

## **MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 NEOLOGISM AND ITS RELEVANCE**

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### **Abstract**

This research looked at the morphological analysis of Covid-19 Neologism and its relevance. Language being dynamic in nature played significant roles in the large number of new words (neologism) that came into existence or use since the emergence of Covid-19. Some of these words were looked into in order to ascertain their mode of formation. Similarly, their relevance was looked into. This study was carried out to find out how these words were formed and their relevance. It equally analyzed these new words in order to ascertain their morphological structures and processes, their parts of speech and meanings. The descriptive qualitative design was used for the study and onomasiological theory of word formation by Pavol Stekauer 1962 and the traditional parsing theory were used for the analysis. The data which comprised new words for the analysis were derived from internet sources and texts. At the end of the analysis, the findings revealed that most of the new words were content words mostly nouns and verb. The common morphological processes in the formation of the new words were compounding, blending, affixation and acronyms. Furthermore, most of the new words followed the compound structure of the free and bound morphemes. It was also discovered that these words motivated by the content of situation. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that the Covid-19 pandemic words were created as a result of the issue at hand and these new words followed the morphological process and structure of neologisms and have also added to the English language vocabularies.

### **Introduction**

Language according to Ndimele (2003:1) “often said to be a means of communication between individuals who share a common code. The codes that individuals share are in form of symbols. These symbols can be oral or written”. Language is a means or instrument of communication of vocal character by which human experience is analyzed in a given community. Without language, the world will be a boring place because it will be difficult for one to analyze one’s experience. Language has many characteristics which include the following: Language is human. It is systematic. It is spoken. It is symbolic. It is dynamic. It is arbitrary. Language is a means of identity.

Linguists identified four different levels according to which language is organized. They are semantic level, syntactic level, morphological level and phonological level. In the course of this research, the researchers looked at the third level, which is the morphological level. Morphology is the study of internal structure of words. Morphology according to Ndimele (2003:2), is “a branch of linguistics which is concerned with the study of how words are formed”. The importance of morphology cannot be over emphasized because every day, new words are incorporated into the language, which is why language is said to be dynamic.

Furthermore, word which is defined as the minimum independent linguistic unit having an identifiable meaning and grammatical function with a fairly consistent phonological shape. What is worthy of note

is that, a word can exist independently without having to co-occur with any other linguistic unit. Words have constituent structure which include; simple word which is a free morpheme that consists of only one root word without any bound element attached. A compound word comprises two or more morphemes which can exist independently. Complex word comprises one root or free morpheme with one or more bound morpheme. Compound-complex word consists of two or more free morphemes, plus one or more bound elements.

As a society continues to develop, so also are new words coming into the language to solve the problems of expression. This was exactly what happened during COVID-19 Pandemic. These new words are known as neologisms. The term 'neologism' as defined by Oxford Dictionary is "new word or expression or a new meaning of a word". New words and expressions coined during the pandemic period helped us make sense of the changes that have suddenly become part of our daily lives.

The word 'Coronavirus' originated in bats or pangolins. The first transmission to human was in Wuhan, China, since then the virus has mostly spread through person to person contact. The first COVID-19 cases started in December 2019. When people with COVID-19 breathe out or cough the droplets that contain the virus. These droplets can enter the mouth or nose of someone without the virus causing an infection to occur. The illness spreads mostly by close contact with someone who has the infection. The common symptoms of COVID-19 include: Fever, breathlessness, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, dried cough, headache, muscle pain, chills. These symptoms are likely to occur 2-14 days after exposure to the virus. With the emergence of the virus, new words (neologisms) came into the English language, words such as quarantine which means way to separate and to restrict movement of someone, who may have been exposed to the virus to check when the person become sick; face mask, hand gel, front liner etc. These words and expressions already exist but gained new momentum and significance in 2020, often with a new meaning. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 many new words and expressions being used to solve the problem of expression during the pandemic spread almost as fast as the virus itself.

Social and physical distancing is among the most widely used terms during the period. They are technical terms used to explain that people need to remain two meters apart from one another. Though they have different meaning, according to an article written by Raquel Burgos, social distancing implies that you are isolated from the society you live in; while physical distancing indicates that you are physically away from other people (two miles away). The one that is needed is physical distancing not social distancing, we need to be physically separated not socially separated.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a lot of teachings going on, on the prevention of the deadly virus. The new normal protocol says Avoid MEN

M - Mouth  
E - Eyes  
N - Nose

This means that one should avoid touching the mouth, the eyes and the nose in order to prevent the virus. Instead Follow WOMEN, which means

W - Wash your hands  
O - Obey social distancing  
M - Mask up  
E - Exercise and eat well  
N - No close contact

We don't know which of these neologisms will stay with us and which one will fade into oblivion as soon as we get effective treatments end the pandemic. The major concern of this paper is to find out the morphological processes these new words formed during the pandemic passed through and if they took the normal processes of word formation. In order to do these, a total number of thirty (30) new words from the internet were analysed using the theories for the study.

### **Definition of Concepts**

There are four concepts used in this research. These are Morphology, Morphological Processes, Neologisms and Corona Virus. These concepts contributed immensely in the realization of this work. The first concept to be looked into is Morphology. The concept, morphology has been defined in so many ways by different authors. According to Umera-Okeke (2009:1) morphology 'is a combination of two words- morph which means form or shape- Ology which is the study of. When put together as one word, it becomes morphology which is the study of the basic building blocks of meaning in language. She went further to say that it is the level of grammar that studies the way morphemes organize themselves to form words. In other words, it studies the internal structure of words.

Yule (2002:25) defines morphology as "the study of forms". Morphology is the body of rules governing the formation of words in a language. It was initially used in Biology to mean the study of form and structure of plants and animals. The study of the rules helps us to know morphologically correct and incorrect forms. In the words of Nwokedi (2003:97) "Morphology is the study of the internal structure of words and how words are formed". This concept was named for the first time in 1859 by the German Linguist, August Schleicher who used it for the study of forms of words.

Morphology is of different types: The Morphemological Morphology and Lexical Morphology. The Morphemological looks at morphemes while the lexical focuses on the lexicon of the language. Both of them are important in the study of neologisms of COVID-19 Pandemic.

### **Morphological Processes**

Morphological processes involve the study of word structure in linguistic field. It can alter stems to derive new words. This may change the words meaning (derivational) or grammatical function (Inflectional). Morpheme which is the smallest meaningful unit of an utterance can stand on its own or depend on another morpheme to be meaningful. Morphological processes involved in the creation of new words include; affixation, this occurs when a morpheme is attached to a root. Morpheme according to Ndimele (2003:8) "is the smallest meaningful units of an utterance which may not however exist in isolation.

**Affixes:** these are bound morphemes that must be attached to the beginning of a root word (prefix) or at the end of root a word (suffix) and in some languages surrounding a root (circumfix) or be inserted in a root (infix).

**Compounding:** compounding is the process of combining two or more stems (or formerly independent root) to form a single new word, such as wristwatch, teacup, textbook, and so on. Compounding is a very productive morphological process in most languages. It does only involve stringing together of words from a part of speech. Words from different parts of speech can be combine to form compounds.

**Conversion:** conversion is when a word changes its part of speech without necessarily undergoing any reduction or enlargement by way of affixation. Another name for conversion is called functional shift or category change. For example some nouns in English such as man, nail, place and ship can also function as verbs. Adjectives such as total, empty and dirty can function as verbs: to empty, to dirty and to total.

**Reduplication:** This is when the root or stem of a word (or part of it) or even the whole word is repeated exactly or with a slight change.

**Borrowing:** this is the commonest way of creating a new word in human language. It is the process of taking words from one or more languages to fit into the vocabulary of another. This is achieved through language contact. The language that borrows from the other is said to be the recipient language while that from which the item is borrowed is known as the 'donor' language.

**Acronyms:** It is possible to create new words created from the initial letters of a set of other words. Words formed in this way are called acronyms. For example; O.A.U. is derived from Organization of African Union. UNO stands for United Nations Organisation.

**Clipping or abbreviations:** This is a process of creating a new word by shortening another word. It involves some element of shortening or reducing the length of the word. A clipped word retains the

same meaning and the same part of speech as the longer word from which it was derived. Example Prof (Professor), exam (from examination), gas (from gasoline).

**Blending:** Blending is a morphological process of creating a new word by combining parts of two or more already existing words in the same language. Examples of blends in English include Urinalysis (derived from Urine plus analysis), telecast (derived from television plus broadcast).

**Back formation:** In a normal word formation process, new words are created by the addition of a new element, so that the derived word is longer than the base or root from which it was created. That is, a normal word formation process involves the creation of a complex word from a simple root. But word formation through back formation, the reverse is the case. Hence it can be defined as an abnormal process of creating a shorter word by removing an affix which thought to be part of the old word like clipping, it is very systematic in the sense that it follows a pattern and it involves a change of part of speech. Examples – donation (Noun) – donate (verb) editor (noun) – edit (verb).

### **Neologism**

This is the process of coining new words and adding them to already existing words in language. It is a reflection of language's ability to grow and evolve with time, culture and technology. Its synonyms include; new word, new expression, new term, new phrase, coinage, invented, nonce word, portmanteau word and so on. The model of neologism according to Krishna Murthy (2010) consists of three components which include word formation, borrowing and lexical derivation. Word formation involves compounding, blending, affixation, acronym and coinage.

The second component of the model is borrowing: This is seen as one of the commonest ways of creating a new word in human language. Borrowing is the process of taking words from one or more languages to fit into the vocabulary of another. Ndimele (2003:65) points out that "no language is free of borrowing". Borrowing helps to make communication effective and it presupposes some element of culture contact. The third component of the model is lexical derivation: lexical tends to produce a neologism which refers to the process of creating new words by applying the existing rule of word formation based on the principle of generation.

### **Coronavirus**

The concept, Coronavirus, refers to the crown-like projections on the pathogen's source. "Corona" is Latin meaning "halo" or "crown". In humans, coronavirus infection most often occur in the winter and early spring, but they can happen at any time. Coronavirus can cause a wide range of illness, including the common cold and COVID-19, respiratory system, but they can affect other systems too.

Covid-19 is the new strain of Corona Virus likely originated from bat and pangolins. The first transmission to human was in Wuhan, China. Since then, the virus has mostly spread through person to person contact. coronavirus is group of viruses that can cause disease in both animals and humans. The first Covid-19 case started in December 2019, that is why it is called Covid-19. Coronaviruses are present in many species, including camels and bats. Some of these viruses can be deadly. A person may have a high risk of developing severe symptoms, if they are older, have a weakened immune system, or have another health condition. A coronavirus also causes coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19). This illness results from infection with acute respiratory Syndrome, corona virus 2 (SAR-COV2). These diseases became so deadly that it became known as COVID-19 Pandemic. This disease spreads through droplet from cough, sneezing, or breathing. The droplets may touch another person, on an item such as a door handle. If someone else touches the handle, the virus may pass on to them, if they touch their mouth, nose or eyes. It was as a result of these that the slogan of avoid MEN and follow WOMEN became popular.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted descriptive qualitative design in analyzing the morphological structures of neologisms arising COVID-19 pandemic. The study specifically involved textual analysis to determine the morphological process involved in the formation of new words. The data used in analysing the

morphological processes of COVID-19 related neologisms were collected from articles, social media and some websites retrieved for analysis. 30 data were collected for this analysis.

### Theoretical Framework

Two theories were used in this research. These are the theories of Onomasiology and traditional parsing. The Theory of Onomasiology was developed by Pavol Stekauer in 1962. The concept is from a Greek word, “onomaso” meaning to name. Its major concern is to find out “how do you express X” with the implications that there are limits and forms (of course in language) for expressing one thing or the other. The basic unit and forms in language that express concept, identify objects are words. The study of words for the specification of their meaning and other grammatical features belong to the branch of linguistics called lexicology. In other words, onomasiology is particularly within the domain of lexicology, studying words that name. However, in 1962 Pavol Stekauer developed a theory on this, known as onomasiological theory whose major interest was on word formation processes. This theory looks at how words were formed, their functions and the class they belong.

The second theory is the theory of parsing by the traditional grammarians which assigns function to the various parts of speech. Hence we can look at a word or phrase and say it belongs to a particular part of speech. These two theories aided in the morphological analysis of this research work.

### Results and Discussions

**Table 1 Neologisms of Covid 19: Its Morphological Processes and Meanings.**

S/N	Neologism	Part of Speech	Morphological Processes	Meaning
1.	PPE	Noun	Acronym	This acronym stands for Personal Protection Equipment.
2.	WFH	Noun	Acronym	This acronym stands for working from home.
3.	Covidiot	Noun	Blending	This means someone ignoring public health advice( Covid and idiot)
4	BCV	Noun	Acronym	Before Corona Virus
5	ACV	Noun	Acronym	After Corona Virus
6	Cocktail hour	Noun	Compounding	This means when you get to enjoy your quarantine perhaps with friends on a video call.
7	Covidals (Coronial)	Noun	Affixation	The generation of children born between November 2020 and June 2021 as a result of the prolonged Covid-19 lock down.
8	PUI	Noun	Acronym	The acronym stands for person under investigation.
9	Covidcation	Noun	Blending	When work or school gets cancelled because of Covid-19. It is also called coronacation.
10	Quarantine	Noun		It means a cocktail during lock down or an alcoholic beverage one sips at home during lock down.
11	Social distancing	Noun	Affixation/ compounding	It means isolating from the society you live in.
12	Physical distancing	Noun	Affixation/ Compounding	Means staying two miles away from the next person to avoid

				physical contact with another person.
13	Contact tracing	Noun	Affixation/ Compounding	This means the practice of identifying and monitoring individuals who may have had contact with an infectious person as a means of controlling the spread of a communicable disease.
14	Convexit	Verb	Blending	This means the act of going out or making an exist during lock down.
15	Zoom bombing	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	It refers to the unwanted disruption or hijacking of a zoom meeting.
16	Quaranteams	Noun	Affixation/ Compounding	This means online teams created during the lockdown to help other people deal with changing work circumstances.
17	Zoom scrolling	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	It refers to obsessively searching and reading depressing pandemic – related news.
18	NCOV	Noun	Blending	It means ‘Novel Coronavirus’
19	Self Isolating	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	To become physically or socially separated from others especially to undertake self imposed isolation for a period of time.
20	Coronal trolls	Noun	Compounding	It means people who take advantage of all the internet traffic in order to create bad context.
21	Apocaloptimist	Noun	Blending	A person who feels hopeful about life after Covid-19.
22	Blursday	Noun	Blending/Affixation	This is an unspecific day because of lockdown’s disorientating effect online.
23	Covideo Party	Noun	Blending/ Compounding	This means online parties via video conferencing platforms such as zoom or skype.
24	Super Spreader	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	It means an individual who is highly contagious and capable of transmitting a communicable disease to an unusually large number of uninfected individuals.
25	Covid-19	Noun	Abbreviation	This means corona disease that emerged in 2019.
26	Front liner	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	A person or thing that operates in an advanced, exposed or conspicuous position.
27	Coronageddon	Noun	Blending	This means a near-certain end of time conditions created either by the actual Covid-19 virus or the

				massive social, financial and political devastation generated on the back of global hysteria.
28	Long Haulers	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	Means providing vaccines that may be relieving symptoms.
29	Infodemic	Noun	Blending	Is a portmanteau of ‘information’ and “epidemic” that typically refers to a rapid and far reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about something, such as disease as facts, rumours and fears mix.
30	Hand Sanitizer	Noun	Compounding/ Affixation	This means liquid that contains alcoholic that is used to avoid the spread of the virus and also remove dirt from the hands.

From the above table, it can be observed that the thirty (30) Covid-19 neologisms (newly formed words related to Covid-19). Most of these newly coined words are nouns. These new words or phrases are adopted to designate the new situations and their responses to it; though some of these words are already in existence but are prevalent during this time. From the findings, there are twenty-three (23) nouns; they are used to name a person, state or thing. While one new word, convexity is a verb. These verbs are used to describe the actions or experiences people commonly engaged in during the pandemic. Therefore, the result authenticates that nouns and verbs are open class that can take in new words (neologisms). Also, it shows that compounding, affixation, blending and acronym are mostly used.

**Table 2: Morphological Structure of the Neologisms**

S/N	Neologism	Morphemes Free	Affixes Bound	Form
1.	NCOV	NCOV		Simple
2.	PUI	PUI		Simple
3.	BCV	BCV		Simple
4	ACV	ACV		Simple
5	WFH	WFH		Simple
6	PPE	PPE		Simple
7	Blursday	Blur - day	- S -	Compound
8	Long Haulers	Long Hauler	- S -	Compound
9	Front liner	Front Liner		Compound
10	Quaranteams	Quaran (tine) Team	- S -	Compound
11	Doomscrolling	Doom Scroll	- ing -	Compound
12	Zoom bombling	Zoom Bomb	- ing -	Compound
13	Social distancing	Social distanc(e)	- ing -	Compound
14	Physical distancing	Physical distanc (e)	- ing -	Compound

15	Coronal trolls	Corona – troll -	- al -	Compound
16	Convexit	Cov – exist		Compound
17	Covid-19	Covid 19		Compound
18	Covideo	Covid Video		Compound
19	Covideo Party	Covid Video Party		Compound
20	Coronnal	Corona	Nial	Compound
21	Covidication	Covid	Cation	Compound
22	Covidiot	Covid Idiot		Compound
23	Quarantine	Quaran (tine) (mar) tini		Compound
24	Super spreader	Super Spread	- er -	Compound
25	Coronal trolls	Coron (a) Troll	- al -	Compound
26	Self isolating	Self Isolate (e)	- s -	Compound
27	Coronageddon	Corona (ama)geddon	- ing -	Compound
28	Cock tail hour	Cock tail Hour		Compound
29	Hand sanitizer	Hand Sanitize (e)	- er -	Compound
30	Infodemic	Info (rmation) (epi) demic		Compound

From the table above, it can be observed that out of the thirty neologisms, 22 (Twenty two) neologisms are compound neologisms. These compound neologisms are new words formed by combining two or more morphemes to form one word or terminology. Examples of these compound words are self-isolating, covidiot, covideo, covideo party etc. Whereas, there are only two (2) complex neologisms (words) such as coronial and covidication. The simple words are six (6) in number such as PUI, ncov, WFH, etc. This result also shows or portrays that there are free and bound morphemes in the formation of some of these new words; and compound words are mostly formed in the covid-19 neologism.

### **Relevance of COVID-19 Neologisms to Humanity**

The relevance of COVID-19 pandemic neologisms to humanity cannot be overemphasized. To start with, the word COVID-19 as an acronym brought awareness of such an ailment to the world. This awareness led to other measures which either aided in the reduction of the diseases, that is, its spread, management and cure. With the introduction of this ailment, many medical experts swived into action, carrying out one research or the other in order to ameliorate the disease. They equally developed more new words to describe the disease and to create awareness and health consciousness. Words such as “stay at home”, “quarantine”, “go to work from home” and many others were created to avoid social and close contact with people as these were the various means through which the disease can be contacted.

The acronyms avoid MEN and follow WOMEN summarise all the preventive means through which the disease could not be contacted. In the study of COVID-19 many new words and phrases came into the



language to support the claim by linguists that language is dynamic. That is, language changes as the society and humans in it change. It again proved the fact that language is creative and that words change their meanings as events in the society change. Some old words assumed new meanings while some new words were produced to represent the new ideas and events, thereby increasing the English vocabulary.

In summary, with the new words invented, the global world came to terms with the disease and this aided drastically in curbing the disease. This aligns with the saying that knowledge is power while ignorance is a disease.

### **Recommendations**

Having analysed this work using the theories mentioned, the researchers recommend that more linguistic theories should be used to look into the terminologies of other linguistic levels of language of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Furthermore, reasons for the circulation and dissemination of these new words should be looked into and finally, phoneticians should look into the phonological aspect of the COVID-19 Pandemic neologisms.

### **Conclusion**

This work revealed from its investigations that the morphological processes involved in the formation of these new words or neologisms are compounding, blending, affixation and acronym. Others such as conversion and abbreviation are minimal. Furthermore, the study showed that the predominant morphological structure of the neologisms is compound word while others are very few. Furthermore, the investigations showed or portrayed that content words (open class) such as nouns are mostly created during the pandemic to take care of the new ideas and new experiences encountered.

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