

A Contrastive Analysis of COVID-19 English-Yoruba Lexicon

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Abstract

Studies on contrastive analysis of texts from Yoruba to English and vice versa are numerous in existing literature, but attention has not been given to the translation of COVID-19 related medical jargon from English to Yoruba. This study, therefore, attempts a contrastive analysis of COVID-19 English-Yoruba lexicon with a view to ascertaining how clearly the medical jargon relating to COVID-19 were captured in Yoruba news reports, analysing the morphological innovations deployed in the creation of the words and determining the robustness of Yoruba vocabulary in explaining health situations. Ten (10) randomly chosen health/COVID-related words from social media, specifically online radios, videos, jingles and fliers from BBC Yoruba news were subjected to contrastive analysis. The analysis reveals that there are words in medical discourse yet to be captured in the Yoruba lexicon while some words are translated by the translation of the words they collocate with. It is also revealed that morphological processes such as vowel deletion, contraction, tonal displacement and replacement are deployed in translating some of the jargon from English to Yoruba. The study concludes that linguists and lexicographers in Yoruba need to do more to widen the lexicon of the language, especially to capture medical jargon and emerging realities.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, English-Yoruba translation, COVID-19, medical jargon

Introduction

The multilingual nature of any nation or society, which is inherent in Nigeria, often births new lexicon with emergencies such as the emergence of COVID-19. This is typical of the characteristics of language abstraction, emergence and open-endedness (Spacey, 2019). This shows that language has the ability to expand at will, describing new and arbitrary concepts conveniently and without limits. Nigeria has adopted the English Language as its official language. The English language makes communication convenient for Nigerians in the midst of over 500 indigenous languages. It serves as the lingua franca, instrument of formal education, regulative engagements for government administration and law courts, interpersonal communication between people who speak different languages, local and international businesses as well as creative works (Quirk et al, 1985; Ogunwale, 2013). Due to the vast roles English language plays in the country, Bamgbose (1995) recommends the mastering of its phonological, syn-

tactic and semantic patterns. This will make anyone using English Language as a second language competes with the international standards. One of the ways in which the English Language has been put to an extensive use is the social media, which has become a place for the educated and less-educated around the world. It serves as a platform for endless information on emerging trends and news, as soon as events unfold. The scope of the social media has widened to accommodate online television (Online-TV), blogs, pages, handles and so on where information can be easily relayed and placed.

The sudden emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, also known as COVID-19, which was discovered in Wuhan, China in 2019, has brought a current trend into language and medical discourse, introducing new lexical items as well as extending the meanings of existing words in usage. The multilingual nature of the world has also necessitated the translation of the corpus of COVID-19 into different languages of the world because the pandemic affects the safety and well-being of everyone. Within the mass media (including the social media) in Nigeria, organisations have taken up campaigns on the pandemic using the English language and translation into the major native languages which are the Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo languages and the Nigerian Pidgin English. In line with this need of making terms used to capture phenomena relating to COVID-19 available in other Nigerian languages, especially the major ones, this study, therefore, attempts a contrastive analysis of COVID-19 English-Yoruba lexicon with a view to ascertaining how clearly the medical jargon relating to COVID-19 were represented in Yoruba news reports, analysing the morphological innovations deployed in the creation of the words and determining the robustness of Yoruba vocabulary in explaining health situations.

Literature Review

Translation of medical lexicon has always been advocated in order to create the international acceptance of medical terms. Deleger et al. (2009) propose a natural language processing method referred to as word alignment in parallel corpora' and opting for getting few correct translations rather than numerous imprecise ones. Daniel (2019) posits that different theories and techniques have been employed in translating technical languages (including medical translations), but most of them have been adjudged unsatisfactory. The study made an attempt at using a free online translator for medical texts from English to Italian. It concludes that apart from finding corresponding words from the source language to the target language of medical abstracts, there are other challenges such as the lexical density, arising from the use of nominalisation and compounding.

Karwacka (2015) affirms that most medical and professional journals are

written in English whereas new medical knowledge and discoveries have to be disseminated to the whole world. However, considering the difficulties in specialised medical texts (such as nominalisations, heavy pre- and post-modification, compounding and affixation, polysemy and synonymy, eponyms such as anatomical parts, names of diseases, procedures in which some are named after the researchers and famous patients), she concludes that since linguistic, socio-cultural, scientific and economic considerations should be involved in medical translation; a multi-disciplinary approach is recommended. Herget and Alegre (2009) consider the translation of medical terms with a focus on non-medical practitioners like journalists who write for the general populace despite their little or no knowledge of medicine and posit that there is a higher tendency for writers to retain medical terms in the original language as science has become more popular and even patients are more curious than in the past.

Within the Nigerian space, the submission of Herget and Alegre (2009) is a reality as most people tend to refer to medical terms in their original terms even while speaking their native languages. The compelling aim of the present study is to consider how the Yoruba native –speakers (of South-west, Nigeria) have received the emerging medical lexicon and other collocates of the COVID-19 pandemic, by attempting a contrastive analysis of the English-Yoruba language translation from posts and online-radio media reports.

Contrastive Analysis and Translation

Applied linguistics is a field which uses linguistic theories, methods and findings to solve and explain issues in different domains. It also applies to many other fields such as ‘stylistics, lexicography, translation and educational field’ (Crystal in Oha, 2010). According to Hickey (2017:2), Contrastive Linguistics has been a way of comparing languages due to the emergence of different languages from various language families around the world and often divided into the theoretical and applied sections. The application is often between two languages where some people are the native speakers of one language (the source language) and others, foreign speakers of the language. So far people from different nations or geographical regions come in contact, their languages will also come in contact, enabling transfers and borrowing from one language to the other.

Linguistic transfers have always been viewed from the positive and negative sides. While the positive transfer is less talked about, the effect of negative transfer (often referred to as interference) has always been largely emphasised based on native linguists’ attempts to retain their languages. However, some of the types of interference have been and accepted translation of one language to another, in the absence of the most appropriate words. Interference could be in

the form of 'substitution, over and under differentiation, overindulgence, under representations and overgeneralisation.

Johansson (2008) posits that a comprehensive understanding of the two languages involved in a Contrastive Analysis is required, citing the problem of equivalence and structure in translation as very common. Translation in its entirety is a wide concept which should be technically dealt with whenever the task is required. Catford (1965) recognises types of translation as full and partial where the entire work submitted is either translated or some left untranslated; total and restricted where the texts are translated at every level of language or at only one level. He also highlights ranks of translation for grammatical hierarchy and their translation equivalent such as sentence to sentence, group to group or word to word. Where there is total translation, target language equivalents are confined to one rank or few ranks low in the rank-scale whereas, free translation allows equivalents up and down the rank-scale but usually more at the higher ranks. However, the source language must adapt the collocational and idiomatic requirements of the target language.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) rated methods of translation into groups such as word for word, copy-transposition, loan incorporation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation while Jacobson (1974) looks at translation from the angles of intralingual translation/rewording, interlingual translation/translation proper and translation of verbal signs. Regular problems of translation include the fact that some texts are difficult to translate such as poetry; some words are ambiguous; while some idioms, proverbs and phrases are characteristics of a particular language.

The above reviews show that there is no absolute theory in translation; rather every translation study has to be carried out uniquely and carefully considering the underlying processes of such translation task.

English-Yoruba Contrastive Analysis Studies

The contrastive study of the English and Yoruba language is an interesting one, for a major reason that while the English is a stress language, the Yoruba is tonal. Therefore, it is apparent that modifications will be in bounds to make the words relevant in sounds. Bamgbose (1990) opines that while Yoruba borrows words from Arabic, French and Hausa, the English remains the major source of borrowing into the Yoruba Language. Awobuluyi (2008) corroborates Bamgbose's position and gave reasons for the preferred choice of the Yoruba borrowing from the English mainly because the latter serves dominant roles in Nige-

ria including official, administrative, political, diplomatic and educative roles, among others.

Many scholars have reiterated means of expanding the vocabulary of the Yoruba Language. Bamgbose (1984) highlights dialectal borrowing and loanwords while Awobuluyi (1994) mentions loan translation plus dialect and external borrowing. Owolabi (1989, 2004 and 2006) agree that Yoruba borrowing occurs through auditory and graphological perceptions while loanwords as the major means of vocabulary expansion. Abdul (1987) discusses borrowing, loanwords and adoption while Olubode-Sawe (2010) highlighted intralingual borrowing, borrowing, loan translation and loan blend. They all agreed that borrowing often comes with the adaptation of the sound and meaning aspects but with peculiar modifications.

Komolafe (2014) categorises the expansion of vocabulary of the Yoruba Language into two which are intralingual and translingual. Intralingual is a straight borrowing from dialect of a target language to express a source language concept. Awobuluyi used the example of the word 'ofò' in Yoruba as 'speech' in English whereas there are other central words that could fit into that. The translingual encompasses and explains the various means of borrowing earlier mentioned. The translingual dwells on how the borrowings are adapted from the source language into the target language. They are divided into four. The first is the direct loan. This is a word loan adapted into the target language. For example: battery becomes *batiri* in Yoruba; lexicalised abbreviations are verbalised in Yoruba such as B.A., B.Ed. as *B.E, B.Edi*, employing both the graphological and auditory modifications. The second is loan translation where the sense of the source language is transferred into the target language such as in ambiguous words (*gbólóhùn onípófóná*). For example, a magnifying glass is called *digiagbiramu*. The third is loan shift where modification takes place. An example is the word 'labarai', a Hausa word that means 'report' modified into 'lábári'. The fourth is a loan blend where there is a combination of both the source language and the target language lexical items with examples such as 'àlà sílèbù' for syllable boundary. However, the target language has modified the word.

A special type of borrowing was also highlighted by Awobuluyi (2008) which is transdisciplinary borrowing, where a word is borrowed to designate new concept in another field within the same language by semantic extension such as *séríkí*, a military warlord now used as an administrative title and *áfòmó*, an agricultural airplant now used to depict affixes or parasites.

Fabususi and Ogunwale (2015) posit that since the Yoruba language is a tonal language (marked for syllable), the languages ensure tonality is fully considered and executed during its word formation and expansion. For Yoruba Language, this is sacrosanct. Owoye (2013) did a contrastive study on French

and Yoruba Language and states that Yoruba often uses prefixation and reduplication of verbs and verbal phrases in derivation. For instance:

- a+pàniyàn=someone who kills
- ò+pùró=someone who lies
- a+ta= something peppery

Tinuoye (1979) supports the extensive use of prefixation and reduplication by the Yoruba language, highlighting compounding and calqueing (loan translation) as additional word formation methods. Of all the methods reviewed above, Komolafe (2014) gave a concise summary of the categorisation and this will be adopted for the present study in the aspect of word formation.

Data and Methodology

The data consist of ten collocates of COVID-19 which were sourced from the social media, specifically online radios, videos, jingles and fliers from BBC Yoruba news. The data consist of English words and their Yoruba equivalent as presented by the authors of the data sources.

The ten COVID-19 collocates in English were listed and their available Yoruba equivalents were subjected to data analysis to evaluate the morphological and translation processes involved in the documentation of the COVID-19 collocates which are emerging words in medical discourse. Most of the words are single or compound words, therefore the elements of translingual, interlingual and transdisciplinary categorisations of Komolafe (2014) were adopted.

Data Analysis

All the thirty words have been grouped according to their collocational relationships and are analysed based on this, their usages and their meanings in context.

- i. COVID-19 Task Force
- ii. Agbófinróààrùn Corona- Agbófinró indicates the force
- iii. Ikò COVID-19 – indicates a group saddled with a task

In the two usages in all the considered data, the words COVID-19 and Corona were not interpreted. Also, Corona and COVID-19 were used interchangeably whereas COVID-19 is a family member of the larger family of Coronavirus. Corona/COVID-19 are relatively new words to researchers in Linguistics and, therefore, words to fully translate them are not readily available now as we have in the case of diseases like typhoid fever – *ibà pónjúpòntò* (a fever that colours

the eyes and urine) or tuberculosis –*ikó ife* (whooping cough). It is evident from this direct borrowing from English that, Yoruba linguists and lexicologists still have works to do to grow the lexicon of the language to cater for new medical realities.

i. Virus, pandemic and disease

The three words above were used interchangeably at various times and instances to refer to COVID-19/Corona.

1. The interpretation for the word virus is *kòkòrò-àìfójúrí* (a micro-organism or literally an insect that cannot be seen with ordinary eyes). No differentiation between a virus, bacteria or other forms of micro-organisms in the Yoruba language. This also shows a generic use of the term *kòkòrò-àìfójúrí* for similar yet different micro-organisms in Yoruba which is another pointer to the need to expand the lexicon of the language.
2. Pandemic is interpreted as *àjàkálèààrùn*. This means a disease/sickness that ravages from one land to another. In English for example, a distinction is made between pandemic and epidemic. The former means a disease prevalent over a whole country or the world while the latter is a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease in a community at a particular time. This distinction is not captured in *àjàkálèàrùn*, which is used to refer to both pandemic and epidemic
3. Disease is interpreted as *àisàn* or *ààrùn*. These two words also do not make a distinction between the clearly different English short-term illness and a terminal disease.

2. Sanitizer

The word ‘sanitizer’ refers mainly to two words: *òróró* (oil) and *ọṣẹ* (soap), but collocated with adjectives such as *apakòkòrò* (something that kills germs) and *ìpawó* (something to rub hands).

The words were too general but were used to:

- i. Show the function (*òróró-apakòkòrò*) and
- ii. Indicate the place or part of the body for use (*ọṣẹ-ìpawó*)

These words show the linguistic creation of lexical items to capture the situation through blending; a combination of two different lexical items. It is, therefore, an attempt at creating new lexical items for health-related issues.

3. Nose mask

The word was referred to using two translations: *ìbòmú* (something used to cover the nose) and *ìbojúbomú* (something used to cover the nose and face). The second translation is more like a face shield because the entire face is also usually referred to as 'ojú'. 'Ojú' is the same term used for the optical area. It must be mentioned that the choice of "nose mask" is also an error or what could be called Nigerian English. This is because a mask or protective covering for the face or part of the face is called face mask. The translation *ìbòmú* is a transferred error from the common usage among Nigerians. Notwithstanding, the Yoruba lexical choices still capture the essence of the words and serve the communicative function of the words (facemask).

4. Self-isolate

The word was translated as "*ya ara yín sòtò*" and "*ya ara rẹ sòtò*"; both mean to separate yourself to somewhere else. The difference in the two expressions is in the second person singular (*rẹ*) and plural (*yín*). While *ya ara rẹ sòtò* is given as the equivalent for 'self-isolate', English differentiates between few other words such "quarantine" and "shelter-in-place." While to self-isolate means to remain apart from others for a period of time, especially in order to prevent the transmission of a disease, sheltering-in-place has a slightly extended meaning as it denotes instructing or requiring people to remain in their current location until a danger has passed. So while isolating or self-isolating is specific to individuals, sheltering-in-place applies to all members of a community. This difference is not catered for in the Yoruba equivalents presented above.

5. Communicable disease

The phrase translateS as *àrìn/kòkòrò/àisàn tó n tòn kále* (a widely-spreading-disease). While this explains the notion of communicable disease, one can argue that it lacks in succinctness which means effort must be intensified to capture such a phrase more concisely.

6. Symptoms

The word translateS as '*ààmì-àisàn*' which means 'sign of being unwell'. This is a customised use of symptoms for health-related issues. It is another example of creativity in a bid to capture the COVID-19 reality as the word was not a very popular one before the advent of coronavirus.

7. Underlying disease

The phrase was translated as *àisàn tí ó tìwà lára tẹ̀lẹ̀*. This means ‘sickness or disease that has been in the body before’. Again, this could be captured more precisely as this number of words can really be said to be too many to capture a single health concept.

8. Flu-like

The expression describes something that is related to flu or cold but translated into Yoruba as *sín* or *‘hú ikó/hú’kó’*. *Sín* means to sneeze while *‘húkó’* means to cough. Flu-like is used to emphasise the symptoms to be categorised and one may argue that the Yoruba equivalent does not clearly capture the compound *flu like*.

9. Tissue paper

The above was interpreted in a single instance as *‘aṣọ inu’jú’* (cloth used to wipe the face). This apparently does not capture the essence of *tissue paper* in clear terms and suggests the need for a more suitable lexical item for this item.

Discussion

The above data revolves around the lexical analysis of evolving medical discourse with regards to COVID-19 collocates. Findings of the study are as follows:

1. There are many words in medical discourse yet to be captured in the Yoruba lexicon while many are translated by the translation of the words they collocate with. COVID-19 and coronavirus in the data analysed were not translated and even till now they have not been translated into the Yoruba language. However, they were supported at every instance by lexical items such as ‘virus’, ‘pandemic’ or ‘disease’. It is safe to assume that the media expects everyone to have heard or known about the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic and the fact that it is a sickness. Probably and with time, COVID-19 may obtain the status of medical terms such as tuberculosis, malaria fever, typhoid fever and so on, that have come to have pure Yoruba translations. The collocations used with the words ‘corona and COVID-19 showed the wide-spreading, deadliness and characteristics of the disease. For instance: *àjàkálẹ̀ààrìn* means diseases that ravage or literally means a disease that fights all over a large land mass. The best that could be done so far is to use the properties of the disease to describe it.
2. Nonspecificity of words: The word, ‘virus’, was translated as *kòkòrò-àifojúrí* which is the name for germs or microorganisms. The translation is gen-

eral, not specifying if the microorganism is a virus, bacteria or fungi. This was further seen in the interchangeable use of disease, germs and virus as 'ààrùn', 'kòkòrò' or 'àisàn'. This suggests the need to widen the Yoruba lexicon, especially with regards to health discourse.

3. Many of the words were translated using a gentive prefix and descriptions of what they are used for. For example:

- i. *Òróró-apakòkòrò* – oil used for killing germs/has the ability to kill germs (sanitizer).

A + pa + kòkòrò

Agent + verb + microorganism

The above combination forms a new lexical item which is *apakòkòrò*.

- ii. *Ìbojúbomú* – something used to cover the face/eyes and nose (nosemask /facemask).

Ì + bo+ ojú + bo + imú

Agent + verb + noun + verb + noun

The above forms a new word *ìbojúbomú* but with deletion of first syllables in the nominal items in the word combination.

Lexical formation

There were various processes involved in the word formation of translations of the words and phrases. These include vowel deletion, contraction, tonal displacement and replacement.

Conclusion

The worldview of the native speakers of languages reflects in their use of language. Whereas the Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria have their own medical situations and the words with which they represent them, the health-related words yet to be captured in Yoruba reveal that intensive effort is still needed to grow the vocabulary of the language while it is equally evident that English is a more popular, if not the most popular language of research, including medical discourse. The study concludes that linguists and lexicographers in Yoruba need to do more in terms of widening the lexicon of the language, especially to capture medical jargon and emerging realities.

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