Italian name pizza only entered English when the food it refers to was taken by English-speaking communities. Correspondingly, glasnost was adopted from Russian to express a policy of frankness and openness in Soviet political life that came in the imprint of the Gorbachev era and represented a concept that had hitherto been unfamiliar to the English-speaking community (Aitchison, 2001). Although borrowing is rampant, not all loanwords are destined to be incorporated into the borrower's language. Many are only temporary and disappear after a relatively short time. The borrowing is likely to be maintained if it denotes an object in the borrower language for which no other, word exists, as in the word pizza mentioned above.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Effects of COVID-19 on Language Change

In most societies, language has culturally endeavoured, as we have seen in earlier discussions. That means every word gets meaning as per what exists within the society. When COVID-19 struck the world right from its origin in China, the virus had to get a name that would be culturally accepted in specific countries. This has been done before in most countries. For instance, countries in Africa that have never witnessed snow have never had a vocabulary in reference to snow. In this case, when snow strikes such counties, they will have to look for a word with a close meaning to it or make a translation from an existing word. That has been the case for COVID-19. During the first stages of COVID-19, many researchers in society and other stakeholders with research in vocabulary formation and approval had the task of forming vocabularies in relation to COVID-19.

Kiswahili is widely spoken in East Africa and is an official language in some counties like Kenya and Tanzania. Therefore, for example, the virus got names like *korona*, *uviko-19*. The researchers also came up with other terms related to the virus, for instance, *barakoa* for a facemask. *Barakoa* was a new vocabulary introduced in the Kiswahili culture. We see that language is a social practice, not an independent construct, both being created and creating the

structures and forces of social institutions within which we live and function. Certainly, language cannot exist in a vacuum, and there is an inevitable kind of “transfusion” at work between language and culture (Fairclough, 1989). It follows, then, that learning a new language will also involve grappling with the notion of culture concerning language. From these words, we can easily say that societies develop new vocabularies or meanings to fill the gap in their discourse. The gap is filled due to the rising need for communication, and culture being the centre for communication. Without culture, we cannot understand the lives and motivations of others and connect with their concerns and interests. Therefore, during the inception of COVID-19, every nation that did not use English as its first language had to bridge this gap to ease communication. Further, the new words and meanings formed also enrich the existing language by adding more vocabulary to it, which already has many words in the dictionary. That is one way that language grows.

East African countries that use Kiswahili and other languages came up with words and expressions for most languages to ease communication and understanding. Because language is used for communication, the need to have the words and expressions translated has made the dissemination of coronavirus information. Some of the translated texts in Kiswahili are:

## Kiswahili

### Dalili za Virusi vya Korona (Covid-19)

Jinsi ya kuzuia Maambukizi ya Virusi vya korona (covid-19).

- ✓ *Nawa mikono mara kwa mara kwa kutumia sabuni na maji.*
- ✓ *Au tumia kieuzi (sanitaiza) chenye kiwango cha alkoholi cha angalau asilimia 65.*
- ✓ *Usiguse uso, pua na mdomo kabla ya kunawa mikono.*
- ✓ *Kohoa au piga chafya kwenye sehemu ya ndani ya kisugudi chako.*
- ✓ *Pangusa pua yako kwa tishu kisha uitupe panapofaa.*
- ✓ *Usimsalimie kwa mkono, kumkumbatia au kumbusu yeyote.*
- ✓ *Kaa mbali na mtu mwingine (takribani mita 1 hadi 3).*
- ✓ *Jiepushe na umati wa watu katika masoko, maduka makuu (supermarket), makanisa misikiti n.k.*

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** Change helps people in society to communicate effectively, which can make it a very good thing. The reason why the corona language had to change is to enable people to communicate with others, keeping in mind that the word was new to most cultures. The change in language and thus making it part of the society’s environment has enabled people to take part in them and thus conform to the WHO’s advice and the Ministry of Health’s instructions in combating the spread of the virus.

**Recommendation:** The study recommends that we should be conforming to the WHO’s advice in combating the spread of the virus.

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