



A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Newspapers' Coverage of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract

Language is a pivotal instrument in the hand of journalists; they manipulate language at their disposal for accomplishing numerous goals. Thus, this study explores a pragmatic investigation of how meanings are interpreted in the selected newspapers' coverage of the Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory was used to analyze ten (10) data selected purposively from *The Punch* and *The Vanguard Newspapers* between February 2020 and June 2020. The study found out that the pragmatic relevance of the COVID-19 newspapers' coverage is embedded in its media functions as it serves as an indicator to interpret the messages inherent in the coronavirus newspapers' coverage and a pract of warning to the citizens of Nigeria to stay safe. The study also revealed that the practs used depend on context, situation and existing shared-knowledge of both the speaker and the reader. It was observed that journalists use the news headlines to perform several acts of warning, sensitising, informing, exposing, etc. to achieve different goals and pass numerous meanings to their listeners/readers during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria. Results indicated that the Nigerian media performed well in terms of covering the pandemic, which in turn created awareness. However, the coverage was not in-depth as most of the reported stories were short and were predominantly straight news. This paper concludes that journalists use contextual language to enhance social relations among the readers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is one whose impact is unparalleled in history. Although advances in technology has helped in the containment of the virus but poses a strong challenge. This has resulted in countries of the world gathering resources, both intellectual

and financial, to combat a common enemy. In spite of this, there appears to be an increase in the spread globally with countries recording daily deaths and increases of up to a thousand and more. Reports indicate that the countries most affected by this pandemic are located in Europe and North America (World Health Organisation, 2020). The mass media has also served as a means by which unfounded fallacies, myths, and misinformation about disease outbreak has been brought to the populace. In the wake of the present coronavirus otherwise known as COVID-19 pandemic which began in Wuhan China in late December 2019, the media globally has been awash with publications, videos, interviews and commentaries on the virus, its spread, cases, recoveries and deaths. Furthermore, it has provided a platform for analysing the impact of pandemic on the economies, politics and social lives of countries around the globe.

The media is seen as a source of health-related information. They have the potential to influence how people act and react to health challenges. More importantly, the media assists in raising public awareness and mobilising citizens to work with health authorities in the battle against pandemics at any time. The relationship between the media and disease transmission is complicated and reciprocal. On the other hand, media coverage of the COVID-19 may alter public perceptions of the condition and increase self-protective knowledge. People who have been informed by media news may alter their behavior. They may take the necessary precautions, such as handwashing often, using protective masks, and maintaining social distances.

Dong and Zheng (2020), argue that the mass media is a powerful information source where people rely on during health crises. Besides, the presence of the news media online has further provided better platforms for citizens to participate in public debates about issues such as politics, health, security and national unity (Ojebuyi, 2016; Ojebuyi&Lasisi, 2019). What the audience consume in the media determines, to a large extent, their perspectives about such issues raised by the media. As such, what guides people to news stories (such as headlines) must be crafted in a manner that does not confuse the mass audience or alter reality (Dong & Zheng, 2020).

Therefore, the primary focus of this study is designed to investigate how pragmatic acts are performed in the media coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria. Given that the related studies to this paper have been done using different linguistic approaches, such as Multimodal discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, other related fields, However, there is a need to further this studies using pragmatic appurtenances to bring out the hidden meaning in each setting (news headlines). Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics

that deals with how context affects meaning. According to Mey (2007, p.6), “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society”. In general, it is concerned with the way we convey meaning in any given social context through the medium of language. This meaning includes verbal as well as non-verbal meanings and it varies depending on the context, the relationship between interlocutors, and many other social factors. In other words, the knowledge of pragmatics helps one to contextualise and interpret the intended meaning inherent in newspaper coverage of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. Therefore, this study therefore sets out to investigate the pragmatic study of selected newspapers’ coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

2. Review of Related Concepts

2.1 Language of Journalism

Language as a human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for communication purposes, is indispensable to man (Osisanwo, 2008, p. 1). As the faculty of human speech present in most human beings due to heredity, language is the means of communication which distinguishes man from other animals (Crystal, 1971, p. 161). Since man, as a social animal, constantly finds himself in an environment where there is a need for communication, language - the main channel through which the patterns of living are transmitted from man to man is used to achieve this aim (Halliday 1978, p. 9). The language of journalism is a fascinating field to analyse, because it offers a challenging outlook on its subtleties and power in each journalistic genre. This type of language helps understand how journalists create their stories or reports, shape points of view, deliver expected news and how media language is different from other languages we encounter. Investigating, interviewing and fact-checking activities are basic components of journalism, transmitted to media consumers, in order to inform, persuade, but also to reinforce public beliefs, using manipulating techniques.

Journalists can also use in their reports coded messages through their carefully selected words and sentences. Self-censorship in using words is often practised by journalists creating a provocative and uncomfortable situation for themselves. This involves expressing sentences differently in order to avoid threats against them and their writings. So, a comprehensive vocabulary will bring stories and broadcasts to life, enabling journalists to better describe the world around them. Using words correctly might provide a shade of meaning and understanding to the journalistic lexical level they aim to reach.

Whether the journalistic purpose is writing for newspapers, magazines or new media, all categories of publicists have the fundamental mission to learn and practice their language as specialists with all linguistic nuances required in their profession. The use of language in the presentation of news and elsewhere in the presentation of media, represents a form of interaction between language and society which affects us all. We are interested in how media work, how language works and particularly how the two interact. Its contents should be accessible to people who have interest in these issues as well as to people who study such matters. Responsive communication among people and between nations is worth striving for. The language of news media is prominent in society and it is interesting to find out how it is produced, how it is shaped by values and how it affects our perceptions.

Mass communication is a process in which a person, group of people, or an organization sends a message through a channel of communication to a large group of anonymous and heterogeneous people and organizations. You can think of a large group of anonymous and heterogeneous people as either the general public or a segment of the general public. Channels of communication include broadcast television, radio, social media, and print. The sender of the message is usually a professional communicator that often represents an organization.

2. 2 Ideology in Reporting Coronavirus

This study examines media bias, media ideology and dominance in two newspaper articles on COVID-19 that were published by *The Punch* Newspaper and *The Vanguard* Newspaper. This study reveals that media bias is practiced through gatekeeping bias, coverage bias and statement bias. Ideology bias is practiced through the selection of topics to cover and the tone for reporting on these topics.

2.3 The Evolution of COVID 19 in Nigeria

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Infectious Disease Centre, Yaba, and Lagos State, Nigeria on the 27th February, 2020. An Italian citizen arrived at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos at 10:00 p.m. on 24th February, 2020 on-board a Turkish airline from Milan, Italy. He visited his company's site in Ogun State the following day where he presented himself at his company's staff clinic. The physician-on-duty had a strong suspicion of the presence of the virus. This led him to refer the Italian citizen to Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) and the COVID-19 status was confirmed (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) started the contact tracing of 'Persons of Interest' which included all persons on the manifesto of the flight that brought the index case to Nigeria, as well as people who had close contact with the index case while in Lagos and

Ogun State. After a period of two weeks, a cluster of cases was detected in Lagos and Abuja, this was noted to be the emergence of the nationwide spread of the virus. The Federal Government, through the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), restricted International commercial flights into the country, effective from 23rd March, 2020. (Onyeji, 2020) On the same day, Nigeria registered her first fatality; a 67-year-old male returnee from the United Kingdom who already had underlying medical issues that were been managed before his death. The death occurred in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Nigeria Centre for Disease and Control, 2020).

2.4 How it spreads

SARS-CoV-2 spreads from person to person through close communities. When people with COVID-19 breathe out or cough, they expel tiny droplets that contain the virus. These - droplets can enter the mouth or nose of someone without the virus, causing an infection to occur. The most common way that this illness spreads is through close contact with someone who has the infection. The disease is most contagious when a person's symptoms are at their peak. However, it is possible for someone without symptoms to spread the virus. Other people can pick up the virus by touching these surfaces or objects. Infection is likely if the person then touches their nose, eyes or mouth.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper is purely qualitative in nature. Qualitative in the sense that the practs performed in the selected news headlines are accounted for bearing in mind the contextual factors that are projected in the selected news headlines. The data for the study were extracted from the *The Punch and The Vanguard* online news headlines between February 2020 and June 2020. A total of ten (10) COVID-19 news items were purposively selected for the analysis. The news headlines were sourced from the internet via www.punchng.com and www.vanguardngr.com. The linguistic theory adopted for the analysis is Pragmatic Acts theory of Mey (2001). The extracts were chosen based on their relevance to the topic and the presence of the elements of the Pragmatic Acts Theory.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory as theoretical framework.

4.1 Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory (PAT)

Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory is an action theory that was 'necessitated by the puncture made in the Speech Act Theory. One of the main criticisms according to Mey (2009)

is that the speech act theory concentrates on 'speech' to the exclusion of other phenomena such as writing (and language, as noted earlier, manifests both in the written and spoken forms). Mey is of the opinion that as a result of this critique, some linguists have suggested that the term 'speech act' be replaced by a more 'general' one, such as 'act of language'. Was Mey just interested in mere terminological quibble? No. In fact, he was more interested in seeing language in use manifesting as a situation-bound-dependent phenomenon. Thus, he concludes that the typical way of looking at people using language is to see them as performing pragmatic acts.

The progenitor of Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) is Jacob Lee Mey who in 2001 propounded this theory to fill what he believes to be a lacuna in the speech act theory. He affirms that: "the speech act theory is individual oriented rather than societal-centered" (Mey, 2001, p. 214). This view is further reiterated by Fairclough who observes that the speech act theory "is thought of atomistically, as wholly emanating from the individual" (Fairclough, 1989, cited in Mey, 2001, p. 214). In the pragmatic act theory, Mey believes that emphasis should be placed on the importance of the situation, environment and extra-linguistic factors in meaning construction and comprehension (Mey, 2016a). He argues that human activity is not the privilege of the individual; rather the individual is situated in a social context, which means that s/he is empowered, as well as limited, by the conditions of his/her social life.

Therefore, pragmatic acts are situation-derived and situation-constrained. It does not explain human language use by starting from the words uttered by speaker. Instead, it focuses on the interactional situation in which language users realise their aims. The explanatory movement is from the outside in, the focus is on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as on what is actually being said (Mey, 2001, p. 221).

That is, from the environment, rather than from the inside out. Consequently, instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation in which the words fit is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said. The importance of contextual aspects of speech acts was echoed by Short (1996) who said that "we can use this context-boundness to infer important unstated aspects of context, including social relations between characters, when we read literary texts... Most ordinary spoken language behaviour takes place in a firmly grounded situational context" So instead of speech acting, people using language can be viewed as practicing or performing pragmatic acts.

4.2 Pragmemes, Practs and Allopract

Pragmatic acts theory is an attempt to explain the way pragmemes are represented in pragmatic acts in relation to speech situations. Mey (2016c:239) asserts that the ‘pragmatic act’, or ‘pract’, was introduced to capture the need to account for the many ways a situation determines what a speech act really ‘does’ (apart from, and often contrary to, its official ‘canonic’ illocutionary point or intention). The emphasis there is not on rules or verbs of individual speech acts but on characterising a typical, pragmatic act as it is realized in a given situation. Adopting familiar linguistic terminology, Mey (2001) calls this (proto-) type of act a ‘pragmeme.’ Individual pragmatic acts realise a particular pragmeme (e.g., ‘admonishing young couples to patient’); we may call these ‘practs.’ However, since acts will never be completely identical (every situation and expression through which admonishing is given is different from every other), every pract is also an ‘allopract’ – that is, a different realization of a particular pragmeme. According to Mey(2016b:139) pragmeme refers to ‘the embodied realization of all the pragmatic acts (or ‘allopracts’) that can be subsumed under it’.

A particular pragmeme can be substantiated and realised through individual pragmatic acts. For Mey it is the activity (interactants) and the textual part (co(n)text) of the pragmeme that defines a pragmatic act. Pragmemes, to be more precise, represent situational prototypes to which there may be several pragmatic access routes (practs). For instance, the pragmeme of requesting a pen can be realised through the following practs:

- (1) Can you loan me your pen?
- (2) Please my pen is bad, kindly lend me yours.
- (3) I don’t suppose you’ll be able to do this, but could you lend me your pen, please?

etc. These are some of the kind of practs through which this pragmeme can be realised.

Pract refers to a particular pragmeme in its realisations. When we study practs or ipras(short form of instantiated pragmatic acts), we aren’t concerned with matters of grammatical correctness or the strict observance of rules (Mey, 2001). What counts as a pract is determined exclusively by the understanding of the given context. Hence, a pragmatic act is instantiated through a pract which realises a pragmeme. Just like a variant of a particular phoneme is an allophone, every pract is at the same time an **allopract**, that is, a concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme (Mey, 2001). Since no acts ever will be completely identical, every pract is also an ‘allopract’ – that is, a different realisation of a particular pragmeme. To further buttress this model, Mey proposed the schema below:

4.3 PRAGMEME

ACTIVITY PART	TEXTUAL PART
(INTERACTANTS)	CO(N)TEXT
SPEECH ACT	INF REF REL VCE SSK MPH 'M'...
INDIRECT SPEECH ACT	
CONVERSATIONAL ('DIALOGUE') ACTS	
PSYCHOLOGICAL ACT (EMOTIONS)	
PROSODY (INTONATION, STRESS,...)	
PHYSICAL (NON-VERBAL) ACT:	
BODY MOVES (INCL. GESTURES)	
PHYSIOGNOMY (FACIAL EXPRESSIONS	
BODILY EXPRESSIONS OF) EMOTIONS	
⊗ NULL	

PRACT
ALLOPRACT
PRAGMEME, PRACT, ALLOPRACT

KEY
INF.....Inference
REF.....Reference
REL.....Relevance
VCE.....Voice
SSK.....Shared Situational Knowledge
MPH.....Metaphor
'M'.....Metapragmatic joker

The schema above shows that there are two categories involved in the realisation of a pragmeme: the textual part (the context within which the pragmeme operates) and the activity part (meant for the interactants). Adeniji and Osunbade (2014, p.13) explains that the activity part represents the options that are available to the speaker to perform the various functions he so desires. The options include speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational (dialogue) acts, psychological acts (emotions), prosody (intonation, stress) physical acts, etc. And they are engaged in the textual part to communicate his intention, in which case, he may employ the

inference (INF), reference (REF), relevance (REL), voice (VCE), shared situational knowledge (SSK), metaphor (MPH), or metapragmatic joker (M). They state that the listing on the textual part is not complete. Essentially, both parts depend on context for the meaning realisation of the discourse of interactants and the interaction between activity part and textual part results in a pract or an allopract.

Odebunmi (2008, p. 77) further explains that the metapragmatic joker points to particular metapragmatic activities. Central to it is "indexicality" which, at the pragmatic level, demands good knowledge of the context of the utterance made.

However, Mey (2001, p. 222) further explains that the activity part lists the various choices that the language user has at his or her disposal in communicating. He considers this part as a feature matrix and it can either be filled or empty. If all the cells are empty, the matrix goes to zero ('Ø'), representing the borderline case of 'silence' (which is not the same as 'zero communication') (Mey, 2001, p. 222).

Being a functional and situated theory that is founded on context and emphasises the priority of socio-cultural and societal factors in meaning construction and comprehension, Pragmatic acts theory is favoured in analysing the headline of vanguard newspaper released on the 1st of march 2022 (COVID 19: more than 250,000 cases, 3000 deaths recorded in 2yrs in Nigeria, as revealed by the NCDC).

The textual part of the pragmatic act theory schema incorporates elements such as Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Voice (VCE), Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH) and Metapragmatic joker (M). They are variously reviewed below.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Datum 1

Coronavirus: We will ban public gatherings if the Italian case escalates, says Sanwo-Olu.

Lagos State Governor BabajideSanwo-Olu said on Friday that the state government would prohibit public gatherings if the coronavirus case confirmed in the state escalates.

The Punch, February 28th, 2020

Practs: informing (assertive), assuring (commissive)

Pragmeme: The above datum is an instantiated pragmatic act with the allopract of informing and assuring. Here, the Governor of Lagos State BabajideSanwo-Olu informs the whole of

Lagos state of his intention to ban public gatherings if the Coronavirus case escalates. One important role of the mass media is to inform society at large of the things happening around them. To achieve the pract of informing, he uses reference (REF), in referring to a particular period which is during the pandemic period in Nigeria. The use of relevance (REL) is also seen how Governor BabajideSanwo-Olu ensures that the reference is relevant to the people. It is relevant (REL) in the sense that the prohibition of public gatherings during a particular period is for their good; for the benefit of everyone. Similarly, Sanwo-Olu uses the pract of assuring. Here, he assures the people that the state government would certainly prohibit public gatherings if the coronavirus case escalates because the government would not want the virus to spread all over. Another important element used in the above extract is Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), which is the background knowledge on the effect of the virus in Nigeria and the world knowledge of how the virus is ravaging the entire world serves as the basis for making the proper analogical deduction (inference) on the incongruousness of the news coverage.

Datum 2

Coronavirus forced me to adjust my birthday programme- Obasanjo

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has said that the fear of contacting covid-19 compelled him to adjust his three-day birthday.

The Punch, March 5th, 2020

Practs: informing, stating (assertive) Declaring(declarative)

Pragmeme: In this datum, Olusegun Obasanjo states the reason for adjusting his three-day birthday by using the pract of informing and stating. The former president, Olusegun Obasanjo informs and states that his supposed three-day birthday was adjusted due to the fear of contracting covid-19. From this, one can infer (INF) that the fear of contracting coronavirus made an ex-President adjust his three-day birthday because he was afraid he might die. The speaker further uses the pract of declaring, that the former president was not happy with the decision but he has no option but to adjust the date because he is not ready to die, and neither would he want to put the lives of the people at stake. During the pandemic, people believed that coronavirus is likely to kill old people faster whenever they contact the virus, this prompted the former president to adjust the date of his birthday due to the fear of contracting the virus. Reference (REF) is made to the former president of Nigeria (Olusegun Obasanjo) in the locution. Olusegun Obasanjo was President of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007, during which time

he played an instrumental role in bringing democracy back to the country, and was Chairperson of the African Union from July 2004 to January 2006. The reference (REF) made is relevant (REL) as it relies on the Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) that exists between the speaker and his listeners that the virus is ravaging the world and its is killing a lot of people. The above information is relevant (REL) because it informs the readers about how coronavirus made an influential person adjust the date of his birthday and it also shows how scary and deadly the virus can be. Due to this reason, the people who will be on a look will be more careful and make decisions not to go on any occasion at that period.

Datum 3

NURTW is providing sanitizers at parks to prevent coronavirus-MC Oluomo

Chairman of the Lagos state chapter of the National Union of Road Transport Workers, MusiliuAkinsanya aka MC-Oluomo has said that the union is providing sanitizers at motor parks across the state to prevent any probable spread of the novel coronavirus disease in the state.

The Punch, March 6th, 2020

Practs: informing, stating (assertive)

Pragmeme: The above datum uses the practs of informing and stating(assertive). It informs the readers about how the (NURTW) Lagos branch has obeyed the rule in preventing the deadly virus. Since coronavirus became so important, people from different organizations must therefore try to prevent the spread of the virus. The chairman of the (NURTW) Lagos branch informs his union members that hand sanitizers have been provided at motor parks across the state to prevent the spread of the virus. This is in line with the guidelines that all members of the NURTW will do everything in their power to ensure that they prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus disease in the state and that is why they are providing hand sanitizers at all motor parks. The NURTW believe asking the passengers to sanitize their hands before entering the buses and maintaining social distance will help prevent the virus from spreading. The above headline also states that the NURTW is playing its role in fighting the virus and preventing the virus from spreading all over the state. The speaker consciously referred (to REF) to the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). The NURTW is a government body that serves the interests of transport workers in the road transport sector. Another important element used in the above extract is Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), here there is background knowledge on the effect of the virus in the state. People are aware of the deadly

virus which triggers the need to take safety measures in the transportation sector. The information in the news coverage is relevant (REL) to the Nigerian situation. It is relevant in the sense that providing sanitizers at every motor park is for the good and benefit of everyone in the state.

Datum 4

Coronavirus: Dangote foundation donates four ambulances to NCDC

The Aliko Dangote Foundation has donated four ambulances to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control to aid its fight against Covid-19 spread in the country

The Punch, March 28th, 2020

Practs: informing, stating (assertive) assuring (Commissive)

Pragmeme: In this datum, the speaker uses pract of informing and stating. It informs the readers about the provision of four ambulances by the Aliko Dangote foundation to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control to aid its fight against the covid-19 spread in the country. Aliko Dangote is the richest man in Nigeria and he also played a part in making sure that the spread of the virus is reduced by providing ambulances. Here, a reference (REF) is made to the Aliko Dangote Foundation, a foundation by Aliko Dangote- the richest man in Nigeria. Aliko Dangote Foundation (ADF) is a private charitable foundation incorporated in 1994, as Dangote Foundation, with the mission to enhance opportunities for social change through strategic investments that improve health and wellbeing, promote quality education, and broaden economic empowerment opportunities. 20 years later, the Foundation has become the largest private Foundation in sub-Saharan Africa, with the largest endowment by a single African donor. There is also a pract of assuring in the above datum. The speaker assures the readers that the provision of these ambulances will aid the fight against the virus and that they will eventually overcome it. Therefore, this assurance is relevant (REL) to the Nigerian situation and it is very much necessary that there are enough ambulances to convey to patients with the virus being a Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) that the number of the coronavirus case is increasing every day at that particular period. It could be inferred (INF) that the provision of ambulances will assist the health workers (NCDC) to perform well in the areas of their duty. They will be able to respond speedily to coronavirus patients and infected persons will be moved quickly for proper medical supervision. Likewise, the information in the report is relevant (REL) because it informs the people about the essential contribution of the Aliko

Dangote foundation as a way of preventing the spread of the virus and how well these contributions will serve. This proves it is relevant (REL) to the Nigerian situation.

Datum 5

Partial lockdown: continue to work from home if you can- Sanwo Olu

The governor of Lagos Babajide Sanwo Olu has declared a partial Lockdown in the state. He then advises people to work from home if they can.

The Punch, April 28th, 2020

Practs: informing, (assertive) declaring (declarative)

Pragmeme: In the datum above, reference (REF) is made to Lagos State. The Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu has shown how concerned he is about his state by declaring a partial lockdown in Lagos state. He then advises people to work from home if they can. This borders on the Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) that the coronavirus is the reason for the partial lockdown in the state. The people are aware of the happenings in the state, they know going about during that time can cause the virus to spread around. In other words, they are asked to stay at home and follow the safety rules. Thus, we could once again draw the inference (INF) that the Governor has declared a partial lockdown to reduce the spread of the virus in the state. The datum is relevant (REL) to the entire state because it informs the people about the partial lockdown in Lagos state which can only be a result of the massive spread of the virus in the state.

Datum 6

COVID-19: My family went through trauma, El-Rufai speaks after recovery.

Kaduna state Governor, Nasir El-Rufai, has recovered from coronavirus. The governor, who made this known on Wednesday via Twitter, said his family went through trauma when he tested positive for the virus.

The Punch, May 27th, 2020

Practs: informing (assertive) assuring (commissive), rejoicing, felicitating (expressives)

Pragmeme: This datum dwells on expressing how happy the people of Kaduna State are as their Governor who test positive for Covid-19 recovers. The governor made this known on

Wednesday via Twitter, he also said his family went through trauma when he tested positive for the virus. The speaker uses *pract informing* to let the people know about the Governor of Kaduna State who has earlier tested positive for the deadly virus but has now recovered from it. This shows that the deadly virus has been typically managed by the governor and with adequate measures in a place he has been able to conquer it. It could be inferred (INF) that the Kaduna state governor has recovered from the deadly virus which has killed many in the past few months, this will shine a ray of hope on the faces of people since they will be aware that the virus can be cured if managed well. The entire state is happy to hear the good news that their Governor has recovered from the virus. Here, the speaker uses the *practs of rejoicing and felicitating* to express how the people feel. There is a background knowledge (SSK) of the virus and how deadly the virus is and also how deadly it could be if preventive measures are not taken. The above information in the report is likewise relevant (REL) because it informs people about the recent state of the governor who has earlier tested positive for the deadly virus.

Datum 7

82-year-old hypertensive woman recovers from covid -19

Osun state Government on Friday said it had successfully managed a coronavirus patient said to be an 82-year-old hypertensive widow.

The punch, May 30th, 2020

Practs: informing, stating (assertive), assuring (commisive), rejoicing, felicitating (expressives)

Pragmeme: In the above datum, there is a *pract of informing and stating*. It informs and states to the readers that the Osun government has been able to manage a coronavirus patient who is old and hypertensive. Several studies on coronavirus show that 99% of people who are old and most importantly have underlying ailments do not survive coronavirus but the Osun state government has done a great job in managing a patient who is not only old but also a hypertensive widow in fighting the disease and they won. There is also a *pract* that assures the readers that since the Osun State government is capable of curing a woman who is not only old but also hypertensive, then they can control the spread of the disease in the state. It could be inferred (INF) that there are chances whereby people with underlying ailments could get cured of the deadly virus if it is well managed. Hence, it showcases the massive development in Osun state and how effectively they have been able to manage the virus. Another element used in

this datum is a reference (REF), the speaker refers to the Osun State government which is relevant (REL) to the above information. It is relevant because the 82-year-old hypertensive woman is from Osun state and the government tried everything in its power to save her life.

Datum 8

Health worker dies of covid-19 in Gombe state

The chairman of the Gombe state task force, Idris Mohammed, has confirmed the death of Abubakar Muhammed, a senior registrar in the pediatrics with the federal teaching hospital, Gombe.

The Punch, June 12th, 2020

Practs: informing, explaining (assertive), disappointment, sadness (expressive)

Pragmeme: The above headline is an instantiated pragmatic act with the allopract of informing and explaining. It explains and informs the readers about the death of a health worker who dies of covid-19 in Gombe state. He is also a senior registrar in pediatrics with the federal teaching hospital, Gombe. There is also a pract of disappointment and sadness in the above datum. It expresses disappointment and sadness over the death of a health worker who died due to the deadly virus. It could be inferred (INF) that Abubakar Muhammed, a senior registrar in the pediatrics with the federal teaching hospital, Gombe died of coronavirus The speaker refers (REF) to the federal teaching hospital in Gombe state, and the Chairman of the Gombe State task force, Idris Mohammed. The state was referenced because the incident happened in Gombe State. The relevance (REL) of this reference is to emphasize the gravity of the problem at hand –it informs the public about how deadly the virus can be and will also prompt the health sector to take more preventive measures. This reference is equally premised on the Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) that exists between the speaker and the readers it is popularly believed that health workers/practitioners tend to be healthier than patients because they know everything about drugs and how to stay healthy. Apart from this, it also reveals the fact that covid-19 had no respect for anyone irrespective of the post you hold, not even in the health sector. Therefore, this will prompt people in the health sector to take more preventive measures so as not to contact the virus since they are the ones that are more close to the infected persons.

Datum 9

Oyo discharges 96 Covid-19 patients

Ninety-six coronavirus patients undergoing treatment in Oyo State have been discharged after testing negative twice for the virus

The Punch, June 13th, 2020

Practs: informing (assertive) congratulating, Felicitating, rejoicing (expressive)

Pragmeme: The headline in datum 9 is an indicating pragmatic act with an expressive allopract of rejoicing, felicitating, congratulating, and informing (assertive). In this datum, the *Punch Newspaper* uses the pract of informing to let the readers know that 96 Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment in Oyo State have been discharged after testing negative twice for the virus. Here, the media informs the readers about the patients that were discharged after they tested negative twice for the virus. Moreso, the media uses practs of rejoicing, felicitating, and congratulating in the above headline. The practs are used to show how happy they are after 96 Covid-19 patients tested negative twice for the virus. To achieve the above practs, the speaker referred (REF) to Oyo State where 96 covid-19 patients have been discharged after testing negative twice for the virus. The use of relevance (REL) is seen as the speaker informs the readers about the development so far since the onset of the virus.

Datum 10

Osun records one death, and six new cases

Osun state records six new cases of coronavirus as well as one death from the pandemic. The deceased was said to be having an underlying ailment and had been buried by his family.

The Punch, June 21st, 2020

Practs: Informing, explaining (assertive), heartbreaking (expressive).

Pragmeme: The above datum performs the practs of informing and explaining. It informs the readers about the six new cases of coronavirus as well as one death record in Osun state. Osun state has recorded new cases of the deadly virus which spreads like wildfire across the state and the country in general. It is recorded that the virus has taken the life of one person in the state. The headline also performs the pract of explaining, it tells the readers that the victim's underlying condition was the reason for the death that was reported. It goes on to tell that the victim's body was given to its relatives and buried. The above datum expresses heartbreak over

the loss of life due to coronavirus in Osun state. The news headline is heartbreaking in the sense that, it captures the way the reader feels about the death of the coronavirus victim reading the news. It could be inferred (INF) that the novel coronavirus is a deadly virus that can eventually kill if safety measures/precautions are not taken. This, the readers can equally infer (INF) that the State is focusing on how the people will adhere to the safety measures and as well stay safe. It is a Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) that the virus is a deadly one and it has also been revealed that those with the underlying ailment might die if they eventually contact the virus. Another element used In the above datum is a reference (REF), here the speaker referred to Osun State where six new cases of coronavirus and one death were recorded. Thus, the above information is known to be relevant (REL) because its shows how deadly the virus can be and this will convince the masses to take preventive measures during the pandemic.

6. Findings

From the analysis, it is revealed that the various acts performed in each of the newspaper coverage were analyzed using Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory. Firstly, the pragmeme is identified. The pragmatic act predominantly used by the journalists is the pract of informing. This is not surprising because one important role of the media, is to inform its community on topical issues or of the events happening around them. COVID-19 otherwise known as a pandemic which began in Wuhan in late December 2019, published in a newspaper is not exempted. It can therefore be said that the primary function of COVID-19 in any newspaper is to inform the readers. Other practs such as Disappointing, Congratulating, Discouraging, Pleading, Appealing, Rejoicing, Acknowledging, Praising, Felicitating, Explaining, Warning, Declaring and Denying were also performed in relation to their context of usage. In datum 9 for example, the allopracts of rejoicing, felicitating and congratulating are used to express how happy the people are after 96 Covid-19 patients tested negative twice to coronavirus in Oyo State. Also another expressive allopract is used in datum 7, where President Muhammadu Buhari acknowledges and praises public-spirited Nigerians and organizations for their donations to support the fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic. Assertive allopracts occurred where the speaker **states**, **informs** or **explains** the reason why the former president Olusegun Obasanjo adjusted his three-day birthday in datum 2. The occurrence of declarative allopracts of are made evident in datum 19, where Governor Wike of Rivers State **declares** or **enforces** staffs in the government house to conduct Covid-19 test so as to be sure that no one is infected since they are working close to the governor. Directive allopracts has the less occurrence. They are mainly used in datum 19 where the Governor of Rivers State **orders** them to conduct the test compulsorily and also **insists** in them conducting the test because he is afraid of contacting

the deadly virus. From this discussion, it is evident that the declarative and directive allopracts were sparsely used. Directive allopract has least occurrence as it was used only twice: in datum 19 where the Governor Wike of Rivers State directed all Government House personnel to undergo compulsory Covid-19 test to ascertain their status. Similarly, declarative allopract was also used twice. This is because the Governor has the right to use a declarative tone.

In addition, relevance (REL), inference (INF), reference (REF), shared situational knowledge (SSK) were the pragmatic elements deployed to mark the pragmatic acts. All of the 20 pragmemes analysed achieves relevance (REL) with a total of 20 occurrences through appropriate inference (INF) and deductions of meaning from the pragmemes that are situated in Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK). An instance of such is in datum 1, 2, 4 5, 6, and so on.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the role of language in the field of journalism cannot be overemphasized. The language of journalism is a fascinating field to analyze, because it offers a challenging outlook on its subtleties and power in each journalistic genre. This type of language helps understand how journalists create their stories or reports, shape points of view, deliver expected news and how media language is different from other languages we encounter. Investigating, interviewing and fact-checking activities are basic components of journalism, transmitted to media consumers, in order to inform, persuade, but also to reinforce public beliefs, using manipulating techniques.

Moreover, this study perceives pragmatics as a very potent linguistic field in interpreting meaning in accordance with context. Pragmatics is used here as an approach that captures the structure and the use of language in newspaper coverages as a form of journalism discourse to present media issues. The study has been able to show the possible interpretations that accompany the various practs identified in the news headlines. It reveals that these practs depend on context, situation and existing shared-knowledge of both the speaker and the reader. As observed from the analysis, the journalists uses all the news headlines to perform several acts, to achieve different goals and pass numerous meanings to their listeners/readers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. They also urge the people to obey the safety rules and to also stay at home during the pandemic period. In the newspaper coverages, the journalists' uses language to create their stories or reports, to shape their points of view, and to deliver expected Covid-19 news.

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