| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Relevance of Non-verbal Communication in the Covid'19 Nigerian Environment

Fidelia Azuka Okeke (PhD)[1], Uche Ken Chukwu (PhD)[2] ✉ **and LIVINA NKIRUKA EMODI, (PhD)[3]**

[1][3]Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra, Nigeria
[2]Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria
Corresponding Author: Uche Ken Chukwu, **E-mail**: chukwukeneth@yahoo.com

| **ABSTRACT**

Human beings, in their various environments, communicate their ideas, feelings, and life experiences through verbal or non-verbal means. The way people speak, move their bodies, gesticulate, and handle spatial relationships are important to all kinds of interpersonal communication. In most non-verbal communication situations, as experienced in the Nigerian environment during the Covid'19 pandemic, we observed that interlocutors, even in their silent states, use nonlinguistic forms to communicate meanings (through space and body language). This paper examined the imperatives of space and body language during the Covid'19 era. Much of what has occupied the interest of scholarship has been verbal (speaking and writing) rather than non-verbal communication. But the Covid'19 challenges have opened a fresh vista of attention to the other modes of communicating messages to a target audience. This paper wondered how easy and possible it was to employ appropriate multi-modal media of information dissemination targeted at controlling the ugly situation, saving the lives of people, and achieving fidelity of desired action in such a multilingual/cultural environment as Nigeria. This triggered the researchers' selection and evaluation of some of the communications made through space (proxemics), body language (kinesics), and other non-verbal symbolic modes, their imperatives, and challenges during this period. The analysis was anchored on the multimodal theory of discourse which is an approach that takes into account multiple modes of communication and how they interact with one another to produce meaning. The study is qualitative in nature and allows the interpretation of data according to the context of use. It is hoped that the findings of the paper shall not only expose the important place of non-verbal communication but will also add to the corpus of knowledge concerning the dynamics of human communication in general.

| **KEYWORDS**

Language, communication, context, proxemics, kinesics, semiotics, Covid'19

1. Introduction

The outbreak of Covid'19 pandemic in Nigeria in the year 2020 triggered much fear in people as the dreaded disease spread like wild fire, endangering some and eliminating many lives. No doubt, the Nigerian government devised diverse measures in collaboration with different agencies to combat and put the ugly situation in check. Most importantly, Nigerians were mandated to sit at home and imbibe relevant habits and measures that kept them safe from contracting the dreaded disease. Meanwhile, efforts were made through social media: Television, Radio, Newspapers, Daily Editorials, Billboards and Handbills, WhatsApp, Facebook, and so on, to enlighten the citizenry on how to adapt to the threatening situation.

The fact that human beings are social in nature entails that it will be difficult for any individual to live in isolation. We cannot do away with interpersonal communication, where individuals come in contact with each other to share their ideas, thoughts, and emotions, and generally, their problems are solved. In most situations, words of a language do not help us to say everything but are supplemented by our body language: facial expressions, bodily stances, gestures, and leg, hand, or head movements which

are capable of conveying much more information than ordinary words of a language could do. Body language and spatial communication help us to make the meaning of our words clear.

This study is triggered by the thought of how non-verbal communication, such as Kinesics and proxemics, were employed by different agents of information dissemination in a multi-lingual/cultural Nigerian environment. It is not an easy task to control or change people's developed habits that have become their second selves. However, considering the peculiar nature of the Covid'19 spread and its attendant effects, the agency for enlightening people resorted to a multimodal means of communication. This paper is poised to analyze selected excerpts of non-verbal communication, an aspect which most scholars have failed to pay adequate attention to in handling issues of Covid'19.

2. Conceptual Review

Language is commonly seen as a means of communication between people in a given speech community. Chukwu, Okeke, and Chinedu-Oko (2014) observe that language is important to man in social survival, just as water and food are to man for biological and chemical sustenance. They cite McLaughlin (2006), who maintains that language is the "system of arbitrary verbal symbols (and non-verbal means) that speakers or communicators put in order, according to a conventional code to communicate ideas and feelings or to influence the behaviours of others" (82). Being a system composed of symbols and signs, people for whom they are used must have a piece of shared knowledge with the sender for accurate interpretation of the intended speaker's meaning. The above view shows the essence of multi-modal (verbal and non-verbal) means of communication in interpersonal relationships.

Thus, Chukwu, Okeke, and Chinedu-Oko (2014) assert that society exists because the people in that society use language,- verbal or non-verbal, irrespective of its dynamic nature. Very important to this study is Kuiper and Allan's (1996) view, cited in Okeke and Chukwu (2015), which sees language as a coding device for conveying a great variety of information. This indicates that language as a code uses symbols or signals which are capable of transferring messages from one person to another through the medium of conventional symbols. Our discussions of communication often focus on the use of language through spoken or written modes. However, it is pertinent here to note that there are situations in human communication when we employ body language, space, and other non-verbal modes (although we may use them without knowing it). Thus, context is essential in the discussion of communication.

2.1 Context

Context is the background, environment, setting, framework, or surroundings of events or occurrences. It simply means circumstances forming a background of an event, idea, or statement in such a way as to enable readers to understand the narrative(https://literarydevices.net>context).

Matthiessen (2014) observes in the manner of Thibault (2004) that context could be taken as the environment of meanings in which various semiotic systems operate, including language, paralanguage (gesture, facial expression, voice quality, and other systems of meaning accompanying language and expressed through the human body). Context has always been explored in relation to field, tenor, and mode, allowing any situation type to be characterised in terms of each of them. Thus, Matthiessan (2014, p.33) explains field as what is going on in the situation, such as the nature of the social and semiotic activity; and the domain of experience. This activity relates to the 'subject matter' or 'topic' He sees tenors as people who take part in the situation; the roles they play as they take part in the socio-semiotic activity: institutional, status roles (power), and so on. In the case of mode, it is the nature of the role being played by language and other semiotic systems in the situation. Together, field, tenor, and mode define a multi-dimensional semiotic space – the environment of meanings in which language and other semiotic and social systems operate.

Interestingly, Matthiessen accepts Halliday's (1978) suggestion that field values resonate with ideational meanings, tenor resonate with interpersonal meanings, and mode values resonate with textual meanings. This paper agrees with Matthiessen and Halliday that the correspondence between language and context is based on the functional organization of both orders of meaning. However, our effort in this paper is made towards discovering the relevance of non-verbal modes of expression among participants as they play different roles in the environment of meaning in the Covid'19 Nigerian environment.

2.2 Communication

Communication shares an intricate relationship with language and thus tells why language is said to be synonymous with communication. It involves the sender and the receiver. According to Nwodu and Fab- Ukozor (2003), communication is a two-way process in which everyone is seen as an important source of information and ideas on an equal basis. In their view, it requires the active mental cooperation of all the interlocutors until a common awareness and understanding are reached concerning the course of action to be taken in the communication process. When their view is related to the Nigerian situation during the Covid-19 era, the major task was keeping people informed about the dreaded disease and strategies to combat it. Of course, this venture

required the cooperation of the people involved. Such communication can be effective when it advocates a cause in order to be meaningful to the target audience and capable of mobilizing them towards active participation in the enlightenment programme. This implies that the messages of the communication have to be properly worded with the conventional modes (both speech and writing) and effectively delivered to bring about "the desired attitudinal and behavioral change" (Nwodu and Fab-Ukozor, p.131).

This paper agrees with the above view, especially when we relate it to the Covid-19 situation where a combination of media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet was deployed for quicker and more effective dissemination of Covid-19-related messages. Again, our earlier assertion is that language and communication share an intricate relationship. Suffice it to say that communication of ideas, signs, and symbols is possible because there are conventional means- verbal and non-verbal – available for interlocutors to use, and the effectiveness of communication, therefore, depends on the effective use of these means.

2.3 Non-Verbal Communication
As earlier noted, human communication is a process that can be attained through verbal and non-verbal means. McLaughlin (2006) compares verbal and non-verbal communication and explains that while verbal communication involves the use of words as symbols to exchange ideas, non-verbal communication does not rely on the use of words; rather, it conveys ideas, thoughts, or feelings through other behaviours. McLaughlin identifies aspects of non-verbal communication to include: facial expressions (e.g., smiles, grimaces), head movements (e.g., shaking, nodding), eye contact (e.g., averting, rolling); body language (e.g., legs crossed, arms folded); gestures (e.g., beckoning, stopping) and proxemics (e.g., up close, distant). Further, McLaughlin observes that non-verbal communication includes much behaviour that communicates without the associated production of words or symbols. According to him, a wink, a smile, a touch, maintaining or avoiding eye contact even assuring a distinctive posture are all fairly universal non-verbal devices for communicating certain messages without the use of words. However, he maintains that non-verbal communication naturally accompanies most verbal communication. He explicates that persons using sign language may use facial expressions and produce gestures with greater or lesser force to supplement their verbal message. He submits that when these non-verbal features accompany spoken language, they are referred to as the extra linguistic aspects of language as they enhance the overall meaning of the entire utterance.

Thus, these non-verbal features might convey attitudes, feelings, or roles that accompany the actual words of a message. Kottak (2004) asserts that our facial expressions, bodily stances, gestures, and movements, even if unconscious, convey information and are part of our communication styles. Thus, he sees kinesics as the study of communication through body movements, stances, gestures, and facial expressions. He believes that attention should not only be paid to what is said but to how it is said and to features besides language itself that conveys meaning (i.e., through facial expressions, gestures, and other signs of animation).

Clark, Eschholz, and Rosa (1977) warn that to look at language primarily in terms of the words that people say or write is to ignore the significant role played by non-verbal communication. This is because, in their estimation, only 35% of the message is conveyed by the words in a conversation; the remaining 65% is communicated non-verbally by how they speak, move, gesture, and handle spatial relationships. They assert that both kinesics, the study of movement (related to Greek 'Kinesis,' movement), and proxemics, the study of the ways in which space is handled (related to Latin 'proximus,' nearest), are important aspects of non-verbal communication.

In relation to the above observation, Verma (2011) agrees that non-verbal communication is everything except your words which includes body language (facial expression and body attitude). She adds that listeners process non-verbal clues automatically and almost unconsciously, and using appropriate gestures and facial expressions to reinforce what you are saying tends to enhance its impact. Meanwhile, she examines the four types of body language. Facial expressions, including eye contact, universally expresses emotion through a smile, a frown, a scowl, and so on. Secondly, gestures can be used purposefully to emphasize meaning. In her illustration, fidgeting shows boredom and restlessness; pressing fingers together to form a 'steeple' shows interest, assertiveness, and determination, and 'touching the nose or rubbing eyes' indicates discomfort of dishonesty. Thirdly, she explains postures as the way people hold themselves to pass important information. According to her, body posture can be closed or open. This implies that certain body postures can be used to show interest and attention to what the other person is saying (leaning forward) or show aloofness or rejection (leaning backwards). And finally, she identifies proxemics (space) spatial arrangement, which shows a man's appreciation and use of space when communicating. It concerns itself with how close we are to people and whether we are facing toward them or away from them. She asserts that this can affect our interaction. Considering this, she observes that human beings being highly territorial, keep special relationships in communicating through body language and know when their space is somehow violated. What she considers a pivoted factor is the habit of maintaining control over personal satisfaction.

Significantly, Verma (2011) takes recourse to Hall (1957) and identifies an informal space characterized by a 'personal zone' or 'bubble' that varies for individuals and circumstances. She sees this as an area that humans control and use most often. According to her, Hall identifies four zones in the use of space: Intimate zone in which people keep at least 0- 0.5m apart such that they can easily touch each other. The second is the personal zone which extends from zero to 1.2 (1/2 – 4 feet), allowing people to shake

hands or may not be more than arm's length from each other. The third is called the social zone, which runs from four to ten feet (1.2 – 3m) and is most commonly used in every day encounters of social or business nature. She shows the final zone, which Hall calls a public zone and which extends from ten feet (3m) to over 3m (p.70).

It is important to recall that spatial relationship in communication was emphasized as a positive attitude towards staying safe from Covid'19 in Nigeria and, in fact, all over the countries experiencing the outbreak of the disease. The social distance of at least 2 meters apart was emphasized, as well as the use of a face mask. It was also the same with the use of body language to avoid close contact, all aimed at avoiding contracting the disease.

2.4 Covid'19 in the Nigerian Environment

Covid'19 is a respiratory illness that can spread through contact with an infected person or a contaminated surface. It started in the early months of the year 2020 with peculiar symptoms such as headache, breathing difficulty, sore throat, running nose, abdominal pain, body pain, loss of taste and smell, fever, and so on. Then, six steps were devised on how to keep safe in our environment: frequent washing of hands with soap under running water for at least twenty seconds or use of alcohol-based sanitizer if water is not available, avoiding large gatherings, and keeping physical contact to no less than 2 meters; coughing or sneezing into a tissue or into one's elbow, cleaning of all surfaces frequently with disinfectants; getting information only from official sources and observing self- isolation for 14 days and calling NCDC's attention in case one develops the symptoms. What is interesting here is that such crucial information is communicated through multimodal means, as each step is illustrated with a corresponding image to complement the written symbols.

Reporting on communication for public engagement and surveillance, Chibuike Alagboso and Bashar Abubaka commend the NCDC agency coordinated surveillance of the disease by supporting states to carry out contact tracing, collecting and testing samples from suspected cases, and supporting establishment and accreditation of isolation and treatment centers. According to them, communication plays a significant role in Covid'19 surveillance by monitoring general conservations and engaging with the public.

They observe that as part of its risk communication activities, the NCDC, in collaboration with other organizations, has produced and shared multi-media content, including videos, infographics, and audio jingles, in various languages, targeting different demographics. According to them, this has helped increase awareness about Covid'19 and many enlightened Nigerians on how to protect themselves and stay safe. They commended the above efforts by the NCDC as they have leveraged technology, including automated WhatsApp messages, dedicated Websites, and regular online live sessions largely, with support from social media platforms and Nigerian telecommunication companies sending public health messages to the public.

No doubt, communication of effective information during this critical period was possible through the various modes, as shown above. Although people were made to stay at home, these various means were employed to enlighten all. It is important to note that much of what was communicated was achieved through body language and proxemics; how these worked in conveying the intended messages and causing the targeted audience to act in a desired manner formed the crux of this study. Definitely, the use of appropriate non-verbal means, as examined here, facilitated the comprehension of the transmitted message(s) in the Nigerian environment.

The review so far dwells on the relevance of non-verbal communication in different situations, purposes, and countries like America, the Middle East, New York City, and so on; this present study contributes to existing knowledge by situating its focus on multi-modal discourse analysis of some of the semiotic representations of body language and spatial relationships that were employed during the Covid'19 outbreak in Nigeria.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper relies on the multimodal theory. The theory considers how communication and interaction are carried out, not just through conventional speaking and writing but also through a combination of multiple sensory and communication modes, such as gesture, gaze, sound, space, etc. The theory has found favour across disciplines (computer, printing and design, teaching technique, psychology, etc.), where it is used to ensure the inclusion of many modes of representing ideas in a single communication scene. However, language refers to the analysis of various and different semiotic modes, with the aim of integrating the representational, interactive, and textual meanings achieved by the various elements of the text. The task is to analyse how the elements combine to form a complete discourse, building on the inventories of the semiotic resources, the actions, and the materials with which people communicate.

Scholars have premised the popularity of the multimodal theory in language on Halliday's (1978) discussion of language as a social semiotic system. Previous scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure, C.S. Peirce, and others had, however, also made reference to

the semiotic quality of language. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* is also a good reference for the popularization of discussion of human communication from the multimodal perspective.

The multimodal theory relies on the assumption that human communication can be discussed from the perspectives of linguistics or alphabetic (written and spoken words); visual (moving and still objects); aural (sound and music); gestural (movement, body language); spatial (position, physical arrangement, proximity) https://openenglishatslcc.pressbook.com. Thus, comic books, picture books, newspapers, brochures, advertisements, posters, digital slide presentations, e-poster, social media, etc., cannot be said to communicate through a single mode. In each of these, all the different modes (written words, pictures, colour, positions, and placements) integrate into the communication of the message.

For the purpose of this paper, our focus is on the application of different modes of communication during the covid-19 era. The period witnessed a major paradigm shift in different areas, resulting in what is now referred to as the "new normal ."This paper believes that no other era in recent history has experienced a greater shift from conventional human communication modes (speech and writing) than the covid-19 era. Thus, it aims at examining how communication within the period can be evaluated through the multimodal approach, bearing in mind that the exegesis of the period necessitated the employment of various modes of communication outside the conventional verbal modes.

4. Methodology
The paper has advertisements and publications on Covid-19 spread and prevention as its population. However, the paper made use of nine (9) advertisements randomly extracted from the internet as its sample. The method of analyzing the data is descriptive, as the paper examines the modes used in communicating the messages in the advertisements and publications and describes them within a known corpus in linguistics and semiotics. The analyses focus on the conventional linguistic expressions used, in combination with other semiotic modes that have been employed in the expression of messages in the publications. Different models, approaches, and techniques have been proposed by different scholars for studying semiotics, but the paper adopts Peirece's tripartite categorization of icon, index, and symbol.

An icon is a direct imitation of the physical resemblance of the object or concept being represented. It draws a direct connection between the signifier (the icon) and the signified (the object being represented). Photographs, drawings, and paintings that bear a direct resemblance to the objects or concepts being represented are examples of icons. The index uses what is associated with the signified as its signifier. The signifier is not a direct resemblance of the object or concept but something that exists with it. For instance, smoke exists with fire; footprint exists with the foot. These are indexes. For a signifier to be indexical, the correlation between it and the signified must be simple. Knowledge of index can be acquired naturally within an environment; it can also be learnt through formal training in a particular field. Unlike icon and index, where there must be an observable connection between the signifier and the signified, symbol holds no such connection. The relationship in the symbol is arbitrary, as we find in letters of the alphabet and number figures. Nations, associations, and organizations make use of symbols of identity, but the connection is usually arbitrarily assigned, mostly through conventional agreement and understanding. There is nothing Nigerian in green and white colour. But whenever the colour is identified among flags of different nations, the image and identity of Nigeria come to mind.

5. Analysis
The title of our paper seemingly restricts the discussion to Covid-19 in Nigeria. As such, the reader is most likely to expect peculiar modes of multi-modal representations of Covid-19 experiences in Nigeria as distinct from other societies. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic took a universal toll, the approach to its management and control also took a universal dimension. Hence the samples analysed in this paper can be said to be universal. Most popular in the messages of the pandemic era is social distancing (avoiding crowding), avoiding some forms of body contact (such as a handshake, hugging, etc.), use of face mask, accepting the reality of the pandemic and debunking associated conspiracy theories, stressing the need for collective efforts in fighting the pandemic. So our analysis centres on these messages and how they were communicated through multimodal means. Then, the discussion of the findings examines the implication of such messages within the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

5.1 Sample 1
The sample contains the message of actions that were permitted and those not permitted during the pandemic era. These are presented and **DO** and **DO NOT**, respectively. There is also a **picture of three persons wearing masks** (one male and two females) positioned in a circle in the middle. The DOs are presented in **green colour**, while the DO NOTs are presented in **red colour.** Again, the Dos have **good sign**s ticked against them, while the DO NOTs have **bad signs** against them.

From the above presentation, we notice that many semiotic forms have been integrated into the expression of the message of the advert. First, there is the **linguistic expression** of what to do and what not to do represented in DO and DO NOT. Then, the picture of the three persons demonstrating the DOs (persons making use of running tap water, those covering their mouth and nose while sneezing, and those maintaining social distance) is an instance of **the semiotic icon**. This is also the case with the persons engaging

in a handshake and those dancing so closely together as DO NOTs. There is also the use of **index** (face masks), where the faces of the persons captured in the pictures are covered with face masks. A face mask is an instance of the index of personal protection in the medical profession. There is the use of **symbols** of good and bad for the DOs and DO NOTs, respectively. Here also, the **colours** of the dress of the persons in the picture (green and light blue) are associated with the medical personnel. Again, presenting the DOs in **green colour** and DO NOTs in **red colour** also communicates acceptance and rejection, safety and danger, respectively. Furthermore, positioning the picture of the three persons and the centre is **spatial foregrounding**.

5.2 Sample 2
The sample contains a message countering trendy doubts about wearing facemasks. The advert makes use of the **linguistic expression** "You don't need to wear a face mask..." "This is not only about you. Protect yourself and others.". There is also the use of **icons** in the picture of two persons (male and female) wearing face masks (**index**) as a practical demonstration of the message. There are also **indexes** in pictures of stethoscopes, test tubes containing some substance (suggesting medical/ laboratory), hands covered with the glove (protection), and professional coats (medical cover all). Again, there is spatially foregrounding of the picture of the persons as they stay close together, backing each other (inclusive efforts from different task points).

5.3 Sample 3
This sample aims at debunking part of the conspiracy theories that characterized the pandemic (the virus was produced in a laboratory). The advert makes use of the **conventional linguistic expression**: "the virus was lab engineered...." Then, there is the use of **indexes:** human hand holding a microscope suggesting human effort (hand); and laboratory (microscope), respectively.

5.4 Sample 4
The sample aims at illustrating how the virus can be defeated through a courageous fight. The message is also expressed multimodally. First, there is the use of **the linguistic expression** "Community, MFI, and Corona, Community and MFI can win the fight together ."Then, there is the use of human pictures as **icons** (a male dressed and positioned as a boxer and a female standing behind him). So, even when a woman does not have the physical strength to fight, she can still support her man in other ways. The fight requires inclusive efforts. There is also **a symbol** in the images and drawings which represent the virus that is challenging humans. Another aspect of the **symbol** is in colour (the image of the virus in red colour representing danger); the man is dressed in blue and white attire (associated with medical practice); the man is positioned as a boxer wearing boxing gloves (representing fight); both the man and the woman are wearing a face mask (protection). There is also the use of **spatial foregrounding** in the image of the virus (the biggest in front as leading in the fight, and four other ones behind as support).

5.5 Sample 5
The sample also debunks part of the conspiracy theory that anyone that is vaccinated against the virus has been micro chipped. This message is contained in conventional **linguistic expression:** "I'll be micro chipped..." "...wailed the conspiracy theorist across Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and TikTok". There is also the use of a **human hand icon** that is spread (suggesting being free). Again, the human hand is covered in a glove which is a **symbol** of safety. The drug bottle in front of the human hand is an **index** of medical treatment. Thus, the overall message is that the Covid-19 vaccine, contrary to the conspiracy theories, is clinically safe.

5.6 Sample 6
The message of this advert is about keeping safe against the pandemic. The advert makes use of both linguistic and other semiotic representations. The **linguistic** reads: "Stay protected from Corona" and "NO CARELESSNESS UNTIL THERE IS CURE" There is also the use of **human icons** used to demonstrate how to be protected from the virus (hands being washed with soap and face covered with a face mask). There is also the use of **spatial foregrounding** in the space between two individuals in pictures.

5.7 Sample 7
This sample contains the message of the need to fight the pandemic. But unlike other adverts treated so far, this sample has **no conventional linguistic symbols;** rather, it relies on other semiotic modes of representation. There is the **human icon** (a human being dressed like a boxer). The icon also has **index features** such as a boxing glove and head protector. Again, there are **symbols** (an **image symbol** or drawing representing the virus); **colour symbol**s (the image of the virus is coated in green, and the boxing glove is in red). Red colour can symbolize danger or attack depending on the context, as in this advert, and green colour can symbolize life. Thus, the danger or attack comes from the boxer. Notable also is that the red boxing hand is spatially close to the green virus, which communicates that the thriving virus (green) is under severe attack from the boxing hand (red glove).

5.8 Sample 8
The sample also contains messages on how to stay safe from the virus. The sample has both linguistic (not English language) and other modes of representation. However, one notices that even where the linguistic expressions are not in the English language, one can still decipher the message through the other modes. There is the use of **human icons**, which are dressed in corporate outfits. From their **body positions,** they are engaged in conversation. Meanwhile, they are also maintaining relative distance

(**spatial foregrounding**) from each other. So, one can see that business activities (symbolically represented in the corporate dress and position of the human icons) can be confidently carried out from a distance (space between the persons).

5.9 Sample 9
The sample contains the message of the need to create awareness about the pandemic. This is done through both the linguistic and non-linguistic. **Linguistics** has two languages (English and another) placed side by side. The English read "Coronavirus Global Awareness ."Probably, the other language is a translation of this. Then, there is the **human icon** (two males and two females). There is also the use of **a symbol** in the image of the virus presented in red colour (danger). Two of the human icons are wearing medical covers all, while two are wearing conventional dressed. This can therefore be interpreted as communicating the need for a concerted effort from both the medical and general society. There is also **spatial foregrounding** where the virus symbol is positioned above the head of the human icons, suggesting that it is the responsibility or burden of everyone.

6. Findings:
From the analyses so far, it has been discovered that Covid-19 messages and advertisements did not rely only on the conventional linguistic mode of communication. Multiple modes were used, involving the linguistic and other semiotic modes (icons, indexes, and symbols), as well as spatial foregrounding or proxemics. A major advantage of this technique is its accessibility to people of different backgrounds, languages, and classes, both the educated and non-educated. Furthermore, the multiple modes have the capability of concurrently communicating to the different senses, the cognitive, sight, and so on. Furthermore, the use of color symbols not only helps in the expression of messages but also adds significantly to the aesthetic appeal of the adverts.

 It is obvious that the pandemic era redefined some of the cultural perceptions about these non-verbal modes of expression. This is where we narrow our discourse specifically to the Nigerian context because the redefinition faced some challenges, and this may have affected the way Nigerians may perceive and interpret the analyzed adverts.

Prior to the period, handshake and hugging, for instance, were major non-verbal modes of expressing welcome and exchange of pleasantries in the country. In some micro-cultures in Nigeria, the Igbo, for instance, refusing a handshake or hug from someone, communicates a lack of trust, a grievance mood, and hostility. But the pandemic era changed the paradigm in the interpretation of such non-verbal modes of communication. However, adapting to such social adjustments was not easy, partly because of the imperatives of the (old) modes in the ecological harmony of the society. Such a paradigm shift also meant a distortion of the psychological harmony of the ecosystem, as it also required a corresponding adjustment in the thought pattern of the people. So the resistance of the people to the new ways of doing things was not only socially motivated but could also be seen as part of eco-cultural protection.

Again, the import of social distancing into the social life of the people formed another stranger to the socio-cultural fabric of the people. Unlike the western world, where communal life had long given way to privacy and individualism, Africans (Nigerians inclusive) still value communal living. Similarly, the economic environment of the country makes it impossible for a social distancing lifestyle to be imbibed. Business activities still rely on the physical movement of people and goods. This is unlike in the western world, where advanced technology has reduced the need for such physical movements.

Similarly, with particular reference to the socio-cultural implications, staying together marks part of the eco-harmony of the people. It goes with the psychological assurance of bonding, security, mutual trust, and dependability. So introducing social distancing, where people were meant to avoid communal gatherings, was viewed as a sharp knife pierced through the social aplomb of the people.

7. Conclusion
This paper is set to examine the relevance of the non-verbal mode of communication, essentially during the Covid-19 era in Nigeria. The paper observed that the era witnessed significant growth in the practice of communication as a multi-faceted process. It also observed that the effectiveness of the multi-modal practice of communication depends on the ability of the interlocutors to factor in the relevant contextual needs. The pandemic era thus created a special context that required major shifts from the usual ways of doing and perceiving things, and communication was not spared in this new order.

From the analyses and discussions so far, the paper concludes that the pandemic era created a veritable opportunity for the exploitation of multimodal communication. This was necessitated by the exegesis of the era, a period of global emergency that required timely communication with people of different backgrounds, abilities, and disabilities. The pandemic was a threat to all. Thus, all must be communicated to, if possible, at the same time. So the use of multimodal methods afforded the necessary broad reach and simultaneous appeal to different sensory organs. Again, it helped to break linguistic barriers occasioned by a multiplicity of world languages. As seen in some of the samples, even without the ability to comprehend the linguistic symbols, or where there is a total absence of linguistic symbols, the non-linguist representations could also convey the messages.

8. Recommendations

The paper recommends that language teaching should incorporate appreciable recognition of the non-verbal mode of communication. Prior to the Covid-19 era, emphasis was placed on conventional verbal symbols (speech and writing), with minimal reference to the non-verbal. But the Covid-19 pandemic has redirected our attention to recognize that communication through non-verbal is as effective as verbal. Therefore, curriculum designers are encouraged to include the teaching of non-verbal signs such as proxemics, kinesics, chronemics, and so on as part of language teaching.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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