



## THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE DURING PANDEMIC

**Shefali Naranje, Ph. D**

Dept. of Business Communication, Vivek College of Commerce, Mumbai, India

### Abstract

*In the times of emergencies like pandemics unleashing the power of the language is very important as well as it works in a very different way. People throughout the world, even the people residing in villages and distant lands speak one common language which is English. It is a predominate language and most of the terms used to describe the situation is formed in the language which is English. The most amazing fact about this language is that even if people do not use and understand English in a daily situation still the terms and words used during the time of emergencies is widely used in these conditions. The appropriate use of these words make it one of the most used languages throughout the world. Learning a language and using it in a state of emergency are two different aspects. The individual has learnt the terms, words, phrases after listening to someone through advertisement, official website of government, health department, news channels, etc. This means a lot of influence is there on the mind of the individual after listening through various channels for a pandemic or an emergency situation. The language English a very common and popular language spoken throughout the world has always played a very essential role in framing the terminologies for various circumstances. Therefore, the role of the language becomes really very essential in communicating the meanings, situations, experiences to all the people concerned with it.*

*This paper has tried to focus on certain terms which were repeatedly used in the time of Covid-19. A lot of words that were used were very normal words, but with the outbreak of this pandemic the same words have had a very important place in almost everyone's life. In fact these words meant a lot to the people in understanding the situation in the times of emergencies like pandemic. These words have not only changed the whole connotation of its meaning but has also found an important place in the dictionary. If these words are used for a longer time they will have a greater and larger meaning of it in the lives of the people.*

---

**Key words:** Droplets, Mask, Sanitizer, Social Distancing, Super-Spreader.

### Introduction:

The most important part of human civilization is that human can speak a language to communicate. Communication is an integral part of an individual. This is more, true and relevant in times of emergencies or under certain critical situations. Trying to understand the situation the recent pandemic that hit our planet gives us a very clear picture of how language has helped people to understand the gravity of the situation and react to it in a much better way. This paper tries to

evaluate the various terms used in daily life for situations like these. Let us try to understand how this very important language English has contributed effectively towards this new pandemic and how it has made people come together to fight it.

The words used in the time of pandemic help us to keep us safe and these words have saved the lives of many people across the world. It is almost a year now after the World Health Organization(WHO) declared the COVID-19 a pandemic, a lexicon of language has evolved during these months. Though the language used is simple it is meant to help common people to understand the seriousness of situation, cope with this disruption, or even simply to have an understanding of this new normal.

Professor Jila Ghomeshi head of the Linguistic Department from University of Manitoba said, "There's always a sort of an influx of new vocabulary around events and technological innovation, or any kind of event." The vocabulary that has taken a hold these days are social distancing, mask, sanitizer, physical distancing, do gaz ki doori in public places.

Ghomeshi notes that metaphoric language is the most common language which is uttered during the pandemic. "If you're trying to explain something that people don't know about, the only way you can explain it is by relating it to something that they do know about," she said.

Metaphors are also the subject of research for Veronika Koller, a professor in discourse studies at Lancaster University in England. In fact, is studying and compiling the metaphors that are being used to describe this new pandemic Covid-19. She was impressed when certain politicians used metaphors like war to describe the whole situation.

In batteries of publications that one can see, new words are roped in English language which were not used in so much before the break of this covid-19 pandemic. These words were used in normal language. The words like new normal, a terrain of high toxicity, self-isolation, quarantine, migrants, lockdown, battle with Corona, flattening-curve have become more important in these days. Man who used to love going out with family and friends, today has to maintain distance even from the family for protecting it from this deadly virus.

**Method:** Language and Art can go side by side. The method here is to seek and understand the behavioural pattern in the human society. A lot of literature with new language has evolved during this one year of pandemic. Koller said "the metaphors and similes are a way for people to help cope with a new reality that has upended their lives." "People are trying to understand an overwhelming thing that you cannot see," she said. "You cannot see the virus, it's so small, and

you can hear of people infected, but it's something that is invisible. But, at the same time, it's huge, because it wrecks havoc on all of our lives. People are trying to understand this thing in a non-scientific or in a simpler way, because difficult terms are meant for the scientists, and they're trying to make sense of it in a laypersons way."

Let us discuss the importance of these few words so as to understand how the pandemic is changing the English language. To put it in other words English has being used by many but these words have made a special place in everyone's vocabulary. Earlier also in times of health crises like AIDS and HIV these words entered into the English language and also made the way into the dictionary.



[https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q\\_auto,w\\_1100,c\\_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdn%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200505225714-artists-corona-final-kashmira-sarode.png](https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q_auto,w_1100,c_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdn%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200505225714-artists-corona-final-kashmira-sarode.png)



[https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q\\_auto,w\\_1100,c\\_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200430122118-artists-corona-final-elen.png](https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q_auto,w_1100,c_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200430122118-artists-corona-final-elen.png)

The above two paintings depict how things have changed after the hit of pandemic across the world. With the help of technology things kept moving on and people found some respite through online mode. This art form speaks volume about the new situation, giving a hint of the new normal. The art form has depicted a lot of things which people experienced during the lockdown.

Talking about this situation with the help of literature, Thomas Nashe, in his poem “**A Litany in Time of Plague**” talks about bidding farewell to the earth’s bliss. He talks about sickness, death, the uncertainties of the world which is brought by the pandemic. He further says that the gold, riches of a person will not save him from going to the grave. He asks the Lord to intervene and have mercy on this earth and its people. This is the second stanza of the poem:

“Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy you health;  
Physic himself must fade;  
All things to end are made;  
The plague full swift goes by;  
I am sick, I must die—  
Lord, have mercy on us!”

Another poet Philip Freneau in his poem “**Pestilence**” talks about plague. The poem talks about the yellow fever which killed 5,000 citizens of Philadelphia in the year 1793. The poem pays a tribute to the horror of the disease as it ravaged the American city.

“Hot, dry winds forever blowing,  
Dead men to the grave-yards going:  
Constant hearses,  
Funeral verses;  
Oh! what plagues—there is no knowing!  
Priests retreating from their pulpits!—  
Some in hot, and some in cold fits  
In bad temper,  
Off they scamper,  
Leaving us—unhappy culprits!”

Here also one can see the usage of words like grave, funeral, dead which were used in those days as it is used now. The continuous beeping of ambulance makes one understand as to how life

is struggling at the hands of death. Sometimes it is life that wins and most of the times it is death that takes over.

People becoming sick and dying of the pandemic, because of the hit of virus or due to some other ailments which could not be treated in time results in serious health issues which sometimes also becomes the reason for death.

**Observations:** Human being is a rational animal. He cannot digest things as told to him. He needs proofs as well as reports to convince him. The situation in today's time is much better, as we all are well connected through technology. If we examine the other pandemics that happened in the past we can understand that people of those times were hardly getting the updates about these diseases and problems. If we try to analyze about the situation, we realize that it is the fear of the unknown virus that is developed among the society. It is contagious and can spread fast through human contact. Therefore, realizing this the governments of the world started spreading the message as stay indoors and maintain physical/social distancing in public places. What was the situation before the outbreak of the pandemic, and what it is now, has totally changed, for example wearing a mask, gloves, using sanitizers for cleaning almost everything has become a common story of each household.

No one can guarantee when this pandemic will end. It is here to stay with us for quite some time. Therefore, it is necessary to change the way we used to live before the pandemic. It is one of the best remedy to avoid being infected by this deadly virus. As discussed earlier, the virus is here to stay means it can mutate (change) itself which becomes a serious issue for the health workers and the doctors. These events have created a lot of stress in the minds of people.

The other biggest change that has taken over in our lives is that almost everyone has in some way or the other have moved into an online mode or into the virtual world. People has started understanding its importance and also have learnt new things through the internet to become a part of this online world. Now instead of meeting physically people are meeting through various platforms like, Google Meet, Zoom, YouTube, Facebook, videoconferencing through WhatsApp and so on. Even the children of the house have moved to online mode of learning. These tools have allowed each one of us to stay connected with their family and friends, as the outside situation is totally different. This way people are getting connected with each other.

These things have opened new avenues for all of us. It has opened doors for physical and mental health through these online platforms. Words like tele-medicine, tele-health, and tele-

therapy has opened and given a ray of hope during these difficult times. When people cannot go out and consult the doctor, one can get a doctor online and hence these health issues to a certain extent can be dealt with online mode. Another important issue is mental health. During this time a lot of people found themselves mentally stressed or ill because they were forced to stay indoors and also not allowed to have social connect with their other group members.

Words like asymptomatic, droplets and super-spreader have become a part of regular conversation. These words have been picked-up from science and medicine into our common vocabulary. We also know words like hot spots and red zones or areas which means heavy concentration of Covid-19 cases. All these words were put together by the politicians, medical staff, government officials before passing it to the general public. These words not only give an alarm but, they also offer a measure of comfort. This creates a common dialect for everyone and people can really understand about what is being referred to. It is a new language in making.

With each new day new entries into the popular lexicon is added like ventilator, community spread, vaccination, active cases, infected people, fake news. This is a time when the lovers of language will have a long time to sit and check the number of times what types of words and language was used. Shakespeare to mention here has also used the word “droplets” in his tragic play “**Timon of Athens**” in the year 1605. This shows that though these words are commonly used they have a special reference. A similar type of situation can be seen when we first heard about AIDS. The term T-cells was prevalent during that time and also was very dominant as all the public understood the importance of it in fighting the disease. Today people still remember it though, it has lost its importance over the period of time.

“The kinds of words that stick around are the kinds of words we’ll still have reason to use in five years because of the way society has changed or the way technology has moved forward,” said Kory Stamper, a lexicographer.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus to end the discussion, it is important to recognize that life is valuable and therefore it must go on. The pandemic is here to stay for some time does not allow the people to stop the daily life activities required to sustain life. Even though the pandemic may not end on a particular day and time we have to understand that no one is alone and that everyone is together facing the situation and fighting it back. As a society all of us will have to learn to adapt to this situation. We all should fight it back and move in together. This can be done only when we all have a common

language to speak and express the situation. A language which will help in understanding the situation and also helping in fighting back with the situation. Though vaccine is the answer for this pandemic or a medicine to fight other situations that can come in the future. Humans can sustain all these situations if they are well connected through technology and the very own English language. The importance of the language in times of emergencies therefore should not be undermined. The language can protect the life of a person if it can give proper instructions to be followed under these critical situations. Medicines, vaccines will definitely play a major role in eradicating or controlling these types of situation but language has a major role to play at this time. If language fails in the exercise of giving instructions using words which are familiar and easy to understand it will be failing in saving the precious lives of people.

### **References:**

Charles Lefebvre- supervising news producer Oct 2020. Winnipeg/news: The evolution of language during the covid-19 pandemic.

Kory Stamper: lexicographer writer of dictionaries.

Mark Barabak, associate press writer for Los Angeles Times of state and national politics, April 2020.

Interestingliterature.com/2020/04/poems-plagues-pandemic-lockdown.

[https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q\\_auto,w\\_1100,c\\_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200430122118-artists-corona-final-elen.png](https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q_auto,w_1100,c_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200430122118-artists-corona-final-elen.png).

[https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q\\_auto,w\\_1100,c\\_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200505225714-artists-corona-final-kashmira-sarode.png](https://dynaimage.cdn.cnn.com/cnn/q_auto,w_1100,c_fit/http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.cnn.com%2Fcdnnext%2Fdam%2Fassets%2F200505225714-artists-corona-final-kashmira-sarode.png).

Roger. J. Kreuz (University of Memphis Tennessee. The Pandemic is changing the English Language.

### **Cite Your Article:**

Shefali Naranje. (2023). THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE DURING PANDEMIC. Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies, 10(76), 18506–18512. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7954069>