

Morphosyntactic Analysis of COVID-19-related English Expressions

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Abstract

Language as a dynamic social artifact with the potential to change captures and encodes the changing realities of life both in time and space. The COVID-19 pandemic, a phenomenal reality whose sudden outbreak affected humanity gravely, triggered off changes in how things were done in all aspects of life prior to its outbreak. This resulted in the upsurge of new words, phrases, and expressions in languages, of which English is one. This paper examines the morpho-syntactic nature of the new words, phrases, and sentences that emerged in English in the wake of the pandemic. It identifies and analyses the word-formation processes and the morphemic components of the words and the syntactic constituents of phrases and sentences. A corpus of 199 COVID-19-related expressions collected purposively from different sources is analysed. The theoretical framework of this study is Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar and Rets Structural theory of neologism. The analysis revealed the different word-formation processes. It showed how nouns, verbs, and adjectives were formed with compounding and blending being the most common process. Noun phrases and verb phrases were most frequently used while the imperative was the most frequent. The study revealed the creativity and vitality of English morphological and syntactical processes in response to the changes in people's routines and habits as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper concluded that the morphological and syntactic processes demonstrate how speakers of English deploy the finite set of rules and elements of the language in new and creative ways to describe and speak about novel situations.

Keywords: COVID-19, language change, morphological processes, reality coding, syntactic processes

Introduction

Language accommodates the changing realities of life in time and space. Varying nonlinguistic factors which range from ideological, interpersonal, textual, socio-cultural, economic, political, health, and even natural disasters provide the realities which trigger off formal linguistic changes in the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of languages. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 and its declaration as a pandemic that threatened human life and impacted gravely the socioeconomic, political, health, and psychological aspects of nations across the

globe triggered off linguistic innovations in the languages of the world, of which English is one.

The deadly coronavirus disease and its life threatening impacts which dominated global discourse provided the scenes for creating new words and expressions associated with the changes and catapulting more obscure or technical words and phrases into common usage. Given its global spread, the coding of the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic is evident in the lexis, syntax, and semantics of many world languages (Kupolati, 2021; Kreuz, 2020; Khotimah et al, 2021; Translators without borders, 2020; Obiora,

2021). This paper is on the morpho-syntactic nature of selected words, phrases, and sentences that emerged in English during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the morphological processes, specifically the type of word-formation processes, the morphemic structures of the words and syntactic constituents of some phrases and sentences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- i) What are the trending English word-formation processes and the morphemic structure of the COVID-19-related words?
- ii) What are the most dominant COVID-19-related word-formation processes?
- iii) What are the trending COVID-19 -related English phrases and sentences and their constituent structures?
- iv) What are the most dominant COVID-19-related phrases and sentences?

Conceptual Clarification

Morphology is simply a branch of linguistics that studies the internal structure of words. That is, how words are formed in languages. According to Aronoff & Fudeman (2005), it refers to 'the mental system involved in word formation (p.1). Studying the morphology of languages entails describing how words are formed; that is identifying and describing the morphemes which are the smallest meaningful unit of grammar that have an independent or dependent status. For instance, in English, the word, *meaningful*, consists of three morphemes: a free/independent morpheme, *mean*, and two bound/dependent morphemes, *-ing*, *-ful*. The dependent status of the bound morphemes indicates their use to derive the noun (meaning) from the verb, *mean*,

and the adjective (meaningful) from the noun, *meaning* respectively. This means that morphology is the study of the structure of content words.

The structure of words of a language follows its acceptable patterns of word-formation. A language can undergo different word-formation processes, such as compounding, coinage, clipping, borrowing, blending, backformation, conversion, acronym, abbreviation, derivation, and multiple processes (Akamjian et al, 2010; Yule, 2017). All these show how language changes morphologically to create new words. An objective of this paper is to examine the word-formation processes through which some COVID-19-related lexemes are formed and describe the morphemic structures of the words, a brief review of the relevant English word-formation processes therefore is done.

Coinage is the deliberate or accidental invention of totally new words, whose typical sources are trade names of company products. Such new words become the generic name or term for other versions of the product. A common example is *Indomie*, used for all types of noodles sold in Nigeria. Other examples are *nylon* and *Xerox*. Coinage is considered in the literature the least common process in English (McGregor, 2009; Yule, 2017). Compounding refers to the joining of two words (free morphemes) to form a single word. Examples include *footnote*, *lockdown*. Yule (2010) describes compounding as a very productive source of new words in English.

Clipping occurs as a result of the deletion of the initial morphemes or final word segments of a multi-syllabic word. Examples: *gas*(gasoline), *exam*(examination), *bra* (brassiere), *flu*(influenza). Borrowing, a common source of new words in English, (Yule, 2017; Akmajian, et al 2010) means the taking over of words from another

language, with or without any phonological or orthographic change. A vast number of words in English are loan-words. Examples include *alcohol*(Arabic), *piano*(Italian), *Zebra*(Bantu), *tokunbo*(Yoruba).

Backformation is the process of reducing a word (usually a noun) by removing its suffix to form another word of a different word class (usually a verb). Examples of such verbs include *vaccinate*, *donate*, *opt* created from the nouns *vaccination*, *donation*, and *option* respectively. Conversion is a word-formation process in which a word from one word class is changed to another without any overt change in form. For example, the noun *Google* (a search engine on the internet) is converted to a verb *google* (meaning to type a word or words into the search engine in order to find information about something or somebody).

Acronym is the taking of the initial letters of a group of words or phrases and combining them to form a new word that is pronounced as a word on its own. For example *ECOWAS* (Economic Community of West African States), *WHO* (World Health Organization), *COVID/Covid* (Corona virus disease). Abbreviation is also the forming of a word from the initial letters of a group of words or phrase. But unlike acronyms, abbreviated words are pronounced letter by letter. Example: *FBI* (Federal Bureau of Investigation) *B.A.* (Bachelor of Arts), *PPE* (Personal protective equipment).

The process which makes the meaning of a word change and can or cannot make the lexical category change by the adding of affixes is known as derivation. In English, this can be done through prefixation or suffixation. For example, *teacher* (noun), *careful* (adjective), *undo* (verb) are formed from the verb *teach*, noun *care*, and the verb *do* respectively. The multiple word-formation process occurs

when a new word results from more than one process. An example is the word, *circuit-breaker* which is output of compounding (*circuit* + *break* = *circuit-break*) and derivation ((*circuit-break* + *-er* = *circuit-breaker*).

Language users can generate and create new words in response to their interests and needs in any given situation using any of the above word-formation processes; this is done 'with the support of existing words' (Asif et al, 2021).

Current studies of the new words that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic (Asif et al, 2021; Mweri, 2021; Bharati, 2020; Kupolati et al, 2021; Dewati & Kepirianto, 2021; Al-Salman & Haider, 2021; Khotimah et al, 2021) have described them as neologisms created through the word-formation processes of compounding, coinage, clipping, blending, acronym, abbreviation, and the semantic shift of the meaning of some old words and the activation of the usage of some old words and phrases. These studies investigated only the word-formation processes and identified compounding and blending as the dominant processes. The present paper differs from these because in addition to identifying the word-formation processes it analyses the morphemic structure of the words.

As language is the bridge linking humans to their thoughts, emotions, feelings, ideas, among others it incorporates, translates, and interprets the realities through the deploying of the new words in discourse (spoken or written). The realities being linked are presented at the syntactic level. Words alone are insufficient to make all the range of complexities and nuances of meaning distinctions people make regularly in communicative situations. Hence, the second objective of this paper is on the syntactic structure of some COVID-19-related phrases and sentences.

Syntax on its part refers to how words are sequenced together to form phrases and sentences. In other words, it has to do with the structure of phrases and sentences. The words that are grouped together to make phrases and sentences are not arranged randomly. All phrases and sentences in any language follow the rules of well-formedness of larger constructions. As such they have identifiable syntactic structures that are language particular, any point of convergence or sameness with another language notwithstanding.

In English, phrases are grouped into five types, namely noun phrase (e.g.: *COVID-19; the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic*), verb phrase, (e.g.: *are grouped into five; entered the language*) adjective phrase (e.g.: *highly infectious; very contagious*), adverb phrase (e.g.: *very carefully*) and prepositional phrase (e.g.: *in the dictionaries; during the COVID-19 pandemic*). Sentences consist of phrases and can structurally be simple (e.g.: *Most of the learning was e-learning; Wash your hands regularly with soap under running water*); compound (e.g.: *The index case reported at the COVID-19 hospital but the contact cases are on the run*); complex (e.g.: *A face mask can spread disease if not handled properly; As you go about work or business, wear a face mask*).

Functionally, in English, a sentence can be a statement, question, or command, and these are used not only for giving and receiving information, they can be used to influence the attitude and behaviour of the hearer. Hence, the mood of the statement and the question is described as being indicative, that of commands as imperative. The emergence and exponential use of the COVID-19 phrases and sentences is influenced by people's attitudes and behaviour during the pandemic. The choices of phrases and sentences made in spoken and written texts on the pandemic served some functions:

present the COVID-19 world and the attitude of the people.

To study the syntax of any language use, in this case, the COVID-19-related phrases and sentences entails a description of the compositional elements of the phrases and sentences. As individual words in isolation cannot capture the meanings being construed and constructed in a language, syntax provides the language users the means to go beyond the limitations of morphology. Thus syntax enhances ` creativity of language in organizing discourse. The syntactic rules of English are exploited to generate phrases and sentences that encode the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the functions of language. Hence the syntactic aspect of this paper examines the structural components of the phrases and the structural and functional types of sentences based on the Hallidayan mood system.

Every language has its unique morphological and syntactic systems and rules. The rules are exploited by the language users for generating words, phrases, and sentences to encode the realities in all aspects of life in all times. This explains why every native speaker or competent non-native speaker of a language has the capacity to generate and understand novel words, phrases, and sentences in the language. Thus, the lexical items, phrases, and sentences that are created and/or whose uses are popularized in English following the outbreak and spread of COVID-19 are natural linguistic responses to the phenomenon. The construction of the new words, phrases, and sentences is inevitable because language, as a social artifact is easily impacted by the social, economic, political, and other events in the society, especially those that have communal and not individual effects (Bauer, 2007; McGregor, 2009; McMahon & McMahon, 2013).

COVID-19 has overwhelming life threatening universal effects that prompted international, national, and community responses to it. Given that English is a global language, and also an official language of WHO, the pandemic activated its morphological potential to create new words and propensity to receive and accommodate ready-made ones from other languages into its vocabulary. Similarly, the limits of the words in capturing all the nuance of meaning is rescued by syntax. Thus the vitality of new words which entered the language due to the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic is more salient in usage (in phrases and sentences) and 'the rapprochement among peoples of the world ... driven by the health emergency' (Al-Salman & Haider, 2021, p.27) made the widespread use of the new words, phrases and sentences possible.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on the Structural theory of neologism and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) theory. According to Rets (2016), the structural theory of neologism posits that newly formed words have new configuration and shapes and unique audio patterns. The new shapes result from the application of the existing rules of word-formation in response to the needs of the language users at a given time. Thus, the kinematic or active part of the language enables it to undergo morphological changes creating new words; its static part maintains the stability and firmness of the morphological system in terms of the structural components of the new lexemes and paradigmatic relations. This theory is suitable because the COVID-19 related words have new configuration and unique audio patterns which are in consonance with the word-formation processes of English. Hence it provides a base for

identifying the morphemic structures of the words. In response to the context of COVID-19 and the social realities it occasioned, the users (speakers and writers) of English have exploited the morphological rules of English to create words.

As COVID-19 realities occasioned language change, Halliday's SFG theory is suitable for this study. SFG theory describes language in use and creates systemic relations between choices of words and grammatical structures made in different communicative contexts for the construal of meanings and the overt realization of meanings in authentic contexts. Within the prism of SFG theory language change occurs in response to the needs of the users in a given context or situation, whether temporal or spatial, formal or informal, technical or non-technical. Hence language has the basic metafunctions namely, ideational, interpersonal, and textual and the operational resource for realizing these functions is the lexico-grammar of language; that is the lexis and grammar of language. Thus, SFG stresses the unity of lexis and grammar as inseparable two poles on a single continuum. The lexis comprising the word stock of language is an open set, specific in meaning and collocation patterns. Hence, SFG theory recognizes that with the openness of the lexis and the contextualization of language use languages are capable of change in response to the changes in society. The grammar system comprises closed grammatical sub-systems that are general in meaning and structure. Hence the collocation patterns of lexical items yield grammatical structures with distinct meanings and structures. This explains why grammatical units such as the morpheme, the word, group/phrase, (e.g.: nominal group/noun phrase; verbal group/verb phrase), the clause, and the

sentence, have unique formal, structural, and semantic components. The choice of any structural components is predicated on the meaning construed and the context of use.

In SFG theory the clause (traditional sentence) structure is either indicative, subclassified as declarative and interrogative, or imperative (Bloor & Bloor, 2013). The indicative is used to give or seek information and make assertions while the imperative is for directives and instructions. SFG theory, therefore, posits that language consists of a set of systems that offers the users unlimited linguistic choices at the morphological (lexis) and syntactic (grammar: phrase and sentence) levels for creating meaning according to the context or situation. COVID-19 being a novel context of situation which triggered social changes in people's experiences, inter-relationships, and attitudes impacted on English language lexis (morphology) and syntax. Hence SFG theory is relevant to this study because for the coding of the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic choices were made in the word-formation processes (lexicon) and the syntactic system to create new words, phrases, and sentence accordingly.

Methodology

This paper is purely descriptive. The data collection process comprised compiling a corpus of 120 COVID-19-related words, 50 phrases, and 26 sentences. The words and phrases are purposively collected from different sources such as newspapers, television, social networking websites such as OED blogs, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and WHO websites, and offline sources such as advertisements on billboards. Also published academic papers and online dictionaries on COVID-19 and the creation

of new words are consulted (Khadgi, 2020; Bharati, 2021; Lawson, 2020, Al-Salman & Haider, 2021; Roig-Marin, 2020; Thorne, 2020; Katermina & Yatchenko, 2020; Dictionary.com, 2020; Oxford Languages, 2020). The sentences are collected from NCDC sensitization SMS sent to GSM network subscribers in Nigeria between March and December 2020, an Email from Nigerian University Pension Management Company Nupemco to me on March 29, 2020, and a WhatsApp platform I belong. Six research assistants helped in collecting the data. The collected words and phrases and the GSM sentences were checked and filtered to avoid repetition. For morpho-syntactic analysis the words are grouped based on the word-formation processes, the phrases are based on their head element and functions and the sentences are classified based on function and their respective structures.

Data Presentation

This section presents the analysed data on the morpho-syntactic analysis of the 199 COVID-19-related expressions. Table 1 shows the morphological structures of the selected 119 COVID-19-related words. In Tables 2 and 3, the syntactic structures of the selected 54 phrases and 26 sentences are presented using the SFG model for the description of these grammatical units. For the analysis of the sentences, the functional and structural types are identified and the SFG notion of the clause as an exchange having the functional structure of Mood and Residue and functional components of Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct is used.

Table 1: COVID-19-related Words: Types of Word-Formation Processes and Morphemic Structures

Table1a: Compounding

Compounds	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
Blended learning	Noun	Blend + learn	ed; -ing
Circuit-breaker	Noun	Circuit +break	-er
Conspiracy theorists	Noun	Conspiracy + theor(y)	-ists
Conspiracy theory	Noun	Conspir(e) + theory	-acy
Contact tracing	Noun	Contact + trac(e)	-ing
Corona babies/kids	Noun	Corona + bab(y)/kid	-ies/-s
Coronaspeak	Noun	Corona + speak	
Corona virus	Noun	Corona + virus	
Coronavirus-proof	Adjective	Corona +virus +proof	
COVID/Covid /COVID-19/Covid 19/Corona-related/imposed/affected/infected	Adjective	COVID/Covid /COVID-19/corona + relat(e)/affect/infect	-ed
COVID/Covid -19 pandemic	Noun	COVID/Covid-19 +pandemic	
Covid/Covid-19 screening tests	Noun	Covid/Covid-19 + screen +test	-ing; -s
Doom-scrolling	Noun/verb	Doom + scroll	-ing
Elbow bump	Verb	Elbow +bump	
Face mask/shield	Noun	Face + mask/shield	
Hand washing	Noun	Hand + wash	-ing
Hand-sanitizer	Noun	Hand + sanit(as)	-izer; -er

Herd immunity	Noun	Herd + immun(e)	-ity
Home-schooling	Noun	Home + school	-ing
Index case	Noun	Index + case	
Interstate border closure	Noun	state +border + clos(e)	-nter; -ure
Isolation centres	Noun	Isolat(e) + centre	-tion; -s
Lockdown	Noun	Lock + down	
Mask wearing	Noun	Mask + wear	-ing
Mask-shaming	Noun	Mask +sham(e)	-ing
New normal	Noun	New + normal	
Outbreak	Noun	Out + break	
Quarantine shaming	Noun	Quarantine + sham(e)	-ing
Self quarantine	Noun	Self + quarantine	
Self-isolate(ing)	Noun/verb	Self + isolate	-ing
Self-isolation	Noun	Self +isolate(e)	-ion
Shelter-in-place	Verb	Shelter + in + place	
Situation reports	Noun	Situation + report	-ion; -s
Social/physical distancing	Noun	Social/physical + distanc(e)	-ing
Stay-at-home	Noun	Stay + at + home	
Syndromic surveillance	Noun	Syndrome(e) + surveillance	-ic
Telemedicine	Noun	Tele + medicine	
Travel ban	Noun	Travel + ban	
Virtual class	Noun	Virtual + class	
Virtual presentation	Noun	Virtual +present	-ation
Voluntary isolation/quarantine	Noun	Voluntary + isolation/quarantine	
Zoom bombing	Verb	Zoom + boom	-ing

Zoom friendly	Adj ective	Zoom +friend	-ly
Zoom-ready	Adj ective	Zoom + ready	

1b: Blending

Blends	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
		Free	Bounded
Blursday	Noun	Blur + (thur)sday	
Corohara	Verb	Coro(na) + hara(ssment)	
Coronacation	Noun	Corona + (va)cation	(ca)tion
Coronageddon	Noun	Corona + (arma)geddon	
Corononomics	Noun	Corona + (eco)nomics	-ic-s
Coronapocalypse	Noun	Corona + (a)pocalypse	
Coroneologisms	Noun	Coro(na) + neologism	S
Coronials	Noun	Coro(na) + (mille)nails	Nail, s
Covexit	Verb	Cov(id) + exit	
Covideo	Noun	Covid + (vi)deo	Covideo
Covidiot	Noun	Covid + (id)iot	
Covidivorce	Noun/verb	Covi(d) + divorce	
Covidpreneur	Noun	Covid + (entre)preneur	
Elbump	Verb	El(bow) + bump	
Infits	Noun	In + (out)fit	-s
Infomedics	Noun	Information + epidemic	S
Loxit	Noun	Lo(ckdown) + exit	
Maskhole	Noun	Mask + (ass)hole	

Mockdown	Noun	Mock + (lock)down	
Pancession	Noun	Pan(demic) + (re)cession	
Plandemic	Noun	Plan(ned) + (pan)demic	
Quarandating	Verb	Quaran(tine) + dating	-ing
Quaranteams	Noun	Quaran(tine) + team	-s
Quaranteens	Noun	Quaran(tine) + teen	-s
Quarantini	Noun	Quaran(tine) + (mar)tini	
Spendemic	Adjective	Spen(d) + (pan)demic	
Staycations	Noun	Stay + (va)cation	-s

1c: Abbreviation

Abbreviations	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
		Free	Bounded
AC/ACV(After Covid/Corona Virus)	Adverb	AC/ACV	
BC/BCV (Before Covid/Corona virus)	Adverb	BC/BCV	
CDC (Centre for Disease Control)	Noun	CDC	
CFR (Case Fatality Rate)	Noun	CFR	
CV (Corona Virus)	Noun	CV	
ECQ (Enhanced Community Quarantine)	Noun	ECQ	
MCO (Movement control order)	Noun	MCO	
NCDC (Nigeria Centre for	Noun	NCDC	

Disease Control)			
PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)	Noun	PPE	
PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction)	Noun	PCR	
PSC (Presidential Steering Committee)	Noun	PSC	
PUI (person under investigation)	Noun	PUI	
PUM (person under monitoring)	Noun	PUM	
RDT (Rapid Diagnostic Tests)	Noun	RDT	
SFH (study(ing) from home)	Verb	SFH	
WFH (Work(ing) from home)	Verb	WFH	
WHO (World Health Organization)	Noun	WHO	

1d: Derivation

Derived words	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
		Free	Bound
Asymptomatic	Adjective	Symptom	a-, -atic
Disinfect	Verb	Infect	Dis-
Isolation	Noun	Isolat(e)	-ion
Lockdowners	Noun	Lock + down	-er; -s
Maskless	Adjective	Mask	-less
Non-essential	Adjective	Essential	Non
Pre/post covid	Adjective	Covid	Pre-/post
Respirators	Noun	Respire	tor, -s
Sanitizer	Noun	Sanit (as)	-ize, -er
Screening	Noun	Screen	-ing

Symptomatic	Adjective	Symptom	-atic
Unmasked	Adjective	Mask	Un-, -ed
Unmute	Verb	Mute	Un-
Vaccinate	Verb	Vaccine(e)	-ate
Vaccination	Noun	Vaccinat(e)	-ion
Ventilators	Noun	Ventilate	-or, s

1e: Compounding + Affixation

Words	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
		Free	Bound
Lockdowners	Noun	Lock + down	-er, -s
Superspreaders	Noun	Spread	Super; -er; -s

1f: Coinage

Coinages	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
		Free	Bound
Smizing	Noun	Smi(le)	z, -ing
Infits	Noun	In +fit	-s

1g: Clipping

Word	Lexical category	Morphemic structure	
		Free	Bound
NCov	Noun	N(ovel)/N(ew) + Cov(id)	
Rona	Noun	(Co)rona	

Table 1 above shows that the words are formed through seven wordformation processes. The commonly used processes are compounding (1a), blending (1b), abbreviation (1c), and derivation (1d) with compounding (table 1a) being the most prominent. The morphemic structure of the majority compounds are complex as they comprise two free morphemes and bound morphemes (e.g.: *situation reports; index cases; covid-19 infected*). The acronym *COVID-19/Covid-19/COVID/Covid* and its clipped counterpart *corona* are the most

productive stems for compounding and blending. The finding therefore is that the COVID-19 trending words as meaningful units of grammar composed with free and bound morphemes follow the general morphological rules of English

wordformation with compounding as the most prevalent.

Table 2: Syntactic structures of selected trending phrases

2a: Noun Phrase

Noun phrases	Syntactic structure					
	Deictic	Numerative	Epithet	Classifier	Thing	Qualifier
Covid-19 virus/disease				Covid-19	Virus/disease	
Corona virus outbreak				Corona, virus	Outbreak	
The outbreak of corona virus	The				Outbreak	of corona virus
Presumptive positive case			Presumptive	Positive	Case	
Contactless delivery			Contactless		Delivery	
Covid-19 index case				Covid-19 index	Case	
Covid-19 shock/crisis/cases/deaths/protocols				Covid-19	Shock/crisis/cases/deaths/protocols	
Interstate border closure				Interstate, border	closure	
Alcohol-based sanitizer				Alcohol-based	sanitizer	
Novel/new corona virus			Novel/new	corona	virus	
Precautionary measures			Precautionary		measures	
Covid-19 restriction measures				Covid-19 restriction	measures	
Covid-19 hospitals/wards				Covid-19	hospitals/wards	
Mandatory wearing of face masks			Mandatory		wearing	of face masks
The re-opening of businesses/shops/markets	The				re-opening	of businesses /shops/markets
Gradual easing of lockdown measures			Gradual		easing	of lockdown measures
The relaxing of lockdown / restriction measures	The				relaxing	of lockdown/ Restriction Measures
Covid-19 committee/news				Covid-19	committee/news	

The closure of schools and businesses	The				closure	of schools and businesses
Corona virus/Covid-19 induced recession				Coronavirus /Covid-19-induced	recession	
Covid-19 vaccine/vaccination				Covid-19	vaccine/vaccination	
Covid-19 screening centres				Covid-19, screening	Centres	
Covideo party				Covideo	party	
Asymptomatic spread of corona virus disease/ Covid-19			Asymptomatic		spread	of corona virus disease/Covid-19
People with pre-existing medical conditions/underlying health problems					People	with pre-existing medical conditions/underlying health problems
Difficulty in breathing					Difficulty	in breathing
The number of infected persons/discharged cases/deaths	The				number	of infected persons/discharged cases/deaths
Person-to-person transmission			Person-to-person		transmission	
Active cases				Active	cases	
Palliative measures			Palliative		measures	
Free Covid-19 testing centres/sites			Free	Covid-19 testing	centres/sites	

2b: Verb Phrase

Verb Phrases	Syntactic structure		
	Predicator	Complement	Adjunct
(to) flatten the curve	Flatten	the curve	
(to) ease lockdown/restriction measures	Ease	lockdown/restriction measures	
Control the Covid-19 pandemic/ corona virus spread	Control	the Covid-19 pandemic/corona virus spread	
Curtail the spread of the disease	Curtail	the spread of the disease	
Contain the virus	Contain	the virus	
Lift lockdown measures	Lift	lockdown measures	
Tested positive/negative	Tested	positive/negative	
Self-isolate for two weeks	Self-isolate	for two weeks	

Screen people for Covid-19	Screen	people	for Covid-19
Detect and isolate people/persons with symptoms	Detect and isolate	people/persons with symptoms	

2c: Prepositional phrase

Prepositional Phrase	Syntactic structure	
	Preposition	Complement
In the fight against the deadly corona virus/Covid-19	In	the fight against the deadly coronavirus/Covid-19

The above analysis the 54 phrases in Table 2 indicates that three phrases, the noun phrase (2a), the verb phrase (2b) and the prepositional phrase (2c), are used with predominantly premodified noun phrases (Table 2a). The premodifiers function either as epithet or classifier indicating the characteristics or subclass of the head noun. The dominant premodifiers are nouns functioning as classifiers. This informs the extensive production of N + N sequence and A + N sequence. Table 2b shows that apart from the verb, *self-isolate*, in the verb phrase, *self-isolate for two weeks*, the verbs of the other verb phrases are transitive with NP complements functioning as objects.

Table 3: Syntactic Analysis of Sentences: Structural and Functional Realizations
3a: Indicative Declarative sentences

Functional type	Structure	Functional structure			
		S	F/P	C	A
Declarative	Spl; Cpd; Cpx; CC	S	F/P	C	A
COVID-19 is real.	Spl	COVID-19	is	real	
Self-medication can be dangerous.	Spl	Self-medication	can be	dangerous	
Wearing a mask helps protect us from the droplets that carry the COVID-19 virus. COVID	Spl	Wearing a mask	helps (to) protect	us	from droplets that carry the COVID-19 virus
Treatment for COVID-19 should be under strict medical supervision.	Spl	Treatment for COVID-19	should be		under strict medical supervision
If you have cough and fever, please stay at home and call your state hotlines.	Cpx	you	have stay call	cough and fever your state hotlines	If please at home and

Until scientists find a certified drug for COVID-19, let us all take responsibility.	Cpx	scientists	find let take	a certified drug us all responsibility	Until for COVID-19
A face mask can spread disease if not handled properly.	Cpx	A facemask	can spread not handled	disease	if properly
As you go about work or business, wear a face mask, wash your hands with soap & water, stay at least 2 metres away from another person.	CC	You	go about wear wash stay	work or business a face mask your hands	As with soap & water at least 2 metres away from another person
You may also cough into your elbow if a handkerchief is not available.	Cpx	You a handkerchief	may also cough is not	 available	into your elbow if

3b: Imperative sentences

Functional Type	Structure	Functional Structure			
Imperatives	Spl; Cpd; Cpx; CC	S	F/P	C	A

Take responsibility.	Spl		Take	responsibility	
Do not travel out of your state at this time.	Spl		Do not travel		out of your state at this time
Wear a face mask; wash your hands with soap and water.	Cpd		Wear Wash	a face mask your hands	with soap and water
Stay safe.	Spl		Stay	safe	
Avoid touching MEN to stop the spread of COVID-19.	Spl		Avoid	touching MEN	to stop the spread of COVID-19
Follow WOMEN to prevent COVID-19.	Spl		Follow	WOMEN	to prevent COVID-19
Wash your hands regularly with soap under running water.	Spl		Wash	your hands	regularly with soap under running water
Encourage self-isolation if exposed to infected persons.	Cpx		Encourage	self-isolation	if exposed to infected persons
Avoid crowded places and gatherings.	Spl		Avoid	crowded places and gatherings	
Observe all COVID-19 protocols/rules.	Spl		Observe	all COVID-19 protocols/rules	
Cover your mouth and nose properly with a tissue paper when sneezing and/or coughing.	Cpx		Cover	your mouth and nose	with a tissue paper when

					sneezing and/or coughing
Avoid close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing.	Spl		Avoid	close contact	with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing
Avoid self-medication; report to the nearest health facility when you experience any of the above mentioned symptoms.	CC		Avoid report	self-medication	to the nearest health facility when you experience any of the above mentioned symptoms
Practice social distancing by keeping about six feet from others if you must go out in public.	Cpx		Practice	social distancing	by keeping about six feet from others if you must go out in public
Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.	Spl		Avoid	touching your eyes, nose or mouth	with unwashed hands
Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily.	Spl		Clean and disinfect	touched surfaces	frequently, daily
Take the following steps to reduce the risk of spread of coronavirus	Spl		Take	the following steps	to reduce the risk of spread of coronavirus

Spl= simple; Cpd = compound; Cpx = complex; CC = Compound Complex; S = Subject; F/P = Finite/Predicate; C = Complement; A = Adjunct.

Table 3 shows that two functional types of sentences, declarative (3a) and imperative (3b), of mostly simple and complex structures are used but at varying rates. The imperatives of simple structures are more dominant. Structurally, the imperatives comprise fourteen (14) simple sentences while the declaratives have an even distribution of simple and complex sentences (4 each) and one compound complex sentence. The finding is that the mood structure of the sentences are declarative and imperative with the imperative of simple structure being more dominant.

Discussion

Table 1 above shows that the commonly used wordformation processes are compounding, blending, derivation and abbreviation with compounding being the most prominent. The compounds (Table 1a) are mostly nouns formed by combining two free morphemes into one terminology (e.g.: lockdown, new normal); few have bound morphemes (e.g.: circuit-breaker, social/physical distancing, zoom friendly). The blends (Table 1b) comprise both simple words such as *loxit,elbump* and complex ones such as *coronials, quaranteens, quaranteams*, which also are pluralized by bound inflectional morpheme, -s. Thus, their morphological structure is both simple and complex. The derived words (Table 1d) comprise both derivational prefixes and suffixes, e.g.: **disinfect, asymptomatic maskless, ventilators**. Some derived words such as

ventilators, respirators, and compound words (e.g.: *super-spreaders, circuit-breakers, lock-downers*) have the inflectional suffix, *-s*. The acronyms, abbreviations, clippings, and coinages have a simple morphemic structure. This reveals that the COVID-19 trending words are meaningful units of grammar composed with free and bound morphemes following the general morphological rules of English wordformation. The acronym *COVID-19/Covid-19/COVID/Covid* and its clipped counterpart *corona* are the most productive stems for compounding and blending. This finding corroborates the findings of earlier studies such as Al-Salman and Haider (2021), Asif et al (2021) among others that compounding and blending are the most dominant word-formation processes.

The trending words are mostly nouns; they relate to naming and describing COVID-19, people's experiences, attitudes, social and economic impacts of the pandemic, and the medical and safety measures adopted. The exponential increase in the productions of these nouns ascertains that the noun is "one of the structures and systems that contribute to making human language the rich and expressive medium it is" (Bloor & Bloor, 2004, p.30), the lexical item used mostly for the expression of the ideational metafunction of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) and that new words entering the English language are mostly nouns than any other part of speech in English (Algeo, 1995). Hence English is lexically a nominal language and its lexis as an open system through which lexical innovations and creativity are carried out responded to the spontaneous or natural needs of English language users towards coding the realities COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2 analysis indicates that the trending phrases are predominantly noun phrases (Table 2a) with the premodifiers

functioning either as epithet or classifier indicating the characteristics or subclass of the head noun. The dominant premodifiers are nouns functioning as classifiers. This informs the extensive production of N + N sequence and A + N sequence. The predominance of the noun classifiers establishes that the nouns already exist in the lexicon of English and their use as classifiers encodes their current semantic import in response to the realities of the COVID-19 phenomenon. This brings about the dense packing of information about COVID-19 and its consequences on the social, health, economic, etc aspects of life into nominal expressions that capture the experiences and attitudes of people. Hence as nouns are the carriers of the semantic burden of sentences in English, more noun phrase expressions occurred in the COVID-19-related discourse. The use of the definite article as the deictic element in some of the NPs shows the definiteness of the realities being encoded as definite responses to the pandemic. The Predicate (lexical verb) + (NP) Complement pattern that dominates the verb phrase captures the transient nature of the events and actions the pandemic engendered in people's experiences. Hence the choice of lexical verbs such as *curtail, control, ease, test, isolate, flatten*, etc specify the processes through which the pandemic was controlled as it unfolded.

Table 3 analysis of the mood of the sentences revealed the declarative indicative and imperative with the imperative being more prevalent. Structurally, the imperatives comprise fourteen (14) simple sentences while the declaratives have an even distribution of simple and complex sentences (4 each) and one compound complex sentence. The prevalence of imperative and declarative mood of the sentences indicates the urgency of the responses and actions taken towards curbing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hence, the exponential nature of the exchange of information, instructions, and directives issued during the COVID-19 pandemic period relates the propositions to the context with fused finite/predicator functions presenting the immediacy and instant nature of the message and information. This brings the propositions down to earth, giving them instantaneous points of reference: the COVID-19 and actions taken against it. Thus, as the message content of the sentences is aimed at sensitizing the public, statements of the reality of the COVID-19 situation and the actions to be taken to curtail its spread and consequently eradicate it are constructed in simple forms in order to make the messages easier to be understood.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the morpho-syntactic nature of selected COVID-19-related expressions (words, phrases, and sentences). The analyses revealed that the newly created words and those whose usages were reactivated are mostly compound nouns; the phrases are dominantly premodified noun phrases and the sentences are mostly simple imperatives. The dominance of nouns and noun phrase attest to the lexically nominal nature of English and this provides its users the morphological and syntactic means for encoding the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. The functional values of the declarative and the imperative sentences as means through which the information about the coronavirus and the attitudinal changes it engendered in people's lives are relayed substantiate that language is not an abstraction, but a concrete reality that finds expression through the events and phenomena in the society at any given time. Thus, the changes in society which happened during the COVID-19 pandemic triggered linguistic creativity and

innovation in the morphology and syntax of English. Although the rampaging impact of the COVID-19 has gradually eased up, the reflections of how events and happenings in society affect language use remain. Hence, it is important to have an understanding of how the morpho-syntactic structures of words, phrases, and sentences used during the pandemic period are responsive to the needs of English language users in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The experience of changes in all aspects of life that the pandemic triggered as captured textually with the above words, phrases, and sentences instantiates how the morpho-syntactic systems of a language, in this case, English, sustain its "life" by encoding the realities of any phenomena that emerge in the society.

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