

Original Paper

The Impact of Coronavirus on English Word-stock

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Abstract

In December 2019, the news of the coronavirus outbreak spread worldwide for the first time. At present, this historical event has already influenced merely all aspects of life. The language is one of the first that reflected the massive events occurring throughout the world.

In the frame of this article, an attempt is made, firstly, to figure out dozens of new words, expressions and new definitions emerged in English due to global changes. Secondly, are considered the semantic changes some words have undergone as a result of extralinguistic processes i.e., narrowing of meaning, semantic broadening, etc. Thirdly, are emphasized the main word-formation means of coining new words and expressions: suffixation, compounding, abbreviation, etc.

Keywords

COVID-19, word-stock changes, semantic changes, word-formation, war metaphors

1. Introduction

In December 2019, the news of the coronavirus outbreak spread worldwide for the first time. Four months later, on March 11, 2020, pandemic was announced. According to the data reported on 01 October 2020 on the website Worldometers.info, 213 Countries and Territories around the world have reported a total of 34,084,376 confirmed cases of COVID-19. This historical event has had a serious influence on all aspects of social life, from public health to economy, industry, education and social media.

Historical challenges found also their reverberation in the language and previously uncommon terms swiftly entered the word-stock to mirror the new changes. Dozens of new words, expressions and new definitions emerged in English due to these global changes.

The pandemic has also led to the emergence of new relevance and meaning to words already existing in the lexicon. Some of the new words and definitions are already fixed in the dictionaries, while others are too colloquial and haven't found their manifestation in the literal language yet.

As for the word coronavirus, we are faced with an interesting fact. This lexical unit is not a neologism. June Almeida and David Tyrrell, who first observed and studied human coronaviruses, noticed that the virus had a halo surrounding it and coined the name of the virus. It was first used in print in 1968 by an informal group of virologists in the journal *Nature* to designate the new family of viruses (Nature.com). Passing on to the architecture of the word *coronavirus*, it is derived from the words *corona* (crown-like circle of light appearing around the moon and the sun) + *virus*.

Corona, in its turn, is derived from Latin word *corona* (garland, wreath; crown), which itself comes from Ancient Greek word *κορώνη* (*korónē*, something curved; end, point, tip) (etymonline.com). The word coronavirus and its first root *corona* have been used to create lots of neologisms.

In the first step of our study we intend to explore the word formation means applied for coining new lexical units relating to this topic: *affixation*, *compounding*, *conversion*, *shortening*, *abbreviation*, *blending*.

1) **Affixation** is considered to be one of the most productive word-formation means (Girunyan, 2009). In case of coronavirus vocabulary, however, words formed by affixes are not so numerous. The most well-known word is the adjective *anticoronavirus*.

This word is framed by the prefix anti+coronavirus and implies the meaning *acting against coronavirus*.

According to the data of 14.09.2020, there are more than 31801 posts on Instagram containing hashtag *anticoronavirus* (Instagram.com).

2) **Compounding** is also one of the most productive ways of word-formation that worked intensively in the process of enriching the word-stock. Neologisms like *coronaphobia*, *coronacoinage*, *zoombombing*, *coronababy*, *coronacut*, *doomscrolling* emerged in the period of coronavirus pandemic.

Coronaphobia is the constant fear of catching COVID-19 (coronavirus), expressed by wearing a face mask in public, or totally avoiding public places, public events, public transport, etc. (Urbandictionary.com)

This word is the combination of *corona+phobia*. There is a similar word coronaparanoia (corona+paranoia).

More research is needed to understand the relationship between coronaphobia and coronavirus-related xenophobia (Ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

Coronacoinage refers to the new words and expressions that appeared due to the novel coronavirus. The word emerged from the words *corona* and *coin+age*.

There is an article posted on March 16, 2020 in website Fritinancy named “*Words of the week: Coronacoinages*” that introduces lots of new words relating to COVID-19 vocabulary

(Nancyfriedman.typepad.com).

Zoombombing is the combination of words *Zoom* and *bombing*. Originated from the name of the Zoom videoconferencing software program, the word means an unwanted, disturbing intervention, generally by Internet trolls and hackers, into a video conference call (Urbandictionary.com).

The firm said Zoom 5.0 will include upgraded encryption features to help protect data and fend off so-called “Zoombombing” (BBC.com).

The term became popular in 2020, when video conferencing became an alternative way of arranging classes, business meetings, etc. The term has also been used in reference to similar incidents on other teleconferencing platforms as a result of generalization of its meaning.

Coronababy (corona+baby) is the child born in 2020 during the quarantine caused by COVID-19. The word also refers to the babies that will be born after the Coronavirus quarantine is over.

Our city’s population doubled in 2021 because of all the coronababies born (Urbandictionary.com).

Doomscrolling (doom+scrolling) is the process of obsessively reading social media posts about coronavirus and sociopolitical situation of the world because of the lockdown (Dictionary.com).

Unfortunately, doomscrolling has worsened during the pandemic because people are hypervigilant for danger and are more likely to seek information in hopes of finding a way to control the problem (Healthline.com).

Coronacut (corona+cut) is the result of cutting one’s own or family members' hair due to the closure of hair salons.

For example, virtual channel NBC New York posted a video named “*Hair Stylist Explains Why You Shouldn’t Get A #Coronacut*”, showing some examples of coronacuts and explaining the reasons for not making that decision (Nbcnewyork.com).

Compound words may be prerequisite for their semantic dimensions. In terms of endocentric compounds, the total meaning of the unit is derived from the meaning of its constituents as in the adduced examples coronababy, coronacoinsages, whereas in the compounds coronacut, zoombombing, the meaning of the whole is “darkened” as it implies some metaphorical shift. Hence, they can be defined as exocentric type of compounding.

3) **Conversion** is highly productive in the formation of verbs, especially from compound nouns (Ginzburg, 1979, p. 136).

In case of the verb *to social distance*, adjective *social* has converted (transformed) into a verb; *to social*. Social distancing or social distance are formerly existing terms but the verb of the expression is new and appeared due to conversion.

Social distancing used to be an expression showing a fancy way for introverts to seclude themselves. Recently it gained its second meaning and is used to describe the practice of keeping away from other people as much as possible, or of keeping a certain distance from other people, in order to stop a disease from spreading to a lot of people (Dictionary.cambridge.org).

We can illustrate the expression by the example of the article posted on the official website Redcross.org i.e., “*How to Social Distance During COVID-19*” (Redcross.org).

The verbal expression *to shelter in place* (derived from the corresponding adjective) means to find a safe location indoors and stay there because of hazards. The first known use of this word was in 1977 as an adjective in the expression *shelter in place order*, meaning an official order, issued during an emergency, that directs people to stay in the indoor place or building that they already occupy and not to leave unless absolutely necessary (Merriam-webster.com).

At present, the verb *shelter in place* has acquired a new shade of meaning and is used for staying at home and not leaving it unnecessarily because of the coronavirus outbreak.

San Francisco and five other Bay Area counties in California have ordered all residents to shelter-in-place to curb the spread of coronavirus (Theguardian.com).

Modern English vocabulary is exceedingly rich in conversion pairs. As a way of forming words conversion is extremely productive and new conversion pairs make their appearance in fiction, newspaper articles and in the process of oral communication in all spheres of human activity gradually forcing their way into the existing vocabulary and into the dictionaries as well (Ginzburg, 1979, p. 136).

4) Shortening is a form of subtraction in which part of the word is taken away. Shortened variants of the words are more common in spoken language and are therefore stylistically colored (Girunyan, 2009).

The shortened variant of coronavirus, i.e., *corona* is used extensively among people.

As it was stated above, the name “coronavirus” itself is derived from Latin word *corona*, meaning “crown” or “wreath”. But the shortened variant of coronavirus indicates neither the crown nor the circle of light that can sometimes be seen around the moon at night, or around the sun during an eclipse. It indicates coronavirus itself and is considered to be the shortened variant of the very word.

The word *corona* is shortened to *rona*, which is more colloquial (dictionary.com).

It’s astoundingly interesting, that coronavirus is personified as Miss Rona, Aunt Rona, the Rona, to refer to COVID-19 ironically, especially when commenting on the challenges of social distancing during the pandemic in more humorous way. A possible explanation to this phenomenon is that the shortened form of the word coronavirus, i.e., *rona* coincides with the existing female name *Rona* (Hebrew female name (meaning: song, joy), Celtic-Gaelic female name “rough island” in Gaelic (Behindthename.com)).

5) The term **abbreviation** may be also used for a shortened form of a written word or phrase used in a text in place of the whole for economy of space and effort. Abbreviation is achieved by omission of letters from one or more parts of the whole (Arnold, 1986, p. 144).

The actual new abbreviation originated during coronavirus pandemic is *nCov* which stands for *novel coronavirus* and is used to indicate a newly recognized coronavirus prior to definitive identification and

classification. The new word is added to Merriam Webster dictionary only on 26 July 2020 (Merriam-webster.com).

Other abbreviations from coronavirus vocabulary WFH (work from home) and PPE (personal protective equipment) are formerly existing words that are widely used nowadays.

6) **Blending** is a type of word formation in which two or more words are merged into one so that the blended constituents are either clipped, or partially overlap. Blends are formed by combining phonemes from different words (Girunyan, 2009).

The first well-known blend is the word *Covid-19*. *COVID* is the blend of the words coronavirus and disease.

Covidiot is another blend of the words COVID-19 and idiot. *Covidiot* is a slang insult for someone who ignores the warnings regarding public health or safety. Some signs of *covidiocy* are: not washing your hands regularly, hanging out in groups of people, standing within six feet of a stranger, hoarding items like toilet paper and hand sanitizer (Dictionary.com).

For example, BBC Scotland news published an article named “*Missing coronavirus cases and raving ‘covidiot’ make Scotland’s Sunday papers*” after “The Herald” newspaper reported that Scotland’s contact tracing system was missing more than 400 patients with confirmed cases of coronavirus (BBC.com).

Covidivorce is blend of COVID-19 and divorce. The word is used to express the divorce that happened because of being in extended isolation during COVID-19 quarantine (Dictionary.com).

Couples whose marriages are fraying under the pressures of self-isolation could be heading for a ‘covidivorce’ (Nytimes.com).

Coronapocalypse means the “end of the world” via coronavirus. It is the blend of coronavirus and apocalypse. Seemingly there is word *coronageddon* that is the blend of coronavirus and armageddon. It is defined as the near-certain, end-of-times condition created either by the actual COVID-19 virus or the massive social, financial and political devastation (Dictionary.com).

It won’t be easy to stand coronageddon for our country.

A blend of *dumping* (the act of getting rid of something that is not wanted) and *Zoom* (the popular video service), *zumping* is when you break up with someone over a video conferencing service (Dictionary.com).

And of course there’s a catchy name for this phenomenon: zumping (Collinsdictionary.com).

Moronavirus is another term for a covidiot. *Moron* is an informal word describing a person who is notably stupid or lacking in good judgment. Calling someone a *covidiot* or *moronavirus* is a form of *quarantine shaming*. That is slang for criticizing someone for not following health and safety guidelines (Dictionary.com).

Quarantini is another slang term for a cocktail people drink at home while under quarantine because of the coronavirus. The term is a blend of *quarantine* and martini (Dictionary.com) *Quarantini* has become

a more general term and is used for other types of alcoholic beverages consumed at home during the pandemic.

The initial thought behind a Quarantini was that it's a martini that you drink alone in your house when under lockdown (Thenovicechefblog.com).

The new generation of children conceived during COVID-19 has been named the *coronials*, blend of *coronavirus* and *millennials*. And when coronials get older, they will become *quaranteens*, blend of the words *quarantine* and *teenager* (Dictionary.com).

We can now expect a wave of "coronababies" and a new generation of "quaranteens" in 2033 (Nytimes.com).

Quaranteam is the group of people you voluntarily choose to *socialize* with or even live with during the quarantine (Theconversation.com). The word *quaranteam* is a blend of *quarantine* and *team*. There is the corresponding verb *quaranteaming* as well.

Quaranteaming is not necessarily a surprising phenomenon, according to some experts (Edition.cnn.com).

Infodemic, blend of *information* and *epidemic*, is used to describe misinformation being spread through various media, namely social media (Public.oed.com).

WHO has warned against the overabundance of information, including falsehoods, about the pandemic, calling it an "infodemic" (Edition.cnn.com).

The diagram below shows the effectiveness of word formation means in producing new words during COVID-19.

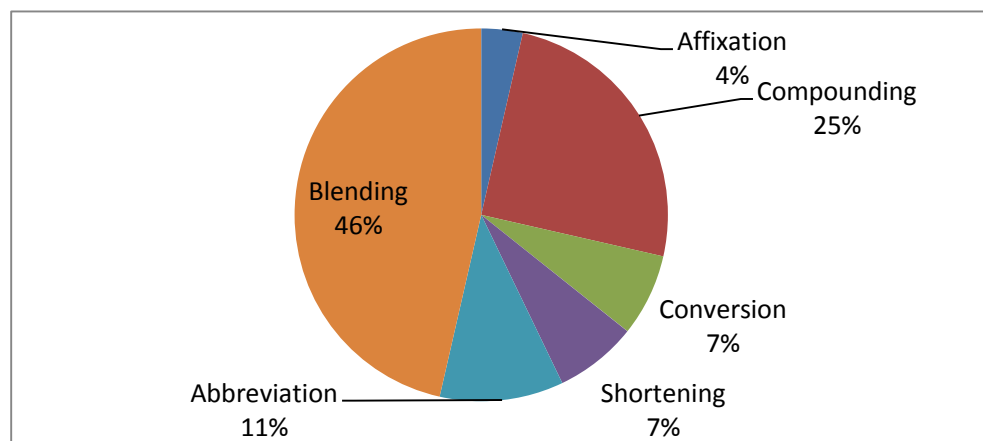


Figure 1. The Effectiveness of Word Formation Means during COVID-19

The most productive one in the range of word-formation means occurs to be blending, making 45% out of 28 analyzed examples.

Coronavirus has led to the birth of new expressions as well that emerged mainly based on formerly existing expressions. Novel coronavirus (**nCoV**) is an expression referring to the coronavirus distinct from the known coronaviruses and is not detected or reported before.

It is a temporary name assigned to the new type of coronaviruses before its permanent name is decided upon. The word novel designates the new pathogen of a previously identified family of a virus.

Happy hour is a cocktail hour or longer period at a bar or a pub, usually in the early evening, when drinks are served at reduced prices, sometimes with free snacks especially at the end of the workday. Similarly, Virtual happy hour is the time when people arrange video chats or video conferencing and drink cocktails and other alcoholic beverages after working from home (Dictionary.com).

The expression *covideo party* depicts online parties people arrange during the quarantine and it's alike virtual happy hour.

Quarantine and chill is an expression used to describe multiple ways people stay at home for a long time and spend their free time during coronavirus (Dictionary.com).

Besides the growth of new words and expressions, dozens of words have undergone semantic changes and developed new meanings. *Semantic change* (also called *semantic shift*) is the change in the meanings of words, especially during the long period of time. Generalisation and specialisation are changes in the denotative component of meaning (Types of Semantic Change by H. Hirt) (Studfile.net).

In case of **generalization**, the widening of a word's meaning and reference takes places over the years.

In 2020 video conferences and online classes are mainly done by Zoom program. And soon hackers started to intervene online meeting for multiple reasons. This kind of attacks became frequent during the first period of using the application, and people called that kind of attacks zoombombing. The term became so popular, that all kinds of online video conference attacks are called zoombombing nowadays no matter it's via zoom or other programs.

Zumping is the blend of zoom and dumping. Dumping is the act of getting rid of someone who is not wanted. Similarly, zumping is the same action via zoom or similar video conferencing application. It used to describe dumping a romantic partner via zoom, but soon due to generalization of the meaning of the word describes the same action via all kind of similar programs.

Specialization (narrowing, restriction) is the narrowing (reduction) in a word's range of meaning and often a generic word is limited to a more specialized use (Studfile.net).

Table 1. Previous and Specialized Meanings of Several Expressions during Covid-19 Pandemic

Word	Previous meaning	Specialized meaning
WFH (Work from home)	to do one's job not in an office building but in one's house (dictionary.cambridge.org)	work at home temporarily because of an epidemic or natural disaster
PPE (Personal protective equipment)	equipment and clothing that protects people from health risks at work (dictionary.cambridge.org)	mask, gloves, hand sanitizer or equipment designed to protect people from infection
Social distancing	rejecting social interaction between individuals and particularly those belonging to various social groups (merriam-webster.com)	keeping a greater than usual physical distance from other people in public places during the outbreak of an infectious disease to decrease the transmission of infection (dictionary.cambridge.org)
Self-isolating	to isolate or separate oneself from others (merriam-webster.com)	Staying at home and not leaving it because of symptoms of contagious disease
Shelter-in-place order	the act of trying to find safety within the building one already occupies because of hazards, bombing or shooting incidents, for radiological and chemical defence, etc. (redcross.org)	staying at home and not leaving it unnecessarily because of the coronavirus outbreak in order not to get infected or spread the virus
Blursday	the humorous word for describing any day of the week that is not much different from the one before (collinsdictionary.com)	an unspecified day because of lockdown's disorientating impact on the time (theconversation.com)

Finally, there is an interesting phenomenon of bringing war metaphors into the language of coronavirus. There are several war metaphors that have widely been used to describe the continuous struggle between healthcare workers and patients on one side and coronavirus disease on the other side.

Table 2. War Metaphors and Their Meanings during Covid-19 Pandemic

<i>War metaphors</i>	<i>General meaning</i>	<i>Meaning during pandemic</i>
<i>Battle</i>	a fight between armed forces	the struggle against the infectious disease
<i>Front-line</i>	a place where opposing armies face each other in war and where fighting happens	Is used to describe the place where doctors and scientists fight against the infectious disease
<i>Hero</i>	a person admired for bravery, great achievements, or good qualities	are expressions that refer to people, especially to doctors and healthcare workers, who risk their
<i>Front-line staff</i>		own lives to save others from contagious disease during epidemic
<i>Soldier</i>	a person who is in an army and wears its uniform, especially someone who fights when there is a war	
<i>Enemy</i>	a country or the armed forces or people of a country that is at war with your own country	is used to describe the infectious disease that threatens people health and spreads rapidly

(Dictionary.cambridge.org)

And there is an interesting project on Twitter named **#ReframeCovid** started by Ines Olza (University of Navarra, Spain), Elena Semino and Veronika Koller (both Lancaster University, UK). They have opened an open-access document to assemble alternatives to war metaphors to talk about coronavirus and Covid-19 (BBC.com). The research shows, that the use of war metaphors to describe coronavirus has become peculiar not only to English, but also to other languages in the world.

To conclude, language is a living organism and changes in social life very quickly find their expression in the word-stock. Coronavirus led to the explosion of new words, expressions and new relevances to the old words. Merely all productive word formation means served to the process of generating new words. Besides, some words have undergone semantic broadening and narrowing resulting in new definitions of formerly existing words. Some of the new words and definitions tend to be short-living and will probably disappear because of being too colloquial and specific, while others have already replenished the glossary of literary terms. Linguistic phenomena like bringing war metaphors to talk of the pandemic, and personification of a virus reveals the creative nature of the language.

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