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THE PROLIFERATION OF COVID-19 ENGLISH NEOLOGISMS ON DIGITAL MEDIA IN KENYA

The proliferation of COVID-19 English Neologisms on Digital Media in Kenya

Anne Manyasi, anne.mayasi@gmail.com, 0722636853
Department of Literature, Languages and Linguistics
Egerton University
Dr. Josephine Khaemba, jkhaemba76@gmail.com, 0722265757
Department of Literature Languages and Linguistics
Egerton University

Abstract

The current global pandemic has not only changed the lives of people globally but also caused language change. Seemingly, there is a parallel language contagion to the pandemic given that some dictionaries have already made unscheduled updates in response to coronavirus-related vocabulary. Previous research has reported pandemics and epidemics to have given rise to certain neologisms. Given the ease with which information can be created and shared on digital media, neologism related to the coronavirus pandemic is a rich ground for research on these platforms. The study explores linguistic neologisms related to the coronavirus pandemic as used on digital media platforms in the Kenyan context. It focused on the word-formation processes as well as the meaning and effectiveness of neologisms related to the pandemic. It is a qualitative study as it describes phenomena, using data from the digital platforms and field notes. The study is informed by Pavol Štekauer's (1996, 1998, 2001b) theory of onomasiology. Data from the study is coded then presented using tables and discussions. The study provides a synchronic account of COVID-19 neologisms and is useful to linguists and scholars of language change. The findings reveal that the contagion has caused an upsurge of new English words, phrases, acronyms and abbreviations as evidenced by their use on digital platforms and offline discussions. The new words are chiefly nouns and adjectives and are of medical background. This paper, therefore, argues that there are multiple neologisms that are currently in use as a result of the coronavirus pandemic or 'the new normal.'

KEY WORDS: neologism, coronavirus, COVID-19, contagion, language change.

Primary authors: Ms MANYASI, Anne (Egerton University); Dr KHAEMBA, Josephine (Egerton University)

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