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Stance Acts in Select Nigerian and South Korean News Report on COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The widespread of COVID-19 pandemic across the globe has been a subject of discourse in the media, with different media outlets striving to report issues of the pandemic to the general public since its outbreak. The question of media objectivity in portraying the pandemic has gained and will continue to receive scholarly attention. Hence, the objectivity of the print media in relaying the pandemic crisis in Nigeria and South Korea is called into question in this article which investigates stance acts in the reportage of COVID-19

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pandemic by a few select newspapers in Nigeria and South Korea. Twenty-eight extracts were purposively sampled, 7 each from Nigeria's *Daily Trust* and *This Day* as well as South Korea's *the Korea Times* and *the Korea Herald* respectively. This is intending to uncover the types of stance acts adopted by each newspaper, their pragmatic functions, the choice of lexico-grammatical resources for expressing stance and the objectivity of each news report in portraying the pandemic. The study draws insight from the conceptual framework of linguistic stance. The analysis shows that epistemic, deontic and affective stance acts featured in the news report. They are used to evaluate the COVID-19 pandemic, provide evidence to support the propositions made, and unveil dispositions in relation to the issue. Also, the assertive, commissive, expressive and directive speech acts serve to relay facts, indicate commitment, express feelings and issue order. Lexico-grammatical features such as modals, hedges and stance clauses signalled by verbs, adjectives and nouns function to introduce the epistemic, deontic and affective stance acts. Finally, each news report displayed a proclivity for the use of objective language in reporting the COVID-19 pandemic, even though there were very slight traces of the use of subjective language in some of the news reports.

Keywords: COVID-19, news reports, objectivity, stance acts, subjectivity

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is a communicable disease that reportedly began in China in December 2019 and has since circulated across the world in a short period of time. The havoc caused by the pandemic forced all nations around the world to go into lockdown mode in an effort to stem its spread. Nigeria and South Korea were not exempted from the pandemic's devastation. Most countries had to announce their national lockdown in a bid to slow the spread of the virus thereby reducing the number of fatalities. Since the pandemic attracts the

attention of the print media globally by its very existence, delivering an impartial and balanced report becomes difficult, if not impossible.

Studies on the COVID-19 pandemic have been carried out from disciplines such as health (Menekli et al. 2021, Papanikos 2021), mass media communication (Fitzpatrick 2022, Osisanwo 2022), sociology (Bäckman 2022, Jurić 2022), business and economics (Jan Reid 2021, Struwig & Watson 2021), tourism (Gukiina & Lamunu 2021, Jones 2022), and linguistics (Asiru & Bello 2021, Edem 2021). Linguistic studies on the COVID-19 pandemic have been conducted using theoretical insights from discourse analysis (Kenneth & Silas Odhiambo 2020, Xue & Xu 2021), critical discourse analysis (Dezhkameh et al. 2021, Mu et al. 2021), pragmatics (Solomon-Etefia & Edem 2020) and sociolinguistics (Ibrahim et al. 2020, Sneller 2022). This study differs from the abovementioned studies in that it investigates the COVID-19 pandemic in select Nigeria and South Korea news reports drawing insights from the conceptual framework of linguistic stance. The aim is to uncover the types of stance acts adopted by each newspaper, the choice of lexico-grammatical resources for expressing such stance, the pragmatic functions of stance act as well as the objectivity of the selected news report in portraying the pandemic. To achieve this aim, the next subsection takes on the concept of linguistic stance.

2. Theoretical and Analytical Tool

Speakers and writers from differing disciplinary fields employ diverse linguistic features in aligning themselves regarding the propositions they make during the conversation (Bloor & Bloor 2007). This is to enable them to project their identity, develop a self-assured personality,

captivate readers, and persuade them of their points of view (Dong & Buckingham 2020). To comprehend and construe the propositional content of these views as well as their impact on listeners or readers, Bloor & Bloor (2007) observe that it is imperative to identify the position espoused by communicators in relation to their discourse subject. One of the many linguistic tools used by communicators in taking a position on a subject is stance.

Over the years, the phenomenon of ‘stance’ has been studied extensively in a variety of fields and identified by a variety of scholars. For example, stance is described as the “lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgment, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message” (Biber & Finegan 1988: 124). According to Hyland (2014: 101), it is seen as “the way that writers project themselves into their texts to express their honesty, authenticity, commitment, and a connection to their subject matter and their readers”. Similarly, Du Bois (2007: 169) views stance as a process where interlocutors implement social actions by evaluating objects, situating subjects, and associating with other subjects by articulate means concerning “any silent dimension of meaning in the sociocultural field”. From the foregoing definitions, it is glaring that stance is an interactive practice that involves the collective positioning of discourse subjects and objects (Englebretson 2007, Szczyrbak 2019, New Jr. 2022). It is the expression of one’s own opinion on a piece of knowledge that has been presented.

Stance can be viewed as a grammatically expressed mode of social activity whose meaning must be perceived within the context of language, communication, and societal value (Du Bois 2007: 139). It may reflect an individual writer’s point of view or a group’s attitude or goal. The manner in which a viewpoint or attitude is expressed in a text may be conceptual or linguistic, and writers and speakers use

various linguistic and discursive methods depending on the genres and societal norms in which they function (Bloor & Bloor 2007: 47). According to Precht (2003), stance is influenced by tradition, practice, and sense of usage, and stance-takers change their choice of stance markers to determine how others view them.

Different types of stances have been identified by linguists. For instance, Bloor & Bloor (2007: 33–34) discuss the different types of stances and how they can be visible or hidden, conscious or unconscious. They go on to distinguish between two forms of stances: affect and judgment. The former is used to convey sentiment, while the latter is used to create a moral assessment of an event or individual. Conrad & Biber (2000) divide stance into three categories: epistemic, attitudinal, and style. Epistemic stance refers to a speaker or writer's "belief about the truth of a state of affairs" (Yang et al. 2020: 145). It can also be referred to as the "degree of certainty concerning the object of discussion" (Chindamo et al. 2012, Ghorbanpour et al. 2019, Punske 2019). While attitudinal stance relates to the speaker or writer's position as indicating his action, feeling or mood; Style stance involves the speaker and writer's manner of speaking. Similarly, Hyland (2005) classifies stance taxonomy into different subcategories, namely: hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions. Hedges are expressions used to express certainty or uncertainty, soften what is said or written and make a statement less forceful or assertive. Boosters are constructions used to support a claim or express a viewpoint more assertively and convincingly. While attitude markers function to express a writer's perspective or evaluation of the propositional content, self-mention is a powerful rhetorical strategy used in constructing authorial identity in spoken or written discourse (Hyland 2005, Pericliev 2022).

Speaking on the significance of stance, Du Bois (2007) states that

the phenomenon of stance in communication attributes meaning to objects of interest, assigns social actors in relation to those objects, adjusts positioning between stance takers, and instils implied social and cultural value structures. According to Yang et al. (2020), stance shows a pragmatic relationship between linguistic items, meaning, and personal thought habits, emotions, attitudes, beliefs, decisions, and evaluations of writers or speakers. Similarly, Hyland & Jiang (2016) state that stance encourages productive contact between writers and expected readers and develops social relationships between them. Also, it allows speakers and writers to develop their personalities, create an influential persona during contact, involve readers, and articulate their arguments in a convincing manner (Dong & Buckingham 2020). Given the importance of the phenomenon of stance in communication, the present article examines the concept in a few select news reports in order to determine its different types, the lexico-grammatical resources for expressing it, the pragmatic functions of stance act as well as the objectivity of each news reports in reporting the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Data and Methods

News reports from South Korea and Nigeria served as the study's data sources. Both nations were picked for this study because they have developed strong collaborative relations. The global pandemic that both nations experienced and how it was handled is another argument in favor of the choice. The pandemic crisis began to affect both nations at separate times. Nigeria's first incidence of the COVID-19 pandemic was reported on February 27, 2020, whereas the first case in South Korea was reported on January 20, 2020. Finally, the

media outlets in both nations work to document and communicate the pandemic issue to audiences both domestically and abroad. In light of this, the study's main objective is to examine both nations' print media's objectivity in reporting on the pandemic issue. The data for analysis comprises twenty-eight (28) excerpts purposively sampled from both countries' news report. While 14 excerpts were manually extracted from Nigeria's *Daily Trust* and *This Day* newspapers, the remaining 14 were sourced online from the websites of South Korea's *the Korea Times* and *the Korea Herald*. To facilitate the data analysis, news reports written in the English language were chosen from both countries. The study adopts a qualitative research method and only extracts that addressed issues of the pandemic were selected and lexical items signaling stance acts in the selected extracts were examined and subjected to analysis using insights from the concept of linguistic stance. More so, the lexico-grammatical features were further segmented and scrutinized in order to determine the types of stances adopted by each news report, the pragmatic functions of stance act as well as the objectivity of each news report in relaying the pandemic.

4. Results and Discussion

The study of stance acts in the chosen news report is done in this section. The aim is to identify the types of stances used in each news report, the lexico-grammatical resources for expressing stance, their pragmatic functions, and the objectivity of each news report in covering the pandemic. Some terms used in the analysis are stance subject (the speaker or reporter) and stance object (the message or discourse subject). The data analysis begins with Nigeria's *Daily*

Trust and followed by *This Day*.

4.1. Analysis of Stance Acts in Nigeria's *Daily Trust*

Daily Trust is one of the popular news publications in Nigeria. The reason for this is that it gives news on current happenings in Nigeria and the rest of the world. This news coverage acquaints the public with the economic, social, health, religious, and political issues in Nigeria. The COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria has been extensively covered by this news publication. The excerpts from this news report that follow demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic was covered.

- (1) While the impact of the pandemic on health and healthcare seems quite obvious, there are speculations about the possible cascading impacts of the global lockdown spurred by the virus, especially if it sustained over the next couple of months.
(Obilade 2020)

The first text takes an epistemic approach in discussing the potential effects of a lengthy global lockdown on the general public. The vocabulary item “speculations” denotes a doubtful attitude on the part of the news reporter about his knowledge of the propositional content of the message. Observe the use of the word “seems”; It is a hedge phrase that serves as a communicative device to lessen the impact of the reporter’s assertion. The hedge phrase in particular demonstrates the reporter’s lack of commitment to this assertion. A close reading of the text demonstrates the use of both objective and subjective language. The expression “...the impact of the pandemic on health and healthcare seems quite obvious...” is an instance of the use of the former given that the reporter’s statement about the effects of the pandemic is based on fact. Conversely, the lexical item “speculation”

demonstrates the latter because the claim made by the reporter is based on rumors. Pragmatically, the text illustrates a representative speech act in that it is utilised in stating the discourse subject.

- (2) One thing is certain: if the lockdown persists over the next four months or so, many of the West’s top companies, already economically haemorrhaging from disruptions in supply chains and lack of customers, may go belly-up or become a shadow of their former selves at least for a while (if they are saved by their government life support).

(Obilade 2020)

As opposed to the first text’s portrayal of the nation’s health sector, the second text focuses on the economic sector. The epistemic stance act is applied in this news article to describe how the prolonged lockdown has affected the nation’s economy. Observe the use of the adverb “certain”; It is a verbal booster utilised to capture the news reporter’s perspective with regard to the propositional content of the message. Specifically, it exemplifies the reporter’s credence in the assertion made due to its factual nature. Also, it is important to note that the following lexical expressions, “economically haemorrhaging”, “belly-up”, and “shadow of their former selves” perform a descriptive function. A closer examination of these lexical phrases reveals that they have negative connotations that are connected to the pandemic’s adverse repercussions on the nation’s economy. This text illustrates an assertive speech act given that it expresses the reporter’s objectivity in communicating factuality.

- (3) Even as the deadly virus spread from China with amazing rapidity across the United States, between late January and early March, the Nigerian government still ignored calls to close our airports and sea boarders as a preventive measure.
(Obilade 2020)

The third text employs the representative speech act in relating the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Nigerian government's negligence in preventing its entry into the country. The epistemic stance act features in this text. It is captured in the expressions, "Even as the deadly virus spread from China with amazing rapidity across the United States..." and "...the Nigeria government still ignored calls to close our airports and sea boarders...". The stance phrases "deadly" and "amazing" in the first expression are adjectives serving descriptive functions. The lexical items, "Virus" and "rapidity" are modified by these adjectives. This modification aids in acquainting the general public with the destructive nature of the pandemic. Additionally, these stance expressions exemplify the reporter's knowledge about the discourse subject. Since they are based on factuality, they demonstrate the reporter's objectivity in reporting the pandemic.

- (4) The coronavirus has spread to 16 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) with fears of escalation and amid criticism by experts that President Muhammadu Buhari did not take action at the right time to stem the tide.
(Obilade 2020)

The reporter's use of three stance acts is indicated in the fourth text. The first is epistemic in nature. It is captured in "The coronavirus has

spread to 16 states and the Federal Capital Territory...”. This expression exemplifies the reporter’s familiarity with the discourse subject as well as his objectivity in discussing the issue. The second stance is affective in orientation given that it is based on emotion and as such reveals the reporter’s concern with respect to the discourse subject as captured in the proposition “...with fears of escalation...”. The third stance is deontic in nature. This is because it adopts a judgemental and evaluative viewpoint as seen in the expression “...amid criticisms by experts that President Muhammadu Buhari did not take action...”. This expression illustrates subjectivity in language use given that it is based on opinions. The above stance acts work collaboratively and are used by the reporter to inform Nigerians about the rapid rate at which the virus is spreading as well as the blame levied on the government for not taking proactive measures at the right time.

- (5) By the time Nigeria recorded its first case on February 27, 2020, the virus had already been raging across many countries for about two month and the World Health Organisation (WHO), had even already declared it a global pandemic.
(Obilade 2020)

The stance expressions “By the time Nigeria recorded its first case...”, “...had already been raging...”, and “...had even already declared it a global pandemic” in text five signal the epistemic stance act given that it indicates the reporter’s knowledge about the rapid spread of the virus, the statistics of affected victims as well as the declaration of the World Health Organization. The epistemic stance serves informative and evidential purposes in this text. It informs the reader of the rapid spread of the virus and also provides the source of the information as captured in the expression “...the World Health

Organization had even already declared it a global pandemic”. A closer examination of the text reveals that the stance phrases above exemplify the reporter’s strong credence in the propositional content of the message.

- (6) Three days later (on March 21) when the Nigerian government announced it would close its two main international airports in the cities of Lagos and Abuja for one month, the Federal Ministry of Health confirmed 10 additional cases of the coronavirus in the country, bringing the total number on that day to 22. (Obilade 2020)

In text six, the stance verbs “announced” and “confirmed” are lexico-grammatical devices introducing the epistemic stance act. These verbs communicate the speaker’s knowledge about the stance object which dwells on the Nigerian government’s decision to shut down the country’s two main international airports. The reporter’s belief in his averment is demonstrated by these verbs, which also perform an evidential function by supplying the source of the information. Unlike the second verb, which reinforces the reporter’s propositional content by identifying the information source, the first is employed by the reporter to relate the stance object.

- (7) Nigerians in the Diaspora are already feeling the heat. In the coming days, they will face a decline in revenue and you can imagine the effects on their families. (Obilade 2020)

Text seven contains the deontic and affective stance acts. The first stance act is indicated by the proposition, “Nigerians in the Diaspora are already feeling the heat”, which conveys the nation’s worry about

the pandemic's negative effects. Conversely, the second is introduced by the lexical expression "...they will face a decline in revenue..." which acts as an evaluation of the stance message. Similarly, the lexical expression "...imagine the impacts on their families" serves an affective function by drawing attention to the feelings of Nigerians who are being affected by the pandemic's negative effects. The study of stance acts in Nigeria's *This Day* is covered in the next section.

4.2. Analysis of Stance Acts in Nigeria's *This Day*

This Day, a widely read national news publication in Nigeria, is comparable to the *Daily Trust* in terms of readership. The COVID-19 epidemic in Nigeria has also been extensively covered by it since it first emerged. The excerpts below demonstrate how this news report has covered the COVID-19 epidemic.

- (8) "So, I tell you in plain language and with all the emphasis at my disposal, wear your face mask always and correctly", she further advised. (Godwin 2020)

The eighth text focuses on the precautionary measures given to the general public in order to avoid contracting the COVID-19 pandemic. The text illustrates the deontic approach given that it adopts a prescriptive viewpoint and objective language in relation to the topic as seen in the proposition, "so, I tell you in plain language...wear your face mask always and correctly...". The following stance phrases, "tell" and "advised" are dynamic verbs denoting action. The prescriptive approach to the discourse subject adopted by the text is realised with the aid of these verbs. From the text, the deontic stance act is used in requesting the addressee to perform a certain task. The task refers to the advice given to the addressee. It is important to note the

significance of the adverb “always”. It serves as a verbal booster to heighten the force of the reporter’s proposition. Pragmatically, the text features the directive speech act through which the reporter is able to issue a command as well as make a request.

- (9) “How will they encourage people to come forward for testing when its own officials are afraid of test? This is sad”.
(Godwin 2020)

Text nine relates the unwillingness of Nigeria’s health workers to take the COVID-19 test. The two stance acts employed here are deontic and affective in orientation. While the deontic stance is introduced by the expression, “how will they encourage people to come forward for texting when its own officials are afraid of the test?”, the affective stance is captured in the proposition, “This is sad.” The first proposition is deontic in orientation seeing that it adopts an evaluative viewpoint in relation to the subject of discourse. Conversely, the second is affective in orientation considering that it highlights the emotion (anger and grief) of the reporter in relation to the discourse subject. The deontic stance act captures the COVID-19 test which the Nigeria’s health workers are expected to take while the affective stance reveals the disposition of the reporter towards the stance object. Noteworthy is the fact that the text features the directive and expressive speech acts. Pragmatically, the former challenges the health workers’ unwillingness to submit to the COVID-19 test while the latter expresses the speaker’s dissatisfaction over the situation.

- (10) In spite of the COVID-19 induced lockdown, the singer is still making massive moves to top the spotlight.
(Godwin 2020)

The tenth text reports the violation of COVID-19 safety measures in Nigeria. This reportage is achieved through the epistemic stance act which exemplifies the speaker's general knowledge about the discourse subject. The speaker, here, is cognizant of the lockdown imposed by the government as well as the violation of the COVID-19 safety measures. This knowledge serves as evidence to buttress the proposition expressed in this text. The language employed here is objective and focuses on facts that can be proven about the lockdown and violation of the COVID-19 safety measures. Pragmatically, the text utilises the representative speech act in informing the public about the stance object.

- (11) Few days back, the Director General of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Chikwe Ihekweazu was threatening Nigerians with another total lockdown if they continue to violate some health guidelines. (Godwin 2020)

The deontic stance act is used in text eleven for appraisal. Specifically, the text relates the threat of a total lockdown proposed by the Director General of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. The text is deontic in orientation considering that it adopts a prescriptive approach in relation to the discourse subject. This prescriptive approach is seen in the threat action proposed by the director as measures to curb Nigerians' violation of health guidelines. The text also features the commissive speech act which is employed by the speaker in committing himself to some future action. The expression "...if they continue to violate some health guidelines..." forms the basis for the threat issued by the speaker.

- (12) “We are facing a national challenge and all hands must be on deck to navigate this difficult course. (Godwin 2020)

Text twelve informs the public about the health crisis which the nation is experiencing. The expression “We are facing a national challenge and all hands must be on deck...” introduces the deontic stance act considering its evaluative approach in relation to the subject of discourse. Stance adjectives such as “national” and “difficult” perform descriptive functions in that they describe the nouns “challenge” and “course”. All these lexical items are used to refer to the health crisis. Through the directive speech act, the speaker is able to request the entire masses to support the government in tackling the pandemic.

- (13) The whole process has been battered by breaches of anti-corruption standard such as cutting of corners in procurement processes, pocketing of donations and inflation of COVID-19 cases amongst others. (Godwin 2020)

Text thirteen adopts the deontic stance and assertive speech acts in relating how the efforts to curb the COVID-19 pandemic have been frustrated. The text is deontic in orientation for adopting an evaluative position in relation to the discourse subject. Observe that the expression, “the whole process” refers to the measures deployed in combatting the virus; “has been battered” denotes the frustration of these measures; “cutting of corners”, “pocketing of donations” as well as “inflation of the virus cases” captures the different means by which the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic has been frustrated. While the above deontic expressions perform evaluative roles, the assertive speech act is used to describe the frustration of the fight against the

Coronavirus pandemic.

- (14) Lagos State Government has made arrangements to begin a hydro-chloroquine trial on COVID-19 patients.

(Godwin 2020)

Epistemic stance and commissive speech acts feature in text fourteen. The epistemic stance indicates the speaker's knowledge about the Lagos State Government's plan to begin a hydro-chloroquine trial on COVID-19 patients. Apart from stating the certainty of the speaker's knowledge, it captures the speaker's objectivity in language use as well as his degree of commitment to the truth of the proposition. Pragmatically, the commissive speech act illustrates the speaker's commitment to the proposition which is hinged on the pledge made by the Lagos State Government to administer hydro-chloroquine on victims of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section begins the analysis of South Korea's news reports.

4.3. Analysis of Stance Acts in South Korea's *the Korea Times*

The Korea Times is one of three English-language newspapers published daily in South Korea. The paper was founded in the 1950s. As the oldest of three English language newspapers in Korea, it provides the most recent information on all stories and events occurring in Korea. This section presents the analysis of stance acts in this newspaper with a view to uncovering the types of stance acts used, the lexico-grammatical resources for expressing stance, the pragmatic functions of stance act as well as the objectivity of this news report in covering the pandemic. The texts below are extracted from the *Korean Times*.

- (15) Severe and critical cases of COVID-19 hit a two-month high here Monday as the highly contagious Omicron variant continues to spread rapidly across the country and fuel new outbreaks. (Woo 2022)

Text fifteen features the epistemic and deontic stance acts. Both stance acts are used to comment on the Omicron, a brand-new COVID-19 derivative. The news report is epistemic in orientation given that it employs objective language in registering the reporter's knowledge of the rapid spread of the brand new COVID-19 derivative. Lexical verbs such as "hit", "continues", "spread", and "fuel" indicates the reporter's confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. However, the news report is equally deontic in orientation for adopting an evaluative viewpoint in relation to the stance object. Stance adjectives such as "serious", "critical", and "contagious" as well as stance adverbs such as "highly" and "rapidly" serve evaluative purposes considering that they exemplify the reporter's assessment of this new variation. Additionally, these lexical items act as boosters to emphasize the Omicron's destructive nature. Pragmatically, the news report illustrates the representative speech act because of its assertive and descriptive prowess.

- (16) The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) reported 202,721 new infections, including 202,647 local ones, raising the total caseload to 4,869,691. (Woo 2022)

Text sixteen contains the epistemic stance act. It is signaled by the verb "reported" which indicates that it is a report presented by KDCA¹. Here, the epistemic stance act performs an evidential

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: Korea Disease Control and

function in that it not only highlights the reporter's familiarity with the most recent information on the Coronavirus epidemic but also provide the source where the information is derived. This news report illustrates a representative speech act because it employs objective language in relating the reporter's knowledge of the most recent statistics on newly infected victims of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Korea.

- (17) The Omicron variant has caused an unprecedented surge in cases in recent week. The overall total passed 4 million Saturday, just five days after reaching the 3 million mark. The country crossed 1 million mark early last month, the KDCA said. (Woo 2022)

Two stance acts are noted in text seventeen. The first is epistemic, whereas the second falls within the deontic classification. The reporter discusses the novel Omicron variety and the number of victims it has affected. Lexical indicators of the deontic stance include "caused", "passed", and "crossed", while the verb "said" introduces the epistemic viewpoint. Additionally, to convey an assessment of the news report, adjectives like "omicron", "unprecedented", and "overall" modify nouns like "variant", "surge", and "overall". The epistemic term "said" also refers to evidentiality. The use of this verb shows that the reporter's information came from the KDCA. By citing the KDCA as the information's source, the reporter shows a high level of confidence in the news report's veracity.

- (18) On Monday, the KDCA raised the country’s pandemic risk level to the highest for the week ending Saturday, considering the number of critical cases, bed occupancy rates in intensive care units, and rates patients aged 60 and above.

(Woo 2022)

In text eighteen, lexical terms like “increased”, “pandemic risk”, “important cases”, “bed occupancy rates”, “intensive care units”, and “patients” introduce the lexico-grammatical elements and speech acts the reporter used in addressing the pandemic problem. The deontic stance act is indicated by the verbs “raised” and “considering.” These verbs are dynamic and participial, and they describe the decision taken by KDCA. In contrast to the first verb, which represents the KDCA’s decision, the second verb describes the factors that influenced the KDCA’s decision. In order to help the KDCA decide what action to take next, the deontic stance assesses the pandemic’s state. Observe how the adjectives “pandemic”, “critical”, “intense”, and “care” describe the nominal items “danger”, “cases”, and “units”, all of which work in concert in this news report to present readers a glimpse of the seriousness of the pandemic. The KDCA uses the assertive speech act to inform the public about its decision.

- (19) Facing a shortage of medical resources, the government has turned its focus to treating serious cases and preventing deaths, ending its rigorous contact tracing program.

(Woo 2022)

The deontic stance act is introduced in text nineteen by the lexical items “has turned”. Through the representative speech act, the stance verb outlines and describes the proactive steps taken by the government

to handle critical cases of COVID-19 in order to avert deaths. Also, lexical items such as “medical”, “serious”, and “rigorous” are qualifiers which add more descriptive quality to the following nouns, “resources”, “cases”, and “contact”. These lexical items—adjectives and nouns—show negative impact which the COVID-19 virus has had on the general populace.

- (20) The country added 186 more deaths, bringing the toll to 9,282 for a fatality rate of 0.19 percent. (Woo 2022)

The epistemic position is emphasized in text twenty. It is introduced with the stance verb “added” and employed by the reporter to quote a trustworthy source. The co-occurrence of lexical expressions such as “the country” with “186 more deaths” and “fatality rate”, which aid in separating fact from opinion, is also noteworthy. Such configurations can be found in the reporter’s references to what he observed. When prefaced with the lexical verb “added”, the news report appeared categorical and pointed to the reporter’s objective qualification of the information.

- (21) Virus-related health protocols were eased, allowing cafes and restaurants to run until 11 pm, starting Saturday, to reduce financial pain for small businesses. But private gatherings of more than six people are still prohibited. (Woo 2022)

The deontic stance and assertive speech act are featured in the twenty-first text. As discourse markers, adjectives (e.g., virus-related, health-related, and financial), nouns (e.g., protocols, cafes, restaurants, and pains), as well as verbs (e.g., eased, run, reduce, and prohibited), highlight the news report’s content. However, while these markers are

deontic in orientation for providing a descriptive evaluation of the measures adopted by the government to avert the death of small-scale businesses in the country, they are also assertive in that they enable the reporter to relate the content of the news report.

4.4. Analysis of Stance Acts in South Korea's *the Korea Herald*

The Korea Herald is the top-ranked and largest English-language daily newspaper in South Korea. It was founded in 1953 by the Herald Media Incorporation. The paper provides news coverage on a variety of topics including politics, social issues, business, science, education, sports, entertainment, and fashion. Also, it features editorials and opinion pieces. *The Korea Herald* has been instrumental in covering the COVID-19 outbreak, much as *the Korea Times*. The sample texts that follow show how the epidemic was covered in the news report.

- (22) The South Korea government announced Friday that it will raise the private gathering size limit to 10 people and push back the current 11 pm curfew on restaurants and cafes to mid-night. (Shim 2022)

The twenty-second text discusses the South Korean government's decision to change the COVID-19 laws, which were originally created to limit the hours that businesses may operate and the size of private gatherings. The stance phrase "announced", which denotes knowledge and is occasionally employed in news reports to quote a trustworthy source, serves as a signal that the reporter is taking an epistemic position. However, the lexical verb "raise" and the modal "will" collaborate to introduce the commissive speech act, which is used to communicate the government's intention and plan. Additionally, the word "will" in this context denotes great likelihood and certainty,

demonstrating the reporter's neutrality and faith in the veracity of the news story.

- (23) Previously, expectations were growing for the latest change to social distancing rules to be the last, as the government viewed that the spread of COVID-19 passed its peak earlier this month. (Shim 2022)

With relation to the discourse subject, the twenty-third text takes a deontic perspective. It shows how nouns (such as expectations, change, and rules), adjectives (like social and distancing), and verbs (such as growing, viewed, and passed) can all serve as channels for evaluation. Lexical expressions such as "...expectations were growing...", "...government viewed...", and "...passed its peak..." convey the reporter's assessment on the topic at hand. The assessment is accomplished through the representative speech act.

- (24) The government currently expects the number of daily COVID-19 cases to go up 10–20 percent without the social distancing rules. (Shim 2022)

A closer inspection of the twenty-fourth text indicates that it intersperses features of more than a single discourse stance. The entire text is highly specific because it refers to the government exclusively. The lexical item "expects" is a mental verb deployed to introduce the affective stance. This is because it conveys expectancy, so, revealing the government's wish or desire towards the current situation. However, the expression "...go up 10–20 percent without the social distancing rules..." switches the news report's emphasis from an affective to a deontic orientation in order to take an evaluative stance

toward the topic.

- (25) On Thursday, the country suffered 360 COVID-19 deaths, raising the death toll from COVID-19 to 16,590. The fatality rates stood at 0.12 percent. (Shim 2022)

The twenty-fifth text demonstrates the reliability of news reporting by using statistical data to corroborate the assertions stated. The reporter uses lexical adjectives (such as COVID-19, death and fatality) to emphasize the devastation the pandemic has wreaked. The lexical verb “suffered” is used to project this wreak. The above adjectives modify nouns (such as death, toll, and rate), which not only educates readers about the virus’ destructive nature but also communicates the reporter’s intense concern and transmits it to the readers in order to draw their attention to the pandemic’s severity.

- (26) Meanwhile, the country added 280,273 daily COVID-19 cases during the 24 hours of Thursday, recording a figure below 300,000 for the first time in four days, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. The total caseload has reached 13,375,818. (Shim 2022)

Updates on daily COVID-19 caseloads serve as the conceptual point of reference for the twenty-sixth text. It discusses how the content of news report is represented objectively. The reporter adopts an epistemic orientation in relation to the topic of the discourse. Analyzing the news report more closely reveals that the reporter cites a trustworthy source by using the stance term “according to”. News reports frequently identify their informational sources to attest to the veracity of the claims expressed. This is clearly demonstrated by the

facts, especially because the reporter in this text specifically mentions the Korean Disease Control and Prevention Agency. Along with the statistical data, lexical verbs like “added”, “recorded”, and “reached” are used to further build on the discourse theme. Collectively, they demonstrate the reporter’s high level of confidence in news report as a whole.

(27) The number of critically ill patients came to 1,299, down 16 from the record high of 1,315 reported a day prior.

(Shim 2022)

In order to accurately report the number of people affected by the virus, the twenty-seventh text adopts an epistemic position and a representative speech act. The text, which is solely focused on conveying the intended message, demonstrates the reporter’s predilection for extremely dynamic predicates (e.g., came and reported) in the past tense. The verb “reported” here is a lexico-grammatical feature deployed to denote evidentiality. Additionally, the news report refers to its content in a deictic manner while remaining largely specific and factual in tone. This is captured in the expression “The number of critically ill patients came to 1,299...”.

5. Findings and Conclusion

This study examined stance acts in the reportage of COVID-19 pandemic by a few select newspapers in Nigeria and South Korea. The objective was to determine the types of stance acts that were utilized in the news reports, their pragmatic functions, the lexico-grammatical elements that were used in stance construction, and the objectivity of

each news report in terms of how they represented the epidemic. The study used 28 extracts in order to achieve this goal, seven from each of the South Korea's *the Korea Herald* and *the Korea Times* and Nigeria's *Daily Trust* and *This Day*. The findings, which drew on the linguistic stance model, demonstrated that the news reports made use of the epistemic, deontic, and affective stance acts. In contrast to *the Korea Times* and *This Day*, which exhibited a preference for the application of deontic stance acts, *the Korea Herald* and *Daily Trust* displayed a penchant for the use of epistemic stance. These stance acts were employed to evaluate the COVID-19 pandemic, provide evidence to support the claims made about the virus, and reflect the attitudes and feelings of the news reporters and the general public around the epidemic.

Noteworthy was the use of assertive and representative speech acts by each news report to relay facts about the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Korea Herald* and *This Day* employed the commissive speech act to indicate a commitment to the issues of COVID-19 pandemic and the expressive speech act to convey feelings and opinions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only *This Day* employed the directive speech act. Apart from the pragmatic purposes served by these speech acts, it is significant to note that each news report showed a proclivity for the use of objective language in the presentation of information about the COVID-19 pandemic, even though there were very slight traces of subjective language in some of the news reports. The aforementioned stance acts were expressed using lexico-grammatical tools such as adverbs, modals, hedges, boosters, and stance complement clauses signaled by verbs, adjectives, and nouns.

In sum, the study adds to the body of knowledge on the COVID-19 epidemic by accentuating the importance of stance in evaluating the issues presented in media texts. The findings can deepen our

understanding of how media discourses take different positions and the linguistic tools employed in print media to present issues and occurrences without respect to the writer's own beliefs or opinions.

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