A Pragmatic Analysis of the Misuse of Nose Masks Among Residents of Port Harcourt

By

Ibiere Ken Maduako
Department of English and Communication Art,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State
&
Charity Elekeme
Department of English and Communication Art,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State

Abstract

This study is aimed to explore various ways in which Nose Masks are misused among residents of Port Harcourt, using a pragmatic view of Morris, who defined pragmatics as **"the study of the relation of signs to interpreters".** Nose mask is one of the Personal Protective Equipments (PPE) recommended by the centre for disease control (CDC). In modern linguistics, pragmatics is broadly defined as the study of language use in context which dealt with the language in use, including signs and symbols, and the context in which it is used. Pragmatics is mostly used in connection with the relationship between signs and their users. It investigates how context (both situational and linguistic) affects the meaning of utterances. It is thus the study of the use of signs, words and sentences, in actual situations. The usage of face masks by the common public to avert COVID-19 transmission was a suggestion by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to reduce the spread because it was scientifically proven that primary route of transmission of COVID-19 is through small respiratory droplets, and it is transmissible from asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals. According to the World Health Organization, wearing a mask in public can help reduce the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. This admonition had been neglected by some residents of Port Harcourt. As such, this study is a pragmatic investigation of the various ways in which nose masks are worn against the prescribed way by WHO. Findings show that, Port Harcourt residents are yet to accept the fact about the COVID 19 outbreak, and might be at risk if there are father outbreaks of any virus if this attitude is not corrected. The paper recommends that residents of Port Harcourt consciously wear their mask properly when there is need for that and obey sanitary rules.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Nose mask, Misuse, Port Harcourt Residents, Covid-19

Introduction

Communication sometimes can be somehow tricky and disconcerting since language itself sometimes can confuse participants in interaction and the meaning what is communicated can be confusing sometimes (Ajulo, 1994). In the linguistic field the term 'meaning' and what it implicates have been studied from different points of view. For instance, in semantics, meaning is focused just on the word and what it mean, how its syntactic structure accompanies its real connotation; whereas in pragmatics the focus is on context of interaction and its influence on the real meaning of the utterance employed depending on the localization where the dialogue is occurring. Linguists had been studying the different connotations pragmatics have given to communication and language over the years and as such, there are several theories about meaning in this field which have provided some different points of views.

The introduction of mouth and nose coverage by using face mask can be traced back to the 20th century (Matuschek et al., 2020). Historically, face mask had been a part of traditional sanitary practices against contagious diseases in early modern Europe. Face masks used in today health care system and in the community can be seen as preventive measure to mitigate or prevent the spread of infectious disease such as COVID-19. Earlier report suggests that, many of these non-pharmaceutical measures likewise face mask had been used for the control of community transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003 and pandemic influenza A H1N1 in 2009 in Hong Kong and other parts of the world (Cheng et al., 2020). Since the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2, the use of face masks has become ubiquitous around the world and it has become an important health measure or we can say as become a new normal after COVID-19 pandemic (Feng et al., 2020). Although, several recommendations as well as usage guidelines have been made available by World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other health agencies to prevent transmission of air droplets by holding it back. In addition, despite of various fact sheet or technical report available regarding the face mask, its usage in healthy population is still controversial (Cheng et al., 2020).

Social-Ecological Model

Figure 1



Source: Mcleroy, K.R., Steckler, A. and Bibeau, D. (1988)

The social ecological model proposed by McLeroy and colleagues in 1988, posits that health is influenced by a collection of subsystems that occur at various levels and not just solely determined by biological factors. Basically these levels include individual, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public policy. This model affords us with the ability to think, design, and implement effective interventions while fully acknowledging the complex systems that lead to differential risk of disease.

Levels of Health Determinants

Individual

Individual differences such as gender, religion, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation as well as the attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge influence conditions of health.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal relationships in formal and informal settings may affect the health of every individual. These relationships whether familial or peer, may be serving as social or emotional support, and may span generations.

Institutional

Institutions shape behaviors and attitudes towards health due to their organizational characteristics, regulations, rules (formal and informal), and cultural expectations. This may include safety, social stigma, or health initiatives.

Community

The environment within defined boundaries an individual lives in may promote certain social norms, provide access to resources, and offer social networks towards good health. The environment, location of a community, housing, transportations, community engagement, income level, community level of awareness, educational facilities allcontribute to a community's wellbeing.

Public Policy

Laws and policies at the local, state or federal level may be influential in determining health outcomes. Allocation of funds, policy initiatives that aim to address health behaviors, social equity, and overall infrastructure all are integral in shaping health outcomes.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics was earlier conceived as a waste basket where the items that could not be analyzed in the semantic, syntactic, and other linguistics levels are analyzed. Pragmatics is the study of language in relation to context. The term "context" is vast, but it can be defined as the elements that surround a sign that determines its meaning (Alabi, 20020). The meaning of a sign is inferred, or implicitly interpreted subjectively which also affects to the number of interpretations that can derive from one context. Pragmatics in its earlier reference as "…the rag-bag into which recalcitrant data could be conveniently stuffed, and where it could be equally forgotten (Bar-Hillel, 1971), lead linguists to discover that what has been disposed into the waste basket can actually be recycled into brand new. Specifically, Morris defined pragmatics as **"the study of the relation of signs to interpreters"** (1938, p. 6). In modern linguistics, pragmatics is broadly defined as the study of language use in context. Pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others Pragmatics deals with language use (Adegbite, 2001).

Mask

Mask is one of the personal protective equipment that fits snugly around the nose. It's secured in place with elastic, and looks a lot like a regular face mask—just smaller. The masks were designed by scientist Gustavo Acosta Altamirano, who recognized a need for protection, even when people are eating and drinking. Altamirano and a team of fellow researchers designed the masks as a barrier to block out aerosols less than 5 microns in size. The mask was basically meant to improve greater protection, especially when it is difficult to maintain a healthy distance in restaurants, long-term flights, or dental appointments. This item was, originally, a personal protective covering for temporary use by professionals in health facilities, particularly, for those involved in clinical chores to protect them and their patients from infection. But, the advent of COVID – 19 altered that and the nose mask became the trendiest piece of outer clothing expected to be donned by everyone in the global community. To limit the spread of coronavirus disease in 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued recommendations that individuals wear face masks in public. Despite these recommendations, the individual decision to adhere and wear a mask may not be a simple decision. This paper pragmatically investigates the misuse of the mask. However, there are remote causes of the misuse. This paper identifies these cause through a societal, interpersonal and community, and intrapersonal influences, it is clear that the decision to wear a mask is multifaceted and influenced by constructs including public health recommendations and government mandates, racism and cultural norms, geography, household income, age, and personal attitudes. Understanding the multifactorial influences on mask wearing during any

pandemic is vital for informing the creation and distribution of inclusive public health communication.

Nose masks are generally used as protection from various types of allergies, bacteria, dust, chemicals and other airborne diseases. They are also worn by health care specialists during surgeries and some other medical procedures. While nose masks are lighter and cheaper and they may not provide as much protection as is expected, nose masks are still a comfortable alternative to respirators. Nose mask such as nasal a pillow, which are small in size and is a medium nasal mask are also commonly used. Nasal pillows have a single strap around the head and are made of small cushions. This type of nasal mask is triangular in shape and does not cover the mouth. During the bird flu epidemic in 2007, in the countries like China, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Toronto, surgical nose masks were widely used by the general public as well to ensure adequate protection.

Apart from environmental reasons, nose masks also serve the purpose of hiding the scars on the mouth and near the nasal area. Pop star Michael Jackson frequently used to wear a surgical nose mask to hide his identity when he was out in the public. Nose masks are typically made of cotton or gauze; however, general purpose nose masks are not used during surgeries as they do not facilitate adequate filtration of microbes.

Increasing levels of air pollution across the globe is a major driving factor for the growth of the global nose mask market. Densely populated countries such as China and India are facing the menace of air pollution. Also, a large part of the global population is suffering from various respiratory diseases caused due to air pollution.

Major factors that impacted the development of the global nose mask market include the rising incidents of H1N1 deaths, periodic occurrences of bird flu and SARS and increasing incidents of other contagious diseases including COVID 2019 boosted the global demand for nose masks. Further, rise in the number of surgical procedures, increased hygiene concerns among people worldwide had also fueled the production of surgical nose mask.

Data presentation
Figure 2
Misuse of nose mask







Source: bing.com/images

Data Analysis

The material used to make nose masks is highly absorptive and does not allow the free flow of oxygen from the atmosphere, thereby making the user breathless. This is likely to hamper the purpose for wearing nose mask. Also, it does not fit right for unusual facial shapes and hence may not be of use to certain people who feel uncomfortable wearing a mask that doesn't completely cover their nose. Keen observers of persons who wear the 'mask' would notice several patterns. There are those who wear it on the chin. There are people who have on the transparent shield product without protecting their mouths or noses. These ones do not realize that such a 'fashion' statement does not protect them or

the people around them from the virus in any way. There are wearers who only cover their mouths while others wear it correctly – covering both buccal and nasal cavities in public places. Nevertheless, there are people, who, deliberately or unconsciously act to assert their stature and stations in their localities by their attitude towards the nose mask. Those who show disdain about the protective covering betray their attitude towards virus especially the recent corona virus of 2019. It is either they do not believe the virus is real or the accounts for deaths recorded so far in the world or they want to spread the infection to as many people as possible in their work place.

The outbreak of COVID – 19 brought a new fashion item to protect people from the spread of the deadly virus. Some call it 'face mask' but that description is not correct because it is meant to cover only the mouth and nose; both organs in the body which are susceptible external receptacles for airborne particles which fly around one's immediate environment.

Misuse of Nose mask among Residents of Port Harcourt

Various misuse of the nose mask has been observed among residence of Port Harcourt. This includes wearing it too loosely probably as a result of under size or discomfort. Another misuse is wearing it above the chin. Again, some Residents wear their mask upside down especially when on medical masks. Medical mask unlike bandanna have a top that includes pliable metal that can bend around the bridge of one's nose to create a tighter fit. This can help prevent one from fogging up one's glasses when one exhales hot or wet breath. If one's mask is upside down, the nose bridge wire or strip will be instead on one's neck, which will make it useless. Some residents even hang it up like a spectacle, some cover only the nose and leave the mouth, others cover the mouth and leave the nose open.

Conclusion

Application of face mask in the public will be contemplated only as temporary measures for several perceptive groups of people not as a substitute for established precautionary procedures. It is the need of the hour to search alternates that could prove better efficacy than present face mask. It is recommended that since wearing a nose is part of a comprehensive strategy measures to suppress transmission and save lives, it should be worn properly by covering the nose, mouth and chin.

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