

## **TRANSLATION OF COVID-19 ENGLISH NEOLOGISMS INTO AFRICAN LANGUAGES FOR PUBLIC USAGE: REFLECTIONS ON KISWAHILI IN THE TANZANIAN CONTEXT**

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This qualitative study investigated the translation techniques used to translate English COVID-19 neologisms into Kiswahili to suit the communicative needs of the general public. The data were collected from two websites which host health texts that are translated into many languages. From Medline Plus and Doctors of the World websites, a total of five English-Kiswahili translated COVID-19 texts were purposefully selected because they were the only available texts at the time of data collection. From these texts, a total of 18 COVID-19 related neologisms with their English-Kiswahili translations were obtained. The translation pairs containing the neologisms in both languages were extracted and analysed based on the framework of translation techniques proposed by Molina and Albir (2002). The findings show that borrowing, description, established equivalent, modulation, amplification, generalisation, literal translation and reduction techniques were used to adapt those medical terms to the general domains of use where they would be used and understood by the general lay public in the Tanzanian context.

**Keywords:** medical term, coinage, translation techniques, lay persons.

## ПРЕВЕДУВАЊЕ НА АНГЛИСКИТЕ НЕОЛОГИЗМИ ЗА КОВИД-19 НА АФРИКАНСКИТЕ ЈАЗИЦИ ЗАРАДИ ЈАВНА УПОТРЕБА: СОГЛЕДУВАЊА ЗА КИСВАХИЛИ ЈАЗИКОТ ВО КОНТЕКСТОТ НА ТАНЗАНИЈА

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Во оваа квалитативна студија се истражуваат техниките за преведување на англиските неологизми за КОВИД-19 на кисвахили заради задоволување на комуникативните потреби на јавноста. Податоците се собрани од две веб-страници на кои има текстови од областа на здравството, коишто се преведени на повеќе јазици. Од веб-страниците *Медлајн плус* (анг. „Medline Plus“) и *Доктори на светот* (анг. „Doctors of the World“), за таа цел, беа избрани вкупно 5 текста за КОВИД-19, преведени од англиски јазик на кисвахили бидејќи во тој момент тие беа единствените достапни текстови. Од нив беа обезбедени вкупно 18 неологизми, поврзани со КОВИД-19 и со нивните преводи од англиски јазик на кисвахили. Беа извлечени преводни парови со неологизми на двата јазика и тие се анализираат врз основа на рамката за преведувачки техники, предложена од Молина и Албир (Molina and Albir 2002). Наодите покажуваат дека техниките заемање, опис, воспоставен еквивалент, модулација, засилување, генерализација, буквален превод и намалување се користат за приспособување на медицинските термини во јавните домени на употреба, од каде што би ги презела и би ги користела нестручната јавност во Танзанија.

**Клучни зборови:** медицински термин, кованица, преведувачки техники, нестручни лица.

## 1 Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 reshaped human interactions due to the introduction of protective measures against the spread of the virus. The measures introduced by governments throughout the world temporarily reshaped human interactions into what came to be known as the new normal in almost all aspects of human engagements, including language. One of the quick and noticeable changes in language was the introduction of neologisms related to COVID-19. Since English is the world's dominant language and one of the official languages of the World Health Organization (WHO) used to share health information, most of COVID-19 neologisms are available in it. Since COVID-19 health information was shared in English, an information gap was evident in many non-English languages making their speakers vulnerable to infodemic and misinformation (Anastasopoulos et al., 2020). This study, therefore, investigates the translation of those medical neologisms from English into Kiswahili and the way they were adapted for use.

## 2 The Name of the Disease

Coronavirus was an emerging disease which was not known by the WHO at the time. As a result, various names were used to refer to it, including novel coronavirus pneumonia (nCov) and pneumonia of unknown cause. On February 11, 2020, the WHO officially named it COVID-19, which is the abbreviation of Coronavirus Disease 2019, where 2019 is the year when the disease was first detected (Haddad and Montero-Martínez, 2020; Ivanov et al., 2023).

The name itself started linguistic innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The official name COVID-19 is a blend of the first two letters of two words (*CO-* from Corona and *Vi-* from Virus), the initial letter of one word (*D* – from Disease) and the last two numerals of the year when it was first reported (*19* from 2019) and a hyphen (-) used as a linking element (Mweri, 2021). In Kiswahili, a variety of names existed too before WHO officially named it. According to Lusekelo (2021), the names included *corona*, *virusi vya korona* 'coronavirus', *upumuaji* 'respiratory disorder', and *Nimonia* 'pneumonia'. The name *upumuaji*, according to the author, was coined as a euphemism to avoid the name *corona*, which was viewed as stigmatizing.

Unlike other neologisms which emerge spontaneously, the neologism COVID-19 is a result of deliberate efforts by the WHO to name the disease. Haddad and Montero-Martínez (2020) say that these efforts were meant to ensure that the name of the disease is accurate and not stigmatizing of any geographical location, individual or group of persons. Despite the coinage of the neutral name, some stigmatizing names of the disease and the virus still surfaced. For example, the term *Kungflu* was used to label the disease and *Chinese virus* to label the virus. Kurilla (2021) says that the term *Kungflu* was in use even before the pandemic. The author further says that this term was used on a tea brand label to denote the Chinese popular culture and in this usage, it did not have any racist connotations. However, the fact that the term *Kungflu* was used to refer to the coronavirus instead of what it had been used to denote is a linguistic innovation in the sense that it acquired a new meaning (semantic broadening). According to Kurilla (2021), the terms *Kungflu* and *Chinese virus* were used to indicate the fact that the disease originated in China.

In the early periods of its detection in China, the disease was referred to in public communication by a variety of terms such as epidemic, virus, and pneumonia (Dong et al., 2020), indicating that China lacked a preexisting reference name for it. The use of terms that are stigmatizing for China started in China itself. Dong et al. (2021) reveals that COVID-19 related Pinyin terms such as *Wuhàn feiyán*, and *Zhongguó feiyán*, which mean Wuhan pneumonia and China pneumonia, respectively, which are both stigmatizing, were used even in Chinese state media in the early times of the disease.

### 3 COVID-19 Neologisms

Since English is a medical lingua franca, many of the COVID-19 neologisms were introduced in it and then translated into other languages (Alduhaim and Alkhalidy, 2023). At this stage, I focus on neologisms introduced in English and later I will discuss their translations into other languages. Based on the reviewed literature on COVID-19 neologisms in English and some African languages, I view neologisms as created in two ways: when new words are introduced in the lexicon through morphological processes and when existing words assume new meanings and/or domains of use.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak led to the introduction of new words through morphological processes such as blending, acronymy, clipping, compounding and derivation.

Blending is the process of joining parts of different words to create a new word (Mweri, 2021). It occurs when parts of different words are conjoined to form a new word whose meaning is related to the root words from which the parts were trimmed off. In order to illustrate this morphological process of neologisms formation, reference will be made to several noteworthy examples provided by Ivanov et al. (2023), such as *diplocovimacy*, *corohara*, *coronomics*, *covismart*, and *quarantime*, to mention but a few. *Diplocovimacy* is the blend of *diplomacy* and *covi-* (from COVID), where *covi-* is inserted within *diplomacy*. It refers to the policy that was formed during COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate its effects. *Corohara* is the blend of *coro-* (from corona) and *hara-* (from harassment). It was used in coronavirus texts to refer to the act of discriminating people who contracted the disease or returned home after isolation or treatment in hospitals. It was also used in the said texts to refer to the act of bullying people who demonstrated COVID-19 related symptoms such as coughing even if such symptoms did not result from COVID-19 infection. *Coronomics* is the blend of *coro-* (from corona) and *-nomics* (from economics). It was used to signify the fact that some governments prioritized economic activities over the negative impacts of COVID-19. The word *covismart* is the blend of *covi-* (from COVID) and *smart*. It was used to refer to strict observance of COVID-19 health guidelines. The word *quarantime* is the blend of *quaran-* (from quarantine) and *time*. It was used to refer to the time spent in quarantine.

In Nigerian languages, Kupolati et al. (2021) found that the blending of COVID-19 related words was done between English and an indigenous language. For example, in the Yoruba language, there were several words resulting from blending English word parts such as *coro-* (from corona) and *-vid* (from COVID) and Yoruba words such as *ounjecoro*, *coroworo* and *erucovid*. According to these authors, *ounjecoro* was the kind of food that was eaten during lockdown to alleviate the symptoms of the disease. *Owocoro* was used to refer to the funds disbursed by the Nigerian government and other agencies to help people during the pandemic and *erucovid* was used to refer to the goods obtained during corona time.

Another morphological process used to introduce new words was acronymy. It is a process of combining letters of different words to create a new word (Mweri, 2021). The new word formed is called an acronym. The acronym may be pronounced as one word or as a sequence of letters. Mweri (2021) observes that during the pandemic, the acronym *BC* in English, which stands for *Before Corona*, was used to refer to the time before COVID-19 outbreak, *AC*, which stands for *After Corona*, was used to denote the post-COVID-19 time. In Kiswahili, the acronym *UVIKO*, which stands for *Ugonjwa wa Virusi vya Korona*, was introduced by the East African Kiswahili Commission (EAKC) in March 2020 while translating WHO and CDC-Africa documents for use in Partner States in the East African Community to refer to the Coronavirus disease.

Clipping is a word-building process through which a word or one of its segments is shortened (Ivanov et al., 2023). It involves trimming some parts of the word so that the remaining root word retains its original meaning. The clipping process in both English and African languages was mainly applied to the word *corona*. In English, the beginning of the word was clipped (trimming *co-* from corona), which resulted in the introduction of such words as *rona* and *rony*, which were used sarcastically to refer to coronavirus (Ivanov et al., 2023). Unlike in English, in some African

languages the end part of the word root *corona*, (-na) was frequently clipped resulting in such words as *coro* in Yoruba language (Kupolati et al., 2021) and *koro* in Igbo language (Onwukwe et al., 2023), both denoting the concept coronavirus. In many African languages, the name of the virus was borrowed from English and then either transferred as *corona* or naturalized to suit the lexical conventions of the target language. In Kiswahili, Lusekelo et al. (2021) observed the use of both the naturalized form *korona* and the transferred form *corona* in COVID-19 banners and newspapers in Tanzania. No clipped form of the word was in use in Kiswahili.

Compounding involves conjoining one or more words into one word (Ivanov et al. 2023). The resulting word is referred to as a compound. The meaning of the compound word is more or less related to the meaning of the conjoined words. In English, Ivanov et al. (2023) exemplify the process by compound words such as *coronetime*, *coronapanic* and *coronawarriors*. For illustration, attention may be directed to just one of these examples – the word *coronawarriors* is a combination of *corona* (COVID-19) and *warriors* (people who fought against COVID-19). It was metaphorically used to refer to individuals, both medical and non-medical personnel, who were fully involved in the fight against the disease (Ivanov et al. 2023). In addition, Mweri (2021) mentions the term *COVID-beards* as a word derived through compounding. This term was a compound coined of *COVID* and *beards*. It was used to refer to a situation when one pulls down their masks to their chin (Mweri, 2021). As wearing masks for a prolonged period of time was uncomfortable, some people pulled their masks down to their chin in order to inhale fresh air.

In Kiswahili, many compounds related to COVID-19 were introduced too. Asheli (2022) mentions compound words such as *majitiririka* ‘flowing water’, *kitakasamikono* ‘hand sanitizer’, and *kibuyuchirizi* ‘water dispensing device for washing hands’, to mention but a few. The word *majitiririka* is a combination of *maji* ‘water’ and *tiririka* ‘flow’. It is the result of the COVID-19 guideline that required people to regularly wash hands with running water. The word *kitakasamikono* results from conjoining the words *kitakasa* ‘cleanser’ and *mikono* ‘hands’. It was introduced to express COVID-19 health guideline that required people to use hand sanitizers in case water was not accessible. The word *kibuyuchirizi* is produced by conjoining the words *kibuyu* ‘gourd’ and *chirizi* ‘flowing’ – gourd that is capable of letting water flow. COVID health guidelines required people to avoid touching surfaces and objects by hand. To comply with this rule, locally made devices for washing hands in public places were invented. These devices were operated by foot to avoid touching them by hand. These devices were referred to as *vibuyuchirizi* (in plural).

There were also words introduced through derivation. In Nigerian English, Kupolati et al. (2021) report derivations from the root *corona* which result in derived words such as *coronise* and *coronate*. The word *coronise* is the denominal verb formed by adding a verbalizing suffix *-ise* to the root noun *corona*. The word *coronise* was used to mean infect with COVID-19. Likewise, the word *coronate* is a denominal verb formed by adding a verbalizing suffix *-ate* to the root noun *corona*. Just like *coronise*, it was used to denote the act of someone contracting the disease.

Apart from the neologization processes discussed, the other way of forming words was by already existing word acquiring new meanings or new domains of use (prominence). In English, Asif et al. (2021) mention the words *infodemic*, *working from home*, and *personal protective equipment*, to mention but a few, as words which gained new prominence. These words were rarely used by the lay public in everyday communication before coronatime. Though related to the field of medicine, the COVID-19 outbreak pushed them to common settings where their use was no longer limited to medical personnel only, but was extended to lay populations as well. According to the author, the word *infodemic* was introduced in 2003 during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this word was rejuvenated to indicate, just like during SARS, the spread of information, both factual and non-factual, to such extent that discriminating between essential and non-essential information would be impossible. The expression *work from home*, according to the authors, emerged in 1995 but was not widely used. It

became more frequently used during COVID-19 pandemic. The word *personal protective equipment* was restricted to healthcare service and emergency workers, whereas during COVID-19 its domains of use were extended to common contexts where it was used even by lay persons.

To discuss the words that gained prominence in Kiswahili, Ntalala (2022) provides the example of the word *barakoa* ‘face mask’. The word *barakoa* was used to refer to all kinds of masks, but during COVID-19 pandemic its meaning was narrowed down to refer specifically to face masks worn to prevent corona virus infection. In addition, Asheli (2022) provides the example of the word *kipukusi* ‘sanitizer’. The word *kipukusi* means chemicals that kill germs on floors of buildings. During coronatime, the meaning of this word was narrowed down to refer to hand sanitizer only.

#### 4 Translation of COVID-19 Information from English

Since English is the lingua franca of medicine and science in general, many COVID-19 neologisms were coined in English (Alduhaim and Alkhaldy, 2023). Despite the fact that the COVID-19 outbreak was first reported in China, Chinese did not act as a source language from which COVID-19 information could be translated into other languages. English acted as a de-facto source language from which such information was translated into other languages, including Kiswahili.

The translation from English into other languages had to navigate through a wide range of neologisms coined in the target language to ensure effective communication. In this regard, Kitanovska-Kimovska and Neškovska (2022) say that in order to ensure effective communication of COVID-19 information, relevant terminology had to be translated effectively and consistently to avoid misconceptions that arise from infodemic and misinformation. The authors say that in the Macedonian language, there was no official COVID-19 terminology that could be used consistently to communicate COVID-19 information. As a result, the translation of such information from English into Macedonian adopted strategies such as borrowing, calquing, description, reduction, particularization, and transposition, to mention but a few.

Similar findings were reported by Alduhaim and Alkhaldy (2023) who observed lack of consistency in the use of such medical terminology and its translation from English into Arabic. A descriptive method or Arabicization was used to render such terminology and ensure effective communication. Arabicization is the act of adopting a non-Arabic word into Arabic, then altering its sound and morphology to align with Arabic linguistic rules. In a similar study, Olimat et al. (2022) found that literal translation, equivalence, reduction, paraphrase, synonymy, transposition, omission and couplet were used as translation strategies in translating COVID-19 information from English into Arabic. Similar strategies were adopted to translate COVID-19 information from English into Indonesian as a means of overcoming the lack of equivalence between the two languages posed by the numerous neologisms coined in the source language (Restiana and Nugroho, 2021).

In the same vein, Aggrey et al. (2023) reiterate how important accurate information in other languages was to combat the pandemic as many people relied on the information available in their languages to take precautionary measures. The authors observed that in rendering such information from English into Asante Twi language, explicitation, expansion, transposition and borrowing strategies were adopted to ensure the accuracy of information despite the structural, lexical, cultural and stylistic differences between the two languages.

In Zambia, Machinyise et al. (2022) report there was a lack of terminology for COVID-19 information in the Tonga language and that the available one was used inconsistently. As a result, such information was rendered from English into Tonga mainly with loan and contextual translations.

The studies previously discussed focused on COVID-19 neologisms, translation techniques and the challenges of general COVID-19 information which did not necessarily contain neologisms. This study focuses exclusively on the translation of COVID-19 neologisms from English into

Kiswahili, which are mainly medical and intended for the general public. The aim is to examine how such medical terminology was rendered to suit the needs of the lay public. The linguistic studies on COVID-19 in Kiswahili by Asheli (2022) and Ntalala (2022) focused more on how Kiswahili responded to the communicative needs of its speakers. The two studies discussed mainly intralingual neological processes that Kiswahili employed to express COVID-19 related concepts. These neological processes did not suffice to express every COVID-19 related concept and so translation from the donor language, English, was still important. Therefore, a study on the translation of such neologisms from English into Kiswahili fills this gap.

## 5 Methodology

This is a corpus-based study with data selected purposefully from two websites which host various translated health information. These websites are Medline Plus (<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/swahili.html>) and Doctors of the World (<https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/translated-health-information/>). From these websites, English-Kiswahili parallel texts containing COVID-19 health information were selected for analysis.

Two texts from Medline Plus and three from Doctors of the World websites were purposefully selected as they were the only texts available at the time of data collection. The texts selected from Medline Plus include *COVID-19 Vaccine 'Chanjo ya COVID-19'* and *10 Things You Can Do To Manage Your COVID-19 Symptoms at Home/COVID-19 'Mambo 10 unayoweza kufanya ili kudhibiti dalili za COVID-19 nyumbani/COVID-19'*. The texts collected from Doctors of the World include *Coronavirus 'virus vya korona'*, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance 'mwongozo wa virusi vya korona (COVID-19)'* and *What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)? '-virusi vya korona ni nini'?*

From these five texts, a total of 18 COVID-19 English neologisms with their Kiswahili equivalents were extracted. The neologisms extracted are the ones that were treated as such in reviewed literature. The translations were analysed based on the framework of translation techniques proposed by Molina and Albir (2002). According to them, translation techniques are procedures to analyse and classify how equivalents work. Therefore, a technique is a tool for textual analysis in translation that illuminates the way target text equivalents reflect the source text and suit the target language situations. The dynamic approach to translation techniques allows for the evaluation of the translated texts to be grounded in context. The translation of COVID-19 texts necessitates the adoption of contextually relevant strategies to suit non-medical populations.

## 6 Discussion

The study revealed description, modulation, amplification, generalization, literal translation, borrowing, established equivalent and reduction as translation techniques that were used to translate and tailor the COVID-19 neologisms to the communicative needs of the lay public.

### 6.1 Description

Description replaces the source language terms with a target language detailed account of its form or function (Molina and Albir, 2002). That is to say, the source language term is not equated to an equivalent term in the target language, but to its meaning, form or function which, in that case, requires the use of detailed information as in the following extracts.

- (1) If the test result is *positive*, you must complete the remainder of your self isolation.  
'Ukipatikana na virusi, sharti ukamilishe siku zilizosalia katika siku zako za kujitenga'
- (2) If the test result is *negative*, you can stop self-isolating.  
'Ikiwa vipimo havitapatikana kuwa na virusi, waweza kuacha kujitenga'.

In (1), the term *positive* is used in medicine to mean that infection is detected and the term *negative* in (2) is used to mean that there is no infection. Instead of being translated using their literal equivalents, *chanya* for 'positive' and *hasi* for 'negative', they were translated using their medical meanings. The translation of *positive result* as *matokeo chanya* and *negative result* as *matokeo hasi* would be misleading. The term *Chanya* 'positive' in the Kiswahili dictionary means 'a thing or a situation that is good and promising' (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (BAKITA), 2015). In the context of COVID-19, if the term *positive* had been translated as such, it would have erroneously suggested that the COVID-19 test results were good and promising, which would imply that there was no virus infection.

The term *hasi* 'negative' in Kiswahili means 'a thing or a situation that is bad or unpromising' (Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (BAKITA), 2015). If it had been translated using the equivalent available, it would have erroneously suggested that the COVID-19 test results were bad or unpromising, implying that there was virus infection. Thus, if word for word translation had been adopted, the COVID-19 positive test results would have been translated in Kiswahili as negative and the negative ones as positive. To avoid those misleading translations, *positive* was translated descriptively as *ukipatikana na virusi* 'when you are found with the virus' and *negative* as *vipimo havitapatikana kuwa na virusi* 'the test results show no virus infection'. During COVID-19, the terms *positive* and *negative* were considered as neologisms since they were semantically narrowed down to specifically refer to 'coronavirus infection' and 'no coronavirus infection', respectively. Their domains of use extended from medical to common domains of use for lay persons. It is in this sense that their translations were descriptive to suit the new domains of use and knowledge shared by the participants in the communication events.

## 6.2 Modulation

Modulation is the shift from one point of view to another (Molina and Albir, 2002). The cases of modulation include translating positive for negative or vice versa, abstract for concrete or vice versa, cause for effect or vice versa, and means for result (Molina and Albir, 2002). The goal of modulation is to keep the attention or meet the expectations of the readership even if it deviates from the expectations of the original text. Modulation of COVID-19 neologisms was meant to communicate accurate information and avoid misinterpretation that would lead to improper compliance with COVID-19 health rules. Consider the following text extracts.

- (3) Check with your local authority for local *lockdown* rules that may apply to you.  
'Wasiliana na serikali ya mtaa upate kujua sheria zozote za kusitishwa shughuli za kawaida ambazo unapaswa kufuata'.
- (4) *Stay home* except to get medical care.  
'Usitoke nyumbani isipokuwa unaenda kutafuta matibabu'.
- (5) If you live with someone who has *long term condition* ....  
'Ikiwa unaishi na mtu aliye na matatizo ya kudumu ya kiafya'.

The English term *lockdown* is considered a neologism because it acquired a new meaning during coronatime. It was used specifically to mean mass quarantine, while in its old sense, it means ‘a prison protocol used to block people, information, or cargo from leaving an area’. The term *stay home*, which generally means ‘to remain in one’s house’, was used specifically to mean ‘remain at home to avoid the risk of COVID-19 infection’ (Ivanov et al., 2023; Mweri, 2021). The term *long term condition* is euphemistically used in medicine to refer to a persistent illness. During COVID-19 pandemic, it was popularized to explain that people with those diseases were more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and that their survival rate was lower if they contracted the disease compared to the people without such an illness.

The term *lockdown* in (3) is translated into Kiswahili as *kusitishwa shughuli za kawaida* ‘to suspend normal activities’ instead of *kufungiwa ndani* ‘to be locked in homes’ as the source language term literally suggests. The translation *kusitishwa shughuli za kawaida* is a very good choice since it is a common practice in Tanzania for some activities to be temporarily suspended to allow for some other activities to take place. For example, business activities are suspended up to 10:00 a.m. in some cities in Tanzania, such as Dar es Salaam, every last Saturday of the month - as it was even during coronatime - to allow people to participate in cleaning activities (Abdallah, 2021). Therefore, the expression *kusitishwa shughuli za kawaida* ‘to suspend normal activities’ is very common such that even if it was used to refer to lockdown, it did not sound threatening and people could easily comply because they had already been used to such situations of suspending normal activities.

On the other hand, the term *stay home* in (4) is translated with its antonym *usitoke nyumbani* ‘do not go out of your home’ instead of *kaa nyumbani* ‘stay home’ as it is in the source language. Since humans have permanent homes where they live, telling them to *stay home* - something that they are already doing - would not invite changes in their life that would comply with COVID-19 health guidelines. In order to attract attention and ultimately encourage changes that comply with COVID-19 safety guidelines, it was necessary to tell them the uncommon, that is, to tell them *not to go out of their homes* in order for them to *stay home*. Therefore, the translation ‘*usitoke nyumbani*’ - do not go out of home - alerted them about the potential COVID-19 infection in places beyond their homes where they would interact with other people.

The term *long term condition* in (5) is translated dysphemistically as *matatizo ya kudumu ya kiafya* ‘permanent health problems’ instead of the available euphemistic expressions *magonjwa ya muda mrefu* ‘long term diseases’ or *magonjwa yasiyo ya kuambukiza* ‘non-communicable diseases’ that are used to refer to the same diseases. The situation occasioned by COVID-19 was appallingly calling for any available defence mechanisms to fend the community against infection. The use of coarser words in translation was, therefore, meant not to offend people with long term conditions but to reiterate the fact that they had to be more careful with coronavirus as the disease potentially was more fatal to them than it was to people without any underlying condition.

### 6.3 Amplification

Amplification is the act of using more signifiers in the target language to solve syntactic or lexical gaps (Molina and Albir, 2002). It introduces details that are not present in the source language in order to clarify a concept or issue that would otherwise not be understood in the target language. It is used to bridge lexical or syntactic gaps between the source and target language (Molina and Albir, 2002). In translating COVID-19 neologisms that are meant to be used by the public beyond health practitioners, amplification is more useful because it adds helpful details so that people can understand COVID-19 health guidelines and minimize the risk of infection.

- (6) Maintain *physical distance of 2 meters*.  
 ‘Dumisha umbali wa mita 2 kati yako na watu wengine’.

- (7) *The tracing service* will contact you.  
'Wahudumu wa kufuatilia watu walioambukizwa watawasiliana nawe'.
- (8) *Self-isolate*  
'Jitenge na watu wengine'
- (9) Get *tested* within the first five days of having symptoms.  
'Pata kupimwa virusi vya korona ndani ya siku tano za kwanza za kuonesha dalili'.

In (6), *physical distance* is a medical term which means keeping certain distance from other persons to protect oneself from infection. This term was more popularized during coronatime such that its use was no longer limited to health practitioners only, but was also used among lay persons (Asif et al., 2021). *Contact tracing* in (7), *self-isolate* in (8), *test* in (9) are medical terms which were also popularized during coronatime. *Contact tracing* was used to mean 'tracing people who had been in close interaction with infected persons and as such were susceptible to virus infection too'. *Self-isolation* was used to refer to the practice of someone separating themselves from others if they suspected that they might have been infected with coronavirus (Mweri, 2021). *Test* gained predominance during the COVID-19 pandemic following the introduction of safety measures such as testing at airports, borders and public places. In Tanzania, body temperature was checked even by non-medical personnel such as guards at public building entrances. This practice normalized the term *test* such that it was no longer restricted to medical domains and professionals only but was extended to the general domains and was used by non-medical populations.

The term *physical distance* in (6) is translated as *umbali kati yako na watu wengine* 'distance between you and other people' instead of simply *umbali* 'physical distance' as it is in the source language. The addition of *kati yako na watu wengine* 'between you and other people' illustrates amplification since this information is not explicit in the source language. If the translation remained *umbali* 'physical distance', as it is in the source language, without the modifiers *kati yako na watu wengine* 'between you and other people', the meaning would be blurred. The lay readership would possibly not understand the fact that the distance to be maintained was between a person and a person, not between a person and other things such as objects or pets.

The term *tracing service* in (7) is translated as *wahudumu wa kufuatilia watu walioambukizwa* 'service personnels who are responsible for tracing people who are infected' instead of simply *wahudumu wa kufuatilia* 'the tracing service' as it is in the source language. The information *watu walioambukizwa* 'infected persons' was added to specify the kinds of people that the tracing service was seeking for. The expression *wahudumu wa kufuatilia* 'the tracing service' needed modifiers for the lay persons to understand which people that the tracing service was seeking. Adding this information was significant for the lay persons to understand and avoid confusion regarding the objects of the tracing service.

The term *self-isolate* in (8) is translated as *jitenge na watu wengine* 'isolate yourself from other people' instead of *jitenge* 'self-isolate' as it is in the source language. The information *na watu wengine* 'from other people' is not explicit in the source language. This addition was meant to clarify the fact that people were required to isolate themselves from other humans, not from non-humans. Adding this information entailed further that the risk of someone contracting coronavirus was posed by their interactions with humans, not with non-humans.

The term *test* in (9) is translated as *pimwa virusi vya korona* 'get tested for coronavirus' with *virusi vya korona* 'coronavirus' added as a modifier even though the term *pimwa* is an adequate equivalent for *test*. In my opinion, this addition is useful in Tanzanian context for the general public to make a distinction between Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and coronavirus testing. The term *test* is not always used with the modifier human immunodeficiency virus in HIV banners and

popular songs (such as *unaringa umepima?* - by Khadija Kopa). It is used without such a modifier and it still means 'get tested for HIV'.

## 6.4 Generalization

Generalization involves translating a specific term with a more general one (Molina and Albir, 2002). It is used when the source language term or expression is replaced by a more general or neutral term or expression in the target language. This occurs when the source term lacks an equivalent in the target language (Molina and Albir, 2002). Specific terms always denote distinctive concepts that can be understood by persons with expert or experiential knowledge of the subject only. These specific concepts need to be translated with a general term when they are intended for use in general contexts. The specific COVID-19 terms, which are medical in most cases, need to be translated with general terms in order for them to be understood by lay persons.

- (10) Reduce your *physical contact* with people you do not live with  
'Punguza idadi ya watu *unaotangamana nao*'.

- (11) Check for the availability of *personal protective equipment* in your work place.  
'Fahamu upatikanaji wa *vifaa vya kujikinga binafsi* kazini'.

The term *physical contact* was popularized during coronatime to refer to person-to-person touch such as shaking hands, kissing, and hugging. To enforce this health guideline, physical contacts that were frequent before COVID-19 pandemic were now banned. For example, sharing the peace of the Lord through handshake in Roman Catholic churches was banned (Boswell, 2021).

The term *physical contact* in (10) is translated as *kutangamana*. According to Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (BAKITA) (2015), *kutangamana* means 'to mingle with each other' as opposed to the specific equivalent already available *kugusana* which, according to the same author, means 'to physically contact each other'. The Kiswahili term *kutangamana* refers to the general situation where people interact in close proximity to each other, which does not necessarily mean to physically contact or touch each other. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both *kugusana* 'physical contact' and *kutangamana* 'close interactions' were forbidden to minimize the possibility of virus transmission from one person to another.

The choice of *punguza kutangamana* 'reduce close interactions or mingling with other people' as a translation of *reduce physical contact*, rather than *punguza kugusana* 'reduce physical contact', as it is in the source language, serves a dual purpose for the lay persons: it warns them against both physical contact and intermingling in close proximity to one another. The use of the specific term *kugusana* 'to physically contact each other' would imply that only physical contacts such as handshakes, hugging and kissing were prohibited while intermingling without physically contacting or touching each other was allowed.

The term *personal protective equipment* in (11) is a medical term whose use is restricted to healthcare and emergency workers (Asif et al., 2021). In Kiswahili, it is translated with the general term *vifaa vya kujikinga binafsi* 'personal protective equipment'. In Kiswahili, this term is not restricted to medical domains only. It is used even in non-medical domains to refer to all types of protective equipment in all work settings that require the use of such equipment. The use of general terms instead of specific ones extends the medical terms from medical domains, where they are understood by medical professionals only, to general domains, where they are understood by lay persons. The general understanding of medical specific terms allows for the lay persons to fend themselves against all dangers of coronavirus infection in their surroundings. The term *personal protective equipment* dates back to 1934 and was recognized by the WHO in 1977 and its use was

restricted to emergency and health professionals only, but during the COVID-19 pandemic it was very popular among lay persons and was widely used in social media forums (Asif et al., 2021). In other words, its use was extended from medical to general domains.

## 6.5 Literal Translation

Literal translation is the word for word translation (Molina and Albir, 2002). Each word in the source language has a corresponding equivalent in the target language. Literal translation allows for modifications such as omission of articles when they are non-existent in the target language. These modifications adjust the text to the acceptable norms of the target language in terms of grammar or word order (Mayyas et al., 2020).

- (12) You should continue to *work from home*.  
 ‘Unapaswa kuendelea *kufanyia kazi nyumbani*’.

The term *working from home* in (12) emerged in 1995 and was less familiar (Asif et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this term resurfaced and was popularized in COVID-19 media briefings such that it became normal for the general public. This term is translated into Kiswahili word for word, *work* (verb) – *fanyia kazi* (verb) – *from home* (adverb) – *nyumbani* (adverb). Literal translation provides a layman definition of concepts that suits the diverse characteristics of the readership.

The term *personal protective equipment* in (11) is also literally translated as *vifaa* (equipment) *vya kujikinga* (protective) *binafsi* (personal). As opposed to its specific sense in the source language, the target language rendition is too general with its literal sense making it general. To understand that it refers specifically to medical facilities requires knowledge beyond the words used and determined by context, experience or professional knowledge. Its literal translation makes it easier for the lay persons to understand it.

## 6.6 Borrowing

Borrowing involves taking a word or expression directly from another language (Molina and Albir, 2002). In the context of translation, it involves taking a word or expression from a source language and using it with or without modification in the target language. Borrowing without modification transfers the source language term fully into the target language like in the following cases:

- (13) *COVID-19* vaccine can prevent *COVID-19* disease.  
 ‘Chanjo ya *COVID-19* inaweza kuzuia ugonjwa wa *COVID-19*’.

In (13), the English term COVID-19 is borrowed and used as it is in Kiswahili. This English term has been transferred without any modification into Kiswahili to denote the same source language concept. In the context of COVID-19 outbreak, this kind of borrowing can be described by the fact that initially, until 20<sup>th</sup> February 2020, when the WHO officially announced the English term ‘COVID-19’ as a name for the disease, many languages didn’t have a name to refer to the disease. Following this announcement, many languages, including Chinese adopted it (Zhihao, 2020). In Tanzania, Lusekelo (2023) and Lusekelo et al. (2021) observed the use of the term COVID-19 in Swahili newspapers, which serves as evidence that Kiswahili borrowed the same word from English. The English term COVID-19 was adopted to comply with the WHO reference to the disease. Since it was frequently used, it became popular among both medical and non-medical people.

Borrowing with modifications adapts the source language terms to the spelling norms of the target language. The modifications are done to avoid introducing uncommon features in the target language that may confuse the readership or blur their understanding of the concept. The following examples show the terms borrowed and modified in Kiswahili.

- (14) *corona* virus  
'virusi vya *korona*'

- (15) You must wear face *mask* in public places.  
'Lazima uvae *maski* kwenye maeneo yenye watu wengi'.

In (14), the term *corona* is translated as *korona* where the English letter *[c]* is changed to *[k]* in Kiswahili to suit its spelling conventions. The combination of the letter *[c]* and a vowel is not allowed in Kiswahili. It only appears with a combination of the letter *[h]* to form */ch/* sound which is equivalent to */tʃ/* in English. In (15), the term *mask* is translated as *maski* in Kiswahili, where a vowel */i/* is added at the end of the word *mask* to denote the fact that words in Bantu languages end in a vowel, technically known as Basic Vowel Suffix (BVS). The domestication of borrowed terms in the target language adapts not only the language but also the whole text to the communicative needs of the readership. Thus, lay persons could easily pronounce and understand terms that were adapted to their language.

## 6.7 Established Equivalent

Established equivalence uses in the target language the term or expression that is found in dictionaries as an equivalent of the source language term (Molina and Albir, 2002). That is, the source language term is rendered using the already available equivalent in the target language as in the following examples.

- (16) COVID-19 can cause severe illness requiring hospitalization, intense care or a *ventilator* to help with breathing.  
'COVID-19 inaweza kusabisha ugonjwa mbaya unaohitaji kulazwa, wagonjwa mahtuti au *kipumuaaji* cha kusaidia kupumua'.
- (17) Maintain frequent hand washing or *sanitizing*.  
'Nawa mikono au *tumia kieuzi* mara kwa mara'.
- (18) Follow the advice on *face covering*.  
'Zingatia ushauri wa kuvaa *barakoa*'.

The medical terms *ventilator*, *sanitizer* and *face covering* or *face mask* were considered to be neologisms during the COVID-19 pandemic since they were used more frequently than before and extended their domains of use from medical to common domains with lay persons using them in their daily communication (Asif et al., 2021; Mweri, 2021). The terms *kipumuaaji* 'ventilator', *kieuzi* 'sanitizer' and *barakoa* 'face mask' were found in Kiswahili even before corona time but were treated as neologisms because they were more frequency used and their meanings were limited to COVID-19 (Asheli, 2022; Ntalala, 2022).

The terms *ventilator* in (16), *sanitizer* in (17) and *face covering* in (18) were translated using their already established equivalents *kipumuaaji*, *kieuzi*, and *barakoa*, respectively, which existed in

the Kiswahili dictionary. According to Baraza la Kiswahili la Taifa (BAKITA) (2015), the term *kipumuaji* is a noun derivative from the verb *pumua* ‘breathe’. Thus, *kipumuaji* denotes something that helps breathing. The term *kieuzi* is a noun derivative from the verb *eua* ‘cleanse’. Thus, *kieuzi* denotes something that is used to cleanse. The term *barakoa* is defined as ‘a piece of cloth worn on one’s face to protect them against wind, bad smell, and micro-organisms’. During coronatime, this term was semantically narrowed down to mean ‘a piece of cloth protecting one against coronavirus (micro-organism)’. Since these established equivalents are a result of derivation or coinage and are technical, they are not very familiar to the lay persons. Their usage is confined to educated persons in formal domains. During coronatime, the terms *kieuzi* and *kipumuaji* were not commonly used in casual conversations. Despite their existence in Kiswahili dictionaries, some of the Kiswahili speakers still preferred the naturalized terms, *sanitaiza* ‘sanitizer’ and *ventileta* ‘ventilator’.

## 6.8 Reduction

Reduction is the suppression of source text information in the target text (Molina and Albir, 2002). It is the result of omitting some information in the source text. Even though reduction is viewed as a means of loss or distortion of information, in medical context it enhances the understanding of information due to its context sensitivity (Wohlmann and Michl, 2020).

The term *contact tracing*, according to Mweri (2021), means ‘to trace people who have been in contact with infected persons and therefore are themselves suspected of having contracted the disease and are likely to infect others’. It is the medical term that gained predominance during the COVID-19 pandemic and referred to tracing both those infected and those suspected to be infected with coronavirus.

In (7), the term *tracing service* is translated as *wahudumu wa kufuatilia watu walioambukizwa* ‘service personnel who trace infected people’. This translation implies that the *tracing service* traces only infected persons and therefore does not trace those who are suspected to be infected with the virus. Therefore, the information that the tracing service traces even the suspected persons is not implied in the target text even though it is in the source language. Despite the reduction, the key information – tracing of infected persons – is captured in the target text. Therefore, the information on suspected ones is redundant and is implicitly included.

## 7 Conclusion

The COVID-19 outbreak threatened normal human interactions. This threat was very beneficial to language development as it poured numerous medical neologisms in languages. Many of these neologisms were invented in English because it is the language used by the WHO to share health information to the general world population. The use of English as a means of sharing COVID-19 health information necessitated translation of such information into other languages for the benefit of non-English speaking populations. Since the neologisms were restricted to medical domains, the translation had to take into account the fact that the readership of these translations was not restricted to the medical domain. It had to move from medical to general domains where the readership included non-medical populations. To achieve this, different translation techniques were used. In the English-Kiswahili translation of COVID-19 neologisms, the techniques used were borrowing with modifications to suit the Kiswahili spelling norms, description of technical terms, established equivalent, modulation to avoid misinterpretation, amplification to clarify medical terms, generalization when the specific equivalent was unavailable or too technical, literal translation for laymen and reduction to omit unnecessary information. These translation techniques Click or tap here to enter text. were found to be a relevant tool in translating COVID-19 terms to suit the general situation and knowledge of the lay persons.

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