

AN EVALUATION OF SELECTED COVID-19 TERMS IN ENGLISH, GERMAN AND YORUBA

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Abstract

Extant studies on terms related to Covid-19 have focused on neologism, axiology and semantic analysis (Asif, 2021, Edet, 2021 & Katermina & Yachenko, 2020). Although neologism, axiology and semantic analysis could be studied under translation as Oyali (2018) shows, little has been done in comparing the morphology of these terms in English, German and Yoruba in the field of translation. This study therefore seeks to fill this lacuna by examining the morphology of selected Covid-19 terms in English, German and Yoruba. The aim is to compare the German and Yoruba translations to show which of the two makes use of more compound words as equivalent of the English terms. To achieve this, twenty-five (25) Covid-19 terms in English were selected together with their German and Yoruba equivalents. The data was gathered from the internet, radio and television. The morphology of the terms in English, German and Yoruba was considered using the conceptual approach on nominalizations by Lees (1960). The dataset used for this study reveals that there are more compound words introduced into Yoruba lexicon and most of the terms are neologisms. The study will contribute to research on Covid-19 and its impacts on language enrichment in Africa and Europe by establishing that the pandemic has brought about more neologisms in Africa (Yoruba).

Keywords: Covid-19, Terms, English, German, Yoruba

Introduction

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2019 and its rapid global spread throughout 2020 and beyond brought about an unprecedented transformation in almost every sphere of human activity. One of the less discussed but profoundly impacted areas is language. Across the world, new terms emerged, old ones were repurposed, and languages adapted quickly to accommodate the evolving public discourse surrounding the virus, safety protocols, health infrastructure, and societal responses. This linguistic adaptation was neither uniform nor arbitrary; rather, it was shaped by cultural, linguistic, and systemic peculiarities of each language community. In particular, Covid-19 discourse provided fertile ground for neologism, compounding, borrowing, nominalization, and other word-formation strategies that had to quickly meet the communicative demands of a global health crisis.

Although studies have examined the evolution and semantic domains of Covid-19 vocabulary (Katermina and Yachenko, 2020; Edet et al., 2021; Asif et al., 2021), few have explored how these terms were translated across different languages and how these translations reflect linguistic structure and cultural worldviews. This becomes especially relevant when considering languages that are typologically and historically distant, such as English, German, and Yoruba. English, with its global dominance and analytic structure, German with its rich compounding tradition and inflectional system, and Yoruba with its isolating structure, tonal nature, and deeply rooted oral culture, all responded to the pandemic lexicon in different ways.

Despite the abundance of studies on Covid-19 language use, little attention has been paid to a systematic comparative translation analysis of the terms developed in response to the pandemic across distinct language families. More specifically, the morphological strategies employed in translating Covid-19 terms into German and Yoruba remain underexplored. This poses a gap in translation studies, especially in the descriptive domain, where the focus is on what translations *are* rather than what they *should be* (Toury, 1995; Darwish, 2010). Moreover, while many translation studies emphasize syntactic or semantic fidelity, this research takes a morphological approach, using Lees' (1960) work on nominalizations to analyze how Covid-19 vocabulary is shaped and reshaped across the three languages.

Literature Review

A number of researches have been carried out on Covid-19, particularly in the field of language and linguistics. Some of them have focused on neologism, axiology and semantic analysis amongst other things. The present study shall be reviewing three of these works considering their relevance to this research.

Katermina and Yachenko (2020) studied the axiology of Covid-19 as a linguistic phenomenon in English mass media discourse. After a comprehensive linguistic analysis, they discovered that the processes of language development are invariably intensified in the period of social disruption. Therefore, they concluded that Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as such a disruption, which made a considerable contribution to English vocabulary.

Edet et al. (2021) carried out a semantic analysis of Corona Virus pandemic terms in English and concluded by affirming that meaning can be realized and maintained globally by establishing relationship among words. This was showed in their analysis which shows that semantics analysis is applicable to the vocabulary of Covid-19. In specific terms, the semantic functions of antonym, and synonym proved useful tools in identifying the interrelatedness of the selected terms.

Asif, et al. (2021) explored the linguistic analysis of neologism related to Covid-19. The theoretical framework of this study is based on three components of neologism, i.e. word formation, borrowing, and lexical deviation. They established that Covid-19 neologisms present colorful portrayals of various social and cultural practices of respective societies and the rationale behind them all remains the same.

The Sociolinguistic Impact of Covid-19 on Global Language Use

The sociolinguistic effects of Covid-19 have been profound and multifaceted. The pandemic brought about rapid, global linguistic shifts, transforming vocabulary, speech practices, and communicative norms. The emergent pandemic lexicon did not simply add new words to the dictionary, it altered the very fabric of how language was used socially, politically, and personally.

Language as Social Behavior during Crisis

Language is fundamentally social, and its function becomes even more critical in times of uncertainty. During the pandemic, language became a primary tool for risk communication, social regulation, and community solidarity. Phrases such as “*stay home, stay safe*”, “*flatten the curve*”, and “*essential worker*” became markers of both state authority and social responsibility. These expressions reinforced normative behavior while creating a new shared vocabulary for public life.

In Yoruba-speaking Nigeria, pandemic discourse extended beyond simple instruction to encompass culturally nuanced appeals. Yoruba idioms and metaphors provided emotionally resonant messages. For example, public announcements often employed the proverb “*arùn ò mò ẹni àgbọ̀nà*” (“a disease does not warn before striking”), emphasizing the need for vigilance. These kinds of expressions show how traditional wisdom was recontextualized for modern health messaging, blending ancestral knowledge with public health advice.

Changing Interactional Norms

Covid-19 disrupted traditional forms of interpersonal interaction, prompting

shifts in how greetings, closings, and everyday expressions were used. In many societies, physical gestures of solidarity, such as handshakes, hugs, and kisses on the cheek, were replaced with verbal-only greetings or contactless gestures like elbow bumps. These changes required accompanying linguistic innovation.

In German, greetings such as “*Bleiben Sie gesund!*” (“Stay healthy!”) or “*Passen Sie auf sich auf*” (“Take care of yourself”) became standard. In Yoruba, “*ẹ má ẹ̀àìrísí ará yín*” (“do not fail to check on your people”) emerged as a pragmatic way of expressing community care at a distance.

Even religious language adapted. In multilingual Nigeria, Muslim and Christian greetings were sometimes modified to reflect pandemic awareness, “*Asalamu alaikum, ẹ̀jọ̀ọ má gbà ọwọ̀ mi*” (“peace be unto you, please don't take my hand”), blending faith with caution. These adaptations demonstrate how language reflects evolving norms and negotiates social space.

Language, Class, and Access

The sociolinguistic impact of Covid-19 also revealed language-based inequalities. Access to timely and understandable information was often stratified along linguistic, economic, and educational lines. For educated urban speakers of English or German, pandemic updates were readily accessible. However, for speakers of Yoruba and other local languages, especially those without literacy or internet access, oral communication through radio, town criers, and religious sermons was vital. This created a dual-layered linguistic economy: one operating through formal institutional discourse, and another rooted in oral vernaculars, which proved crucial for community-level communication. The pandemic thus reaffirmed the centrality of mother tongues and non-written media in public health education, especially in African contexts.

Covid-19 and the Rise of Digital Language and Abbreviations

The Covid-19 pandemic coincided with an era of heightened digital interaction. Social distancing and lockdowns forced a migration of personal, professional, and educational activities into digital spaces, intensifying the linguistic features of online communication. As a result, digital language evolved rapidly to meet the needs of speed, brevity, emotion, and identity formation.

Emergence of Pandemic Acronyms and Short Forms

Covid-19 discourse gave rise to a wave of abbreviations and acronyms. These forms, once restricted to bureaucratic or medical fields, became mainstream. For instance:

- *WFH* (Work from Home)
- *PPE* (Personal Protective Equipment)

- *R-naught* (Basic reproduction number, R_0)
- *PCR* (Polymerase Chain Reaction)
- *Vax/vaxxed* (Vaccinated)

These abbreviated terms reflect not only convenience but also shared knowledge economies. Their meaning relies on context and assumed familiarity, creating discursive in-groups, those who understand, versus those excluded by jargon.

In German, terms like *FFP2-Maske*, *Inzidenzwert* (incidence rate), and *Impfpass* (vaccination passport) were shortened in casual conversation and often appeared in memes and protest slogans. Yoruba speakers, especially online youth communities, engaged in partial borrowing (“*vaksiin*” for *vaccine*) or linguistic remixing (“*àjọdá Zoom*” - “Zoom gathering”).

Digital Neologisms and Memetic Language

New terms such as *covidiot* (a person who ignores safety protocols), *quaranteam* (a household or group during quarantine), and *doomscrolling* (compulsively reading bad news online) emerged globally. These blends and portmanteaux were spread largely through memes and informal social media use. They reflect how humor, critique, and identity coalesce in digital linguistic innovation.

Memes served as vehicles for linguistic creativity, often using visuals and minimal text to express shared frustration or coping mechanisms. In Nigeria, memes circulated in both English and Yoruba, such as:

- Image: an overcrowded bus with caption: “*Ẹ wá rí social distancing yii*” (“Come and see this social distancing”).
- A digital poster in Yoruba: “*Şé ijọba ní Zoom?*” (“Is the government on Zoom?”), satirizing disconnected governance.

These digital forms show how the pandemic fostered translingual, multimodal expression, creating informal registers that blurred boundaries between formal and informal language.

Linguistic Acceleration and Transience

Digital language during Covid-19 was characterized by its ephemerality. Terms emerged and faded with astonishing speed, often lasting only weeks or months. For example, “*circuit breaker*” (used in Singapore and Malaysia for lockdown) saw intensive usage and then decline. The lifespan of digital neologisms is short, making archiving and linguistic analysis a race against time.

Moreover, digital language practices during the pandemic have implications for language standardization, lexicography, and translation pedagogy, as many informal or emergent terms resist easy categorization or formal equivalence.

Lexical Borrowing and Language Contact during the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic intensified global linguistic interactions, prompting a surge in lexical borrowing and language contact phenomena. In a time when information needed to travel faster than the virus itself, words, especially technical and public health terms, crossed linguistic borders at unprecedented speeds. This section explores how English, German, and Yoruba responded to and contributed to the circulation of pandemic vocabulary, with attention to how borrowed terms were adapted, resisted, or indigenized.

Language Contact in a Time of Crisis

Language contact, broadly defined, occurs when speakers of different languages interact regularly, resulting in linguistic exchange, structural borrowing, and lexical adaptation. Covid-19 accelerated these processes. English, already the dominant global language in science, medicine, and media, became the primary source of pandemic terminology. Terms such as *lockdown*, *vaccine*, *quarantine*, *hotspot*, and *flatten the curve* were disseminated through international news outlets, scientific updates, and social media platforms.

German, while also a global language of science, imported several English terms wholesale, especially those related to technological and institutional practices. For instance:

- *Lockdown* was widely used in German, alongside *Shutdown* and *Homeoffice*, despite existing native equivalents like *Ausgangssperre* (curfew) or *Heimarbeit* (home work).
- *Superspreader* and *Contact Tracing* were used in English even in official German-language contexts before standardized translations emerged.

This reflects 'prestige borrowing', where foreign terms are adopted not due to necessity but due to their perceived scientific, technical, or modern status.

In contrast, Yoruba approached borrowing 'selectively and adaptively'. While many new concepts lacked direct equivalents, Yoruba speakers often created indigenous compounds or modified English words through phonological approximation. Examples include:

- *Vaccine* - *vaksiin* or *ibúpá*, depending on register and audience;
- *Covid-19* - *arun korona* (Corona disease), a calque combining Yoruba and global terminology;
- *Quarantine* - *iyàníśótò* (state of separation), formed through nominalization and compounding.

Yoruba's borrowing is thus functional, driven by communicative need, but it frequently seeks semantic clarity and cultural relevance, often avoiding opaque imports.

Structural Adaptation of Borrowed Terms

Borrowing is rarely direct. Languages adapt borrowed words through processes like phonological assimilation, morphological adaptation, and semantic extension. For instance:

In German:

- *Lockdown* is sometimes morphologically adapted with native suffixes, e.g., *Lockdownmaßnahmen* (“lockdown measures”), reflecting the language's productive compounding system.
- *Homeoffice* is treated as a native noun, taking plural forms (*Homeoffices*) and declining with case markers.

In Yoruba:

- Borrowed terms undergo 'tonal' and 'syllabic restructuring' to fit the prosodic system. For example, *vaccine* becomes *vaksiin*, with elongation to accommodate vowel harmony and syllable closure.
- Morphological enrichment often follows, as in *àrùn korona kókó* (“primary Covid illness”), which adds explanatory modifiers to clarify meaning.

Such adaptation processes affirm Haugen's (1950) model of borrowing, which includes stages of importation, substitution, and integration, all evident in how both Yoruba and German have metabolized English pandemic vocabulary.

Cultural Filters and Resistance to Borrowing

While borrowing is common in times of crisis, it is also met with linguistic resistance, often rooted in cultural pride, purism, or concerns about intelligibility. In Germany, institutions like the *Verein Deutsche Sprache* (Association for the German Language) have long campaigned against unnecessary Anglicisms. During the pandemic, some linguistic purists criticized the use of *Lockdown* and *Homeoffice*, preferring native compounds like *Ausgangsbeschränkung* and *Telearbeit*.

In Yoruba contexts, resistance is subtler but equally present. Some speakers prefer creative neologisms rooted in Yoruba's semantic system over unfamiliar loanwords. For instance, *ìdànikànwá* (self-isolation) is preferred over anglicized forms among traditional or rural speakers. Religious institutions, especially those emphasizing Yoruba identity, actively promote indigenous terminology in their messaging.

However, among younger Yoruba speakers or bilingual urban dwellers, code-mixing and hybrid forms are common. For example:

- “Mo lọ sí test center yẹn” (“I went to that test center”)
- “Ẹ jẹ́ ká Zoom pọ̀” (“Let us Zoom together”)

These examples reflect dynamic bilingualism rather than passive borrowing. They illustrate how contact-induced change does not displace native language structures, but enriches them.

Lexical Convergence and Global Linguistic Solidarity

Covid-19 also produced a form of lexical convergence, where different languages around the world began to share a small pool of globally recognized terms. Words like *pandemic*, *vaccine*, *variant*, and *lockdown* became globally intelligible across linguistic boundaries, forming what could be described as a pandemic pidgin, a shared crisis lexicon. This convergence facilitated:

- Cross-border communication between medical professionals,
- Uniformity in media reporting, and
- A sense of shared human experience.

Nevertheless, it also created challenges for localization, especially in oral or under-resourced languages like Yoruba, where semantic precision and cultural adaptation are necessary for community uptake. Therefore, there is the need of translation scholars balancing the benefits of lexical convergence with the need for local intelligibility, cultural continuity, and linguistic equity.

Implications for Translation and Lexicography

The lexical borrowing patterns during the pandemic call for updated multilingual dictionaries and Covid-19 term banks, Expanded translation protocols for emergent crises and Increased support for terminological development in underrepresented languages.

For Yoruba, this may mean formalizing some of the neologisms born out of the pandemic, such as:

- *àkókò ifarahàn-àisàn* (incubation period),
- *àjọdà Zoom* (Zoom gathering),
- *ìṣàbójútó ara ẹni* (self-monitoring).

Incorporating these terms into educational and medical materials would ensure continuity and reinforce Yoruba's capacity to handle specialized discourse domains.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon two main frameworks: the Descriptive Approach to Translation as developed by Darwish (2010), and the Nominalization Theory articulated by Lees (1960). These frameworks serve to guide the analysis of the morphological structures and linguistic patterns found in the Covid-19 terms across English, German, and Yoruba. While Darwish's approach anchors the research in the realm of translation as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, Lees' work provides the necessary morphological lens for dissecting how meaning is restructured through nominal forms.

Descriptive Translation Studies (Darwish 2010)

Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) positions itself as a non-prescriptive, empirical approach to understanding how translations function in specific contexts. Darwish (2010) extends the scope of DTS by emphasizing the translator's agency in reconstructing meaning across linguistic systems and cultural paradigms. Central to this approach is the idea that translations are not mere linguistic replicas but dynamic texts shaped by socio-cultural, ideological, and systemic norms. In the context of Covid-19, where terminologies emerged rapidly and were shaped by science, media, and institutional discourse, translators played a crucial role in adapting these terms to different linguistic and cultural realities. Darwish's framework recognizes that translation does not occur in a vacuum. It is governed by three primary constraints: linguistic, textual, and cultural. Each of these constraints is evident in how Covid-19 terms were rendered in German and Yoruba, languages that differ significantly in grammar, lexicon, and worldview.

For example, the English term “*social distancing*” became “*räumliche Trennung*” in German, a spatial rather than social emphasis, whereas in Yoruba, it became “*ìjìnnàsíraeni láààrin àwùjọ*”, a more expressive and socially nuanced phrase. Such divergence illustrates the descriptive essence of translation: the observable choices made by translators that reflect both linguistic resources and cultural appropriateness.

Furthermore, Darwish (2010) introduces the concept of information transformation, which refers to how the core information in a source language is not merely transferred but restructured based on the receptor language's capabilities. In Covid-19 discourse, where scientific accuracy intersects with public comprehension, this restructuring was inevitable and necessary. Little has been done in using this theory in similar studies. The theory is basically used to analyse items on the basis of description.

Nominalization Theory (Lees 1960)

While Darwish provides a descriptive lens to analyze translation as a cultural act, Lees (1960) offers a morphological framework focused on nominalizations, or the process of transforming verbs or adjectives into nouns. His study of English nominalizations was one of the earliest efforts to link transformational grammar to actual word formation processes.

Nominalization is particularly relevant in pandemic discourse, which is replete with abstract terms derived from processes, conditions, or events. Terms such as “*transmission*,” “*quarantine*,” “*infection*,” and “*incubation*” are nominalizations that condense complex processes into lexical items. This phenomenon is not unique to English but is a strategic morphological process in many languages.

Lees' (1960) categorization allows for the identification of patterns such as:

- **Derived Nominals** (e.g., *infection* from *infect*)
- **Compound Nominals** (e.g., *droplet transmission*)

- **Complex Nominals** involving modifiers (e.g., *anti-viral medication*)

In the German and Yoruba translations of Covid-19 terms, similar nominalization strategies were employed, though with linguistic adaptations. German, with its propensity for compounding, often fused roots and affixes into extended nominal forms (e.g., *Beatmungsgerät* for *ventilator*). Yoruba, a more isolating language, made use of periphrastic constructions and affixation strategies within its morphological possibilities to form equivalents like “àránká tèkán-òní” for *droplet transmission*.

Applying Lees' model in this multilingual analysis allows us to trace not only the lexical transformations but also the underlying grammatical shifts that occur during the translation process. It also enables us to evaluate how abstract Covid-19 concepts were reconstituted into morphologically acceptable and culturally intelligible forms in the target languages.

Methodology

This section outlines the procedures and principles that guided the data collection, selection, and analytical approach of the study. The objective is to provide a transparent, replicable framework suitable for descriptive translation studies with morphological emphasis.

Data Sources and Collection

The data for this study comprise selected twenty-five (25) Covid-19-related terms that were widely used in global media, public health advisories, and academic discourse between 2020 and 2023. These English terms were selected based on their frequency and relevance in public communication, and their equivalents in German and Yoruba were extracted from a variety of authentic sources. These include:

- **Official government health websites** (e.g., Robert Koch Institute for German, Nigeria Centre for Disease Control for Yoruba translations),
- **News media outlets** (e.g., BBC, Deutsche Welle, Channels TV),
- **Covid-19 awareness campaigns** on television and radio in Germany and Nigeria,
- **Community translations** and locally adapted public signage, especially in Yoruba-speaking regions,
- **Lexical innovations and usage** collected through social listening and crowdsourced language forums.

This approach ensures a broad and realistic representation of how the terms are used in context, especially given the evolving nature of Covid-19 vocabulary.

Analytical Approach

The analysis employs a descriptive approach to translation based on Darwish (2010), which focuses on translation as an empirical phenomenon observed through language use. This approach seeks not to evaluate the translations as “correct” or “incorrect” but to explore what strategies were used and how linguistic and cultural systems shaped them.

Each term is analyzed based on:

- Morphological structure in the source and target languages;
- Type and frequency of compound formation;
- Presence of neologisms or lexical borrowings;
- Evidence of nominalization in the form of derived or compound nouns;
- Translation shifts in meaning or emphasis due to cultural or structural constraints.

This analysis is further enriched by applying Lees' (1960) theory of nominalizations, allowing us to understand how dynamic processes (e.g., "transmit", "monitor", "isolate") are transformed into nouns or nominal expressions across the three languages.

Criteria for Comparison

To facilitate consistent analysis, each English term and its corresponding German and Yoruba translations are evaluated using the following metrics:

1. **Number of morphemes** (based on visible and functional morphological units);
2. **Compound word presence** (indicating single or multi-word lexical units with embedded morphemes);
3. **Structural complexity**, categorized as:
 - Simple Nominal (e.g., “virus” - “Virus”/“àrùn-ọlọjẹ”)
 - Derived Nominal (e.g., “isolate” - “Selbstisolierung”/“ìdànikàn wá-àrà-ẹ̀ni”)
 - Compound Nominal (e.g., “contact tracing” - “Ermittlung von Kontaktperson”/“ìwákírí olùbápadè”)
4. **Degree of innovation** (whether the translation is a neologism, a borrowing, or an established term).

For instance, “self-isolation” is translated into German as *Selbstisolierung* (a compound with a derivational suffix) and into Yoruba as *ìdànikàn wá-àrà-ẹ̀ni* (a creative neologism involving morphological compounding). These patterns are documented and compared to determine broader trends in the morphological adaptation of pandemic discourse.

Analysis of Covid-19 Terms

S/N	English	German	Yoruba	(Morphemes)
				Eng/Ger/Yor
1	Incubation period	Inkubationszeit	àkókò ifarahàn-àisàn	2/2/3
2	Community spread	in Gemeinschaft verbreitet	ìtànká àdúgbò	2/3/2
3	Droplet transmission	Tröpfcheninfektion	àrànká t?kán-òmí	2/2/3
4	Asymptomatic	Asymptotisch	àifàmí-hàn	1/1/2
5	Super-spreader	Super-spreader	àyàrá-tànkál?	2/2/2
6	Flattening the curve	Kurve	dídìn ipa náà kú	3/2/4
		abflachen/verflachen		
7	Hand hygiene	Handhygiene	ìmòtótó ?w?	2/2/2
8	Social distancing	räumliche Trennung	ìjinnàsíra?ni lááárin àwùj?	2/2/3
9	Self-isolation	Selbstisolierung	ìdànikànwá-àra-?ni	2/2/3
10	Self-monitoring	Selbstkontrolle	ì?àbójútó-àra-?ni	2/2/3
11	Quarantine	Quarantäne	ìyànis?t?	1/1/1
12	Drive-thru-testing	Drive-Thru Testen	ày?wò-kíákíá-nínú ?k?	3/3/4
13	Anti-viral medicines	Antivirales Arzneimittel	àw?n egboògi adíbìsí-àrùn-àrànká-kú	2/3/6
14	Ventilator	Beatmungsgerät	?r? afáf?-èémí	1/2/3
15	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	Persönliche Schutzausrüstung (PSA)	?hún-èlò ìdààbòbò tara-?ni	3/3/5
16	Medical response	medizinische Behandlung	ì?radáhùn sí tíwósàn	2/2/3
17	Outbreak	Ausbruch	àjàkál?	1/1/1
18	Pandemic	Pandemie	Àjàkàyè	1/1/1
19	Contact tracing	Ermittlung von Kontaktperson	ìwákírí olùbápadè	2/4/2
20	Working from home	Telearbeit/Heimarbeit	?ísí?e láti ilé	3/2/3

21	Index case	Ereignisfall/ Indexfall	àmì-àt'ka i?el?	2/2/3
22	Contagious	Ansteckend/übertragbar	gb'éràn	1/1/1
23	Virus	Virus	àrùn-?l'j?	1/1/2
24	Morbidity	Morbidität	àisànníní	1/1/1
25	Vaccine	Impfung	Ìbupá	1/1/1

Overview of Morphological Trends

The dataset consists of 25 Covid-19-related terms in English, along with their German and Yoruba equivalents. The terms span a variety of concepts including medical procedures (*ventilator*), epidemiological phenomena (*community spread*, *super-spreader*), and public health measures (*social distancing*, *hand hygiene*). Morphological analysis reveals that:

- English terms typically consist of one or two words, often in the form of compound nouns (e.g., *index case* *anti-viral medicine* or nominalizations (e.g., *transmission quarantine*).
- German equivalents frequently employ closed compound words, a hallmark of the language's morphology (e.g., *Inkubationszeit*, *beatmungsgerätekontrolle*. *Inkubationszeit*, this combines *Inkubation* (incubation) and *Zeit* (time), literally meaning incubation time. The *s* is added in the middle (Fugen-s) to make the words flow smoothly when spoken. *Beatmungsgerät*, made from the verb *beatmen* (to ventilate), turned into the noun *Beatmung* (ventilation), and combined with *Gerät* (device), literally ventilation device. 'The' links the two nouns together. *Selbstkontrolle* combines *Selbst* (self) and *Kontrolle* (control), literally Self-control/Self-monitoring showing how German joins words to express a complete idea in one.
- Yoruba translations largely rely on compound constructions formed from native morphemes and affixes (e.g., *arah-ọ̀n egboògi adibùsì-àrùn-àránká-kú*), many of which are neologisms created for contextual clarity and cultural relevance.

The table below summarizes compound word frequency in each language:

Language	Total Compound Words (out of 25)
English	21
German	21
Yoruba	23

Yoruba shows the highest use of complex compounds, supporting the hypothesis that it accommodates lexical expansion primarily through native morphological innovation. In contrast, German compounds are more syntactically compact, though still derivationally rich.

Morphological Patterns in English

English, being relatively analytic, often expresses abstract medical and epidemiological terms using nominalizations derived from verbs (*transmission*, *infection*) or phrases formed through noun-noun compounding (*social distancing*, *index case*). These constructions are generally concise and semantically dense. For example:

- *Incubation period*= Noun + Noun
- *Contact tracing*= Noun + Gerund
- *Self-isolation*= Reflexive Prefix + Noun

English tends to use borrowings from Latin/Greek (e.g., *uarantine* *andemic* and medical terminology that is accessible across scientific communities. However, for lay communication, these terms often need re-contextualization in other languages.

Morphological Equivalence in German

German translations of Covid-19 terms lean heavily on nominal compounding, often forming long, multi-morphemic words that combine root nouns, affixes, and qualifiers. For instance:

- *Beatmungsger*: *Beatmen* is a verb (to ventilate), turned into the noun *Beatmung* (ventilation) with -ung, and combined with *Ger* (device). The “s” a linking element (*Fugen-s*) joining the nouns smoothly
- *Inkubationszeit*: *Inkubation*(incubation) and *Zeit* (time) are nouns fused directly to form a compound, literally ncubation time No linking s needed because the first noun ends in a vowel.
- *Selbstkontrolle*: *Selbst* (self) and *Kontrolle* (control/monitoring) form a compound noun with a reflexive element, literally elf-control showing how German combines words to express complex ideas.

German favors syntactic tightness and lexical economy through compounding. Where English may use a phrase, German often provides a single complex noun. This results in structural equivalence but not necessarily morphological parity with English.

Morphological Strategies in Yoruba

Yoruba, a tonal and isolating language, approaches Covid-19 vocabulary differently. It uses analytic and additive compounding, stringing together words with semantic transparency. Many of the Yoruba terms are neologisms or adaptations, formed through Affixation (nominalization) in *idànikànwá-àra-ẹni* (“self-isolation”), the prefix *ì-* turns the action of isolating oneself into a noun, naming the state or process. Also, through Noun phrasing with cultural framing in *àwọn egboògi adibìísí-àrùn-àránká-kú* (“anti-viral medicines”), several roots are combined to create a Noun Phrase that conveys a culturally and semantically rich meaning - medicines designed to fight deadly viral infections, where each element contributes part of the concept.

These word forms show more than just how words are made; they also reflect culture. In Yoruba, translations often include ideas of cause and effect and focus on who is doing the action.

Compound Word Frequency and Types

To quantify compound word tendencies, we categorized each term into:

- Simple Nominals (1 morpheme),
- Compound Nominals (2+ morphemes),
- Complex Periphrastic Phrases (multi-word units with embedded meaning).

Term (Example)	English Type	German Type	Yoruba Type
Super-spreader	Compound Nominal	Compound Nominal	Compound Nominal
Quarantine	Simple Nominal	Simple Nominal	Simple Nominal
Vaccine	Simple Nominal	Simple Nominal	Simple Nominal
Contact-tracing	Phrase Nominal	Compound Phrase	Compound Nominal
Personal Protective	Phrase Nominal	Compound Nominal	Complex Compound
Equipment			Phrase
Drive-thru testing	Phrase Nominal	Compound Nominal	Compound Nominal (4 morphemes)

Yoruba tends to express concepts with more morphemes than English or German, reflecting its preference for semantic fullness over lexical economy.

Neologisms and Borrowings

Both German and Yoruba exhibit neologisms, but with differing motivations:

- German draws from technical terminology and adapts through compounding, often without creating wholly new words. For example:
- *Drive-Thru Testen* borrows *drive-thru* as a loan term and attaches a German verbal noun (*Drive- thru*)
- Yoruba, lacking equivalent pre-pandemic vocabulary, often coined new expressions or used analogical extension. Terms like *arah*-(incubation period) and *ṣàbójútó-àra-ẹni* (self-monitoring) are clear linguistic innovations rooted in indigenous morphology.

This trend supports the conclusion in the abstract: the pandemic led to a greater increase in neologisms in Yoruba than in German or English, underlining the adaptive creativity of indigenous African languages in response to global crises.

Nominalization Patterns

Nominalization is when a verb or adjective is turned into a noun. Applying Lees' (1960) theory, we observe several types of nominalizations across languages:

- **Derived Nominals** Derived nominals are nouns formed from verbs or adjectives by adding suffixes e.g., *transmission*(Eng), *rfcheninfektion*(Ger), *kẹkán-òní* (Yor)
- **Compound Nominals** Compound nominals join two or more words to make a single noun e.g., *nti-viral medicine* *ntivirales Arzneimittel* *on egboògi adibiísi-àrùn-àrànká-kú*
- **Abstract Process Nominals** Abstract process nominals name actions or processes as nouns e.g., *solation* *elbstisolierung* *ikw*

Yoruba frequently combines ideophones, action nouns, and agentive markers, resulting in semantically rich but morphologically long expressions.

English vs German: Similarities

Both English and German share Indo-European roots which means they are both from West Germanic languages) and exhibit comparable morphological tendencies and exhibit comparable morphological tendencies in their use of nominal forms. This similarity is evident in the use of:

- Derived nouns (e.g., *transmission- nfektion*,
- Compounds (e.g., *ndex case- ndexfall*,
- Phrase nominalizations (e.g., *self-monitoring- elbstkontrolle*).

German, however, tends to convert English phrasal constructions into unified nominal compounds. For instance, *self-isolation* becomes *elbstisolierung*, a single morphological unit combining *elbst*-(self) and *isolierung*(isolation).

Differences

- Length and compactness German forms are longer but more syntactically integrated. English uses separable or phrasal forms that maintain clarity at the expense of brevity. *e.g working from home*) while German *Telearbeit/Heimarbeit*)
- Loanword adaptation English more frequently uses Latin or Greek-based terms (e.g., *uarantine andemic*, while German sometimes adapts these or creates native compounds (*usbruch* instead of *pidemic outbreak*).
- Inflectional markers German morphological forms carry case, gender, and number markers that are absent in English. For example, *Antivirales Arzneimittel* includes a gender-marked adjective and noun, that is, *Antivirales Arzneimittel* means antiviral medicine, where *Arzneimittel* is a neuter noun (*das*). The adjective antiviral takes the ending *-es* because it agrees with a neuter, singular noun in the nominative case without an article.

Thus, while English offers more syntactic flexibility, German relies on its morphological density and compounding tradition.

English vs Yoruba: Similarities

- Both languages use nominalization to convert processes into terms (e.g., *monitoring, transmission, isolation*).
- There is a semantic effort in both to maintain clarity, especially in newly coined terms related to public health.

Differences

- Morphological typology English is analytic with moderate compounding Yoruba is isolating but uses additive compounding for conceptual clarity. For example:
- *Hand hygiene*- *ọwọ́* (literally "cleanliness of the hand")
- *Contact tracing*- *lad* (literally "searching for one who met with")
- Neologism Yoruba creates more contextual neologisms due to the absence of pre-existing equivalents. English often reuses medical terminology or Latin-Greek terms.
- Translation fidelity Yoruba frequently introduces cultural explication to ensure comprehension. For example, *rive-thru testing* becomes *ẹ̀wò-kiákíá-nínú ọkọ̀*, reflecting the rapid test and vehicular setting, which may not be familiar in all rural contexts.

This difference reflects the adaptive creativity of Yoruba, which relies on semantic decomposition and recombination to communicate new realities.

German vs Yoruba: Similarities

- Both German and Yoruba prefer compound expressions over simple ones when translating abstract or process-based concepts. Example from this data: German (Selbstisolierung), Yoruba (ikwa-ẹni)

Both languages create new compound terms rather than relying entirely on borrowed forms. An example from this data: German (Selbstkontrolle), Yoruba (ìṣàbójútó-àra-ẹni)

Differences

Morphological form: German uses closed, concatenated compounds (e.g., *Inkubationszeit*), whereas Yoruba uses phrasal compounding with word-boundaries clearly retained (e.g., *àkókò ifarahàn-àìsàn*).

- Phonological integration German maintains phonological compactness. e.g. *Beatmungsger* whereas Yoruba's tonal system and syllable structure require separable morphemes for clarity and correct pronunciation. e.g. *fẹ-éèmí*)
- Cultural nuance of Yoruba often encodes action, agency, or affective context. For example:

Super-spreader= *tkẹ* (literally “fast spreader”), adding emotive or moral implications.

Personal Protective Equipment= *òhún-èlò idáàbòbò tara-ẹni*, emphasizing individual responsibility and function.

This reflects Yoruba's emphasis on relational and context-sensitive expression, whereas German emphasizes precision and lexical economy.

These comparisons reinforce the conclusion that Yoruba shows the highest level of morphological innovation and semantic unpacking, while German exhibits structural compaction through compounding, and English operates between the two with a mix of phrasal nominalizations and Latinate borrowings.

Implications for Translation Studies

The findings of this comparative analysis have significant implications for the field of translation studies, especially within the descriptive paradigm. The interplay between morphology, linguistic creativity, and cultural adaptation revealed in the Covid-19 terms points to how translation functions not merely as a conduit for meaning transfer but as an agent of lexical innovation, cultural mediation, and linguistic systematization in crisis communication.

Demonstrating the Value of the Descriptive Approach

Darwish's (2010) descriptive approach is validated by this study's findings. Instead of evaluating translations on the basis of formal equivalence or functional adequacy, the descriptive approach allows scholars to observe how languages respond organically to new communicative needs. This includes:

- The choice of neologisms in Yoruba where no previous term existed.
Example: *ikwa-ẹni*
- The preference for phrasal restructuring in English to maintain clarity.
Example: Self-isolation.

- The structural economy of German compounds, which retain scientific precision. Example *Beatmungsger*
the descriptive approach respects contextual translation decisions, showing how linguistic constraints and cultural logics shape translation products.

Lexical Innovation in Response to Crisis

One major insight is that crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic accelerate lexical change. In Yoruba, this led to the coining of novel compound expressions that synthesized traditional roots with contemporary realities. For instance, *ẹ̀wò-kiákíá-nínú ọkọ̀* (drive-thru testing) did not exist pre-pandemic and had to be constructed using familiar words for speed (*kiákíá*) and vehicle (*ọkọ̀*).

This phenomenon underscores the creative capacity of indigenous languages when faced with global communicative demands. It also invites a reconsideration of translation as lexical engineering, a form of linguistic innovation rather than mere interlingual replication.

Translating Scientific Discourse

Another implication relates to specialized translation, particularly in science and medicine. The data reveal that while German accommodates medical terminology within its lexical system through native compounding, Yoruba requires the semantic unpacking of medical concepts into their functional components. This has two effects:

1. It enhances comprehensibility for non-experts,
2. It localizes the terminology into culturally and linguistically relevant frameworks.

Thus, in health communication, domestication strategies (Venuti 1995) may be more effective than foreignization strategies, particularly in African languages where modern scientific vocabulary is still developing.

Expanding the Scope of Nominalization Theory

Lees' (1960) work on nominalization finds renewed relevance in multilingual contexts. This study demonstrates how nominalization strategies differ not just across texts but across language systems:

- In German, nominalization is embedded in tightly knit morphological compounds (*eatmungsger elbstisolierung*)
- In Yoruba, nominalization often involves the prefix plus verbs or verbal phrases, forming compound nominals (*ikwa-ẹni, iṣàbójútó-àra-ẹni*).

This suggests that nominalization is not a uniform process across languages, but is instead shaped by each language's morphological architecture.

Translation studies must therefore adopt language-specific frameworks to understand how abstract processes are lexicalized.

Culturally Informed Translation Practices

Finally, this study emphasizes the need for culturally informed translation training, especially in multilingual societies. Translators must not only understand lexical equivalence but also be able to coin new terms when none exist, preserve semantic meaning while adapting cultural framing. Lastly, make context-sensitive decisions that go beyond syntactic structures. Yoruba's translations exemplify 'situational relevance' and 'pragmatic adaptation', making the language a model for context-driven translation strategies in African and other under-resourced languages.

In summary, the Covid-19 pandemic revealed how translation operates at the intersection of linguistic systems, cultural knowledge, and global exigency. By applying a descriptive translation framework and nominalization theory, this study contributes to understanding how languages mediate emergent realities in ways that are structurally coherent and culturally meaningful.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic was not only a global health emergency but also a profound linguistic event. It forced languages around the world to evolve rapidly, giving rise to new terms and reconfiguring old ones to address an emergent socio-medical reality. This study has shown how three typologically distinct languages, English, German, and Yoruba, responded morphologically to this crisis through the creation and adaptation of 25 selected Covid-19 terms. The analysis revealed a range of morphological strategies as is mentioned in the following. English mainly uses nominalizations and two-word compounds from Latin and Greek roots, German relies on its strong compounding system to form compact and precise technical terms, while Yoruba demonstrates rich morphological creativity through culturally grounded, expressive neologisms and flexible semantic compounds.

One of the key findings is that Yoruba exhibits the highest degree of lexical creativity among the three languages analyzed, particularly in its use of indigenous affixation (*i-*) and additive compounding to produce meaningful, culturally resonant neologisms. German followed with structurally efficient compounds, while English maintained a balance of existing medical terms and new coinages.

Using Darwish's (2010) descriptive approach to translation, this study treated translation as a culturally embedded activity, allowing the identification of distinct choices made by translators in shaping meaning. Lees' (1960) nominalization theory also provided a useful tool for tracking how abstract processes and conditions were rendered as lexical items across the languages.

The study makes several contributions:

- It adds to the growing body of research on Covid-19 discourse by focusing on morphological translation rather than semantics or neologism alone.
- It affirms the relevance of descriptive translation theory in analyzing language behavior during crises.
- It highlights the resilience and creativity of African languages, such as Yoruba, in responding to global phenomena.
- It demonstrates the importance of culturally informed translation strategies especially in contexts where direct equivalents do not exist.

The analysis in this study also suggests practical implications for translators, linguists, educators, and public health communicators. For translators, it affirms the importance of both linguistic fidelity and cultural relevance. For linguists, it presents a real-time case study of lexical expansion and morphological adaptation. For educators and health communicators, it underlines the need to engage local languages innovatively in the development of accessible public discourse.

Future studies could extend this research by analyzing syntactic shifts, metaphorical frameworks, and phonological adaptations in translated Covid-19 discourse across additional languages and dialects. Such work would deepen our understanding of how languages continue to serve as adaptive, responsive tools in the face of global change.

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