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THE FREQUENCY AND USAGE OF OVER-DERIVATIVES IN TEXTS ON COVID-19

Abstract: Being stylistically neutral, prefix over- is used in different functional styles. Here the focus is on its usage in words appearing in written newspaper texts on COVID-19. The main goal of the paper is to examine the overall frequency of over-derivatives in this type of text. The idea is to illustrate the most frequent word class of derivatives, show their meanings and to analyse morphological and colligational patterns in which and with which they occur. Derivational prefixes can change either the meaning of the word they are attached to or the word class. Taking into account the frequency and features derived words with this prefix show, we consider that this paper will give a significant contribution to further research on over-words in different types of texts.

Key words: written text on COVID-19, over-words, frequency, colligational patterns.

1. Introduction and Metodology

The mainstream media reporting on the global corona virus pandemic was full of health care system descriptions, problems medical staff faced, concerns about our lives, threats that awaited us, warnings and instructions on how to survive. Reporters used a lot of *over-words* to describe these troubling scenes like *over-filled* hospitals *overflowed* with patients, *overstretched* A&E departments, *overwhelmed* funeral firms, *overworked* nurses, immune system *overreacting* to the virus and so many other *over-words*. It seemed that these were used to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation, to give excessive meanings to the words used in this type of text. But is it possible that *over-only* adds the meaning of excessive here?

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‘Languages frequently have affixes that fall into common semantic categories: personal affixes, negative or privative affixes, prepositional and relational affixes, quantitative affixes and evaluative affixes’ (Lieber, 2010:p.40). The prefix of interest for this study, prefix *over-* is classified as prepositional and relational affix whose meaning is limited to “notions of space and/or time”.

Quirk et al. (1985) and Mangusev (2009) also tend to limit the meanings of prefixes probably because of the fact that they take into consideration only the most frequent meanings prefixes show. In Quirk et al’s classification (1985), the prefix *over-* belongs to prefixes of degree and size whose primary meaning is “excessive”. Mangusev (2009:p.18) as well, places it in the prefixes whose meaning is “in excess, more than necessary”. Yet, prefixes like *over-* have miscellaneous meanings which deserve to be explored in all their diversity.

“When viewed from the angle of their stylistic reference, English prefixes fall into those characterised by neutral stylistic reference and those possessing quite a definite stylistic value. There is no doubt, for instance, that prefixes like *over-*, and some others can be qualified as neutral prefixes because they ‘occur in all functional styles’ (Ginzburg et al., 1979:p.118–119), including the journalistic style we used for analysis.

Prefixes ‘can change or concretise the meaning of the word’ (Мангушев, 2009:p.8). They ‘usually have special requirements for the sorts of bases they are attached to. Some of these requirements concern the phonology of their bases, and others concern semantics of their bases– but most basic requirements are often the syntactic part of speech or category of their basis (Lieber, 2010:p.35). The *over-* prefix is one of those prefixes Bauer (1983) calls class-maintaining prefixes that do not change the parts of speech of the base they are attached to just to add some flavour. The overwhelming flavour the prefix *over-* gives to words, for example adjectives, is that of having the highest degree of quality. If the degree is high then there is no need to grade it. If something is already excessive, you can’t make it more excessive, maximise or diminish its excessiveness. For example, the adjective *overexcited* expresses the utmost excitement and it would be linguistically and semantically redundant even illogical to grade it or to use it in comparison structures, as in the sentence *I am more overexcited about it today than I was yesterday*. On the other hand, the *over-* prefix gives verbal derivatives gradability. The verb estimate is non-gradable, but the morphologically related verb *overestimate* is gradable because it is ‘concerned with the result of estimating and is also susceptible of an evaluative meaning. Amplifiers co-occur only with gradable verbs’ (Quirk et al., 1985:pp.594–595), but corpus analysis showed other colligational partners of *over-*verbs like downtoners, some adjuncts and disjuncts.

Ginzburg et al. (1979:pp.115-116) point out the prefixes are independent semantically and according to the available word-counts of prefixal derivatives, the greatest number are verbs (42,4%), adjectives comprise 33,5 % and the nouns make up 22,4 %.

Quirk et al. (1985:p.1524) argue that the prefix *over-* combines freely with verbs and adjectives, but the study carried out by Tomić and Šajinović Novaković (2016) showed that it can be combined with some other open-class words like nouns and adverbs. *Over-*derivatives may belong to different word classes: *over-whelm* occurs as an adjective, noun and verb (*overwhelming, overwhelmed, overwhelmingly*); *over-all* occurs in the same form as an adjective, noun and adverb and as pluralia tantum noun *overalls*; *over-head* in the same form (*overhead*) occurs as an adjective, noun, adverb and verb; *over-night* as an adjective adverb, and noun.

*Over-*adjectives are usually derived out of verbs with the meaning 'affected in this way' or the meaning 'having this affect' (Thomson & Martinet, 1986:p.33).

Jespersen (1942: p.166) showed that *over-* attached to verbal bases creates transitive verbs out of intransitive ones with meanings: *passing over a boundary or obstacle; passing across a surface, etc.; situated above, or covering, have the prospect of; prefixed mostly to denominative verbs to express the idea of mastery, superiority.* We will be dealing with semantics of derived verbs too but also with the semantic domains of single-word verb bases *over-* is attached to.

The corpus used for this research consists of 1 million words, and it has been excerpted from articles on corona virus appearing on the official website of *The Guardian* in 2019 and 2020. We combined a quantitative and analytical analysis. The quantitative method provided results regarding the frequency in different word classes prefixed with *over-*, while the analytical method enabled us to determine morpho-syntactic features and colligational patterns of each word class.

2. Results and Discussion

Judging by the total number of analysed examples of *over-*words, the most numerous *derivatives* are verbs (185), and adjectives (173). Nouns occur in 102 examples, and adverbs in 64 examples. As the results have shown, the prefix *over-* is very frequent as a deverbal prefix (44), deadjectival (42), and denominal (37), and less present in adverbs (6).

2.1 Verbs

Within the frame of this research, the prefix *over-* occurred with 44 different verbs. The most frequent pattern it takes is the pattern

over- + activity verbs → derivative verbs

(*come, look, take, rule, turn, run, ride, step, haul, do, work, reach, deliver, spend, use, throw*)

Less frequent patterns include the structures:

over-+mental verbs (*see, hear, bear, estimate, think*) → **derivative verbs,**

over-+communicative verbs (*promise, encourage, call*) → **derivative verbs**

over-+verbs of existence or relationship (*stay, represent*) → **derivative verbs**

When attached to activity verbs then the meaning of prefix *over-* is usually not that of excessive. Exceptions are *overdo, overwork, overdeliver, and overspend*. With mental verbs, its meaning may be that of excessive (*overestimate, overthink*), but it usually conveys some other meanings (*oversee, overlook, overbear*). The same happens when it is attached to verbs of communication and verbs of existence where its meanings are not exclusively that of excessive.

Out of a total 185 examples, the most frequently used is the verb *overwhelm* (occurs 35 times). More details on the frequency of other *over-* verbs are given in the table below.

DERIVED VERBS WITH PREFIX <i>over-</i> ACROSS CORPUS	
VERBS	FREQUENCY
<i>overwhelm</i>	35
<i>overcome</i>	16
<i>oversee</i>	12
<i>overlook</i>	11
<i>overflow</i>	8
<i>overstate</i>	7
<i>overtake, overrule, overturn, overrun, overreact</i>	6 per each
<i>override, overload, overlap, overhear</i>	4 per each
<i>overstretch, overstep, overshadow, overhaul, overdo</i>	3 per each
<i>overgrow, overwork, overreach, overinterpret, overburden</i>	2 per each
<i>over-call, overblow, overbear, overgraze, overcorrect, overcrowd, over-deliver, overhead, overhype, overinflate, overdraw, over-encourage, overestimate, overexpose, over-promise, overlay, overleverage, over-prescribe, overstay, overrepresent, overspend, overuse, overthrow, overthink, overcharge</i>	1 per each

Table 1: Frequency of derived verbs with the prefix *over-* in texts on COVID-19

As for the morpho-syntactic patterns, the majority of derived *over-*verbs occur in non-finite forms usually as bare infinitives with central modal verbs, the most frequent of which are modals *will*, and *can*. Less frequently *over-*verbs occur with

modals *may*, *must*, and *should*. *Overrule* is one of the verbs that combines with central modals only. Some *over*-verbs show a tendency to occur with semi-auxiliaries *have to* (overcome), *be likely to* (overtake) and *be able to* (override).

However, verbs such as *overcome*, *oversee*, *overstate* and *overhaul* are predominantly used in the form of *to*-infinitive as direct objects (*overcome*, *oversee*), and as complements of adjectives (*overstate*). The verb *overhaul* is used in the form of imperative and as adverbial of purpose.

Some verbs like *overlook*, *overreact* and *overturn* are used only in the *-ing* form, the latter two as part of reduced relative clauses. Verbs *overwhelm*, *overcome*, *overflow* and *overgrow* tend to be used in the form of *-ed* / past participle usually in participle clauses:

The Sacre-Coeur basilica overlooking Paris was closed for the first time since it was built in 1914.

Overcome by anxiety: Indians in lockdown many can ill afford

Several *over*-verbs like *overrun*, *overdo*, *overstretched*, *over-represent* and *overlay* show a great tendency to be passivised.

Syntactically, verbs like *overlook*, *overwhelm*, *overflow*, *overreact* and *overrun* tend to occur within adverbial clauses, the most frequent of which are time adverbial clauses marked by the subordinator *while* (*overlook*, *overrun*). Verbs *overflow* and *overrun* are used within reason clauses introduced by the subordinator *as*, and the verb *overrun* is also registered within clauses of concession introduced with *while*. *Over*-verbs are not frequently used in clauses of condition introduced by *if* (*overwhelm only*) and clauses of similarity and comparison marked by *like* (*overreact only*).

As the data have shown, *over*-verbs are often modified by subjuncts such as additive subjuncts *also* (*overlook*, *overwhelm*) and *even* (*overhear*), time relationship subjunct *already* (*overstretch* and *overcrowd*), particulariser *hugely* (*overstate*) and *largely* (*overwhelm*), diminisher *partly* (*overturn*), maximiser *absolutely* (*overload*) and *completely* (*overwhelm*), emphasiser *simply* (*overexpose*) and booster *severely* (*overcrowd*). *Over*-verbs are less frequently modified by adjuncts such as manner adjuncts *grossly* (*overblow*), *wildly* (*overleverage*) and *massively* (*overthink*), time position adjuncts *previously* (*overlook*) and *soon* (*overtake*), usual frequency adjunct *usually* (*overflow*) and high frequency adjunct *often* (*over-prescribe*). Content disjunct *probably* combines only with the verb *overtake*. The verb *overwhelm* is the only one which occurs with concessive contrast conjunct *however* and temporal meaning conjunct *meanwhile*.

2.2 Adjectives

The prefix *over-* occurs almost equally with adjectives as with verbs, with 42 examples found. The majority of derived adjectives follow this pattern of word creation *over-* + **verb** + **-ed suffix/ past participle** → derived adjective, which gives them a passive meaning of affected in this way, as in *overwhelmed, overcrowded, over-subscribed, overburdened, overlooked, over-filled, overgrown, overheard, overblown*, etc. The adjectives used in this type of text which follow the previous pattern usually convey excessive meaning (except overlooked and overheard).

Less frequent is the pattern *over-* + **verb** + **-ing suffix/ present participle** → **deverbal adjective** with the active meaning “having this affect” as in *overcharging, overriding, overbearing, over-reaching* and *overstaying*. The *over-*adjectives from the second group usually have meanings other than excessive (exception is overcharging).

The adjective creating pattern *over-* + **verb** + **-ive suffix** → **deverbal adjective**, which occurs only with adjectives *overactive* and *over-reactive*.

Denominal adjectives following derivational patterns *over-*+ **noun**+ **-y suffix** → **denominal adjective** (*hasty*) and *over-* + **noun** + **-ous suffix** → denominal adjective (*over-zealous*) have a rare occurrence.

A small number of *over-*adjectives are made through the word formation process of zero affixation. Adjectives *overall, overseas, overdue, overcast, overnight, overhead* and *overweight* are all formed this way. Almost all adjectives of this type have meanings other than excessive (exception is overweight). The table below illustrates the overall frequency of adjectives with the prefix *over-* in the corpus.

ADJECTIVES WITH PREFIX <i>over-</i> - ACROSS CORPUS	
ADJECTIVES	FREQUENCY
<i>overall</i>	26
<i>overwhelmed</i>	25
<i>overwhelming</i>	19
<i>overseas</i>	13
<i>overstretched, overcrowded</i>	11 per each
<i>overdue</i>	10
<i>overworked</i>	5
<i>over-zealous, overlooked</i>	4 per each
<i>overweight, over-subscribed, overloaded, overarching</i>	3 per each
<i>overburdened, overblown, over-run, overriding</i>	2 per each

<p><i>overactive, overcooked, over-caffeinated, overcast, overbearing, overawed, overhead, overheard, overhasty, over-filled, overgrown, overnight, over-leveraged, over-ordered, overpopulated, over-reaching, overreactive, overwrought, overtaped, overused, overstaying, overscheduled, overpressurised, oversensitive, oversized</i></p>	<p>1 per each</p>
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Table 2: Frequency of adjectives with the prefix *over-* in written COVID-19 discourse

Out of 173 examples registered, the most frequent adjectives are *overall* (26), *overwhelmed* (25), and *overwhelming* (19), while other adjectives are used less often. *Overall* have the greatest number of colligational nominal partners and here we list them all: *activity, aim, appearance, assessment, average, backing balance, benefit, budget, cases, chance, charge, coherence, command, composition, community transmission, concept, conclusion, condition, consistency, consumption, context, correlation, cost, covid mortality risk, death toll, debt, decline, decrease, deficit, demand, design, dimension, distribution, drop in, duration, earnings, effect, effectiveness, efficiency, estimate, fall, fatality rate, fatalities, figures, fitness, gain, goal, good health, growth, health, herd immunity, hesitancy, imperative, improvement, increase, lack, level, majority, number, mortality rate, mobility, objective, pattern performance, preparedness, programme, progress, recovery, responsibility, risks, satisfaction, shopping patterns, structure, tally of, tenor, traffic, utility, trajectory of something, threat, trends, turnout, verdict, well-being.*

Regarding a syntactic relationship, *over-* adjectives are more frequently used attributively. Some of them, like *overall, overseas, overcrowded, over-zealous, overcharging, over-subscribed, overburdened, overriding* are used only in an attributive position. Adjectives like *overactive, overbearing, overcast, overcooked, over-filled, overgrown, overheard, overhead, over-leveraged, overnight, over-ordered, over-populated, over-reaching, overscheduled, overpressured, oversized, overstaying, overtaped* and *overused* occur only once within the analysed corpus:

The overall threat from Omicron variant is likely to be very significant.

Overawed, over-caffeinated, overhasty, over-reactive, oversensitive and *overwrought* are used predicatively and have a very low frequency of occurrence (one example only):

He seemed overawed and overwhelmed as the rhetoric of the last eight years was mugged by reality.

Adjectives *overwhelmed, overworked, overloaded, overweight, overblown* and *overrun* are almost equally used in both positions. *Overdue* prefers a predicative position, while *overstretched, overwhelming* and *overlooked* show a tendency to be used attributively.

In an attributive position, the majority of *over*-adjectives usually premodify countable nouns, except for adjectives *overwhelming* (which predominantly premodify uncountable nouns) and *overall*, which are equally used as premodifiers of countable and uncountable nouns. It is interesting to say that the adjective *overall* often premodifies compounds (*likelihood ratio*, *mortality rate* and string compounds (*covid mortality risk*). It is common for the adjective *overwhelmed* to premodify compounds where the second IC is the noun *system* such as *contact-tracing system*, *health system/s* and *hospital system*.

In the predicative position, *over*-adjectives usually combine with verbs *become* and *feel*, and less frequently with verbs *be*, *seem* and *remain*.

Even though adjectives usually precede/premodify a noun phrase, there are adjectives which follow a/postmodify a noun phrase. Among *over*-adjectives only *overcrowded* modifies a noun postpositively:

The detention centres, incidentally, chaotic, overcrowded and insanitary, have been afflicted by repeated outbreaks of Covid-19. Staff moving in and out of them are likely to have helped spread the virus through the wider community.

In the argumentation produced at the beginning of this paper, we gave our reasons for asserting that *over*-adjectives are non-gradable. However, corpus analysis has provided examples of *over*-adjectives expressing comparative and superlative relations:

the Scout is a sniper – arguably the most fun and potentially most overpowered of the four classes.

Adverbs, which modify adjectives integrated into a noun phrase include manner adjuncts like emotionally (*overwrought*), and quickly (*overwhelmed*), manner adjuncts ending in *-ly* which take on the role of degree adjuncts that do not describe the manner but rather the intensity like *brutally* (*overloaded*), *badly* (*overcrowded*, *overstretched*), *vastly* (*overcrowded*), *wildly* (*overleveraged*), boosters like *severly* (*overcrowded*), emphasisers like *simply* (*overexposed*), *surely* (*overdue*), and *really* (*overwhelming*), and amplifiers like *increasingly* (*overwhelming*).

2.3 Nouns

The prefix *over-* occurs with 37 different nouns. The most frequent pattern in which *over*-nouns occur is the pattern *over-* + **noun** → **derived noun** (*oversight*, *overload*, *overtime*, *overwork*, *overhaul*, *overuse*, *overdose*, *overhead*, *overdraft*, *overflow*, *overcapacity*, *overspill*, *overview*, *overreach*, *overlord*, *overexposure*, *overdrive*,

overkill and *overestimate*). As far as frequency is concerned, the above-mentioned pattern is followed by the second frequent pattern

over- + **number/noun + inflectional suffix for plural-s** → **derived noun** (*over-50s/16s/18s/80s/60s//70s/65s* and pluralia tantum noun *overalls*).

The patterns given below are less frequent in the corpus we analysed:

over-noun + **-ing** → **denominal abstract noun**

(*overcrowding, overwhelming, overturning, overheating, over-policing, over-ordering, over-reassuring, overspending* and *overpromising*);

over-verb/adjective + **-ance/ence** → **deverbal/de-adjectival abstract noun**

(*overreliance, overconfidence, over-vigilance*);

over-verb + **-ation** → **deverbal abstract noun**

(*overrepresentation, overreaction* and *oversimplification*);

over- adjective + **-ness** → **de-adjectival abstract noun** (*overzealousness*);

As shown in Table 3, out of 102 total examples, the most frequent are combinations with numbers related to years (16), and the noun *oversight* (9). Other nouns are less frequent.

The overall meaning of *over-* in all noun creating patterns is excessive with a few exceptions (*oversight, overhead, overhaul, overflow, overview, overreach, overlord, overdrive, overturning*).

NOUNS WITH PREFIX <i>over-</i> ACROSS CORPUS	
NOUNS	FREQUENCY
<i>over-year/s</i>	15
<i>oversight</i>	9
<i>overload</i>	6
<i>overtime, overalls</i>	5 per each
<i>overwork, overcrowding, overhaul</i>	4 per each
<i>overuse, overdose, overhead, overheating, overreliance, overdraft</i>	3 per each
<i>overflow, overspill, overview, overreach, over-capacity, over-policing, overlord, overrepresentation</i>	2 per each
<i>over-ordering, overpromising, overexposure, overreaction, overconfidence, overestimate, overdrive, overkill, over-reassuring, overspending, oversimplification, oversealouslyness, over-vigilance, overwhelming, overturning</i>	1 per each

Table 3: Frequency of nouns with the prefix *over-* in written COVID-19 discourse

The majority of *over-* nouns occur as a prepositional object usually within *of*-phrases (*over-* + number + *-s*, *overdose*, *overhead*, *overheating*, *overuse*, *overpolicing*, *over-representation*, *over-ordering*, *overpromising*, *overreach*, *over-reassuring*, *overspending* and *overzealousness*). Noun *overalls* occurs as a head of a NP that functions as a prepositional object within adjuncts of manner and instrument:

Doctors here will understandably be concerned when they see images in the media of their colleagues around the world treating patients in full overalls and full face protection, and asking why the same is not recommended or available here.

2.4 Adverbs

Judging by the research data, the *prefix over-* forms 6 adverbs only: *overseas*, *overall*, *overnight*, *overwhelmingly*, *overboard* and *overhead*.

The majority of *over-* adverbs belongs to adjuncts, half of which are classified as space adjuncts (*overseas*, *overboard*, *overhead*), which denote both position and direction (Quirk, 1985:p.516). The adverb *overnight* belongs to time adjuncts denoting time duration, while the adverb *overwhelmingly* is classified as a manner adjunct. Only the adverb *overall* belongs to summative conjuncts.

Out of 64 derived adverbs with the prefix *over-*, the most frequently used is the adverb *overseas* (20 examples), *overall* (18) and *overnight* (15). The adverb *overwhelmingly* is less frequent (9), and adverbs *overboard* and *overheard* occur with one example respectively.

The adverb *overseas* usually combines with activity verbs (*look*, *go*, *watch*, *send*) and existence verbs (*live*, *spread*), and less with mental verbs (*see*). On the other hand, the adverb *overwhelmingly* combines with verbs of (dis)agreement or (dis)approval (*dissapprove*), characterise verb (*oppose*), activity verbs (*show*) and verbs of modality or causation (*vote*). It can be used as a sentence adverb:

There are a few people who have betrayed their community, but overwhelmingly, Australians are doing the right thing, and at the same time, with the telehealth, with the work in hospitals, with the construction of new ventilators, we're boosting that capacity.

It is common for the adverb *overnight* to co-occur with other adverbials, usually with prepositional phrases that function as time position and time duration adjuncts, while co-occurrence with the approximator *almost* and the resultive conjunct *so* are less frequent:

Zoë Challenor, the founder of the children's opera company B'Opera, said her self-employed household lost all work and income overnight in March 2020.

As an artist I've had all of my income wiped overnight for the next three months.

In the vast majority of examples, the conjunct *overall* occurs initially, and co-occurs with the concessive conjunct *though*:

Overall though, this vaccine is efficacious enough, safe enough and any side effects are manageable enough.

3. Conclusion

In written texts on COVID-19, the prefix *over-* occurs with verbs that make up 34% of the total number of *over-*words, adjectives 32% and nouns 29%. *Over-*adverbs are few in number and make up only 5%.

Out of 185 verbs found, the most frequent one is *overwhelm*, followed by *overcome*, *oversee* and *overlook*, while other verbs are less frequent. The majority of registered verbs follow the pattern *over-* + activity verbs → derivative verbs, and are usually used in non-finite forms, i.e. as bare infinitives combining with central modals, and less frequently with semi-auxiliaries. It is common for some verbs to be used within adverbial clauses, with time adverbials clauses introduced by the subordinator, *while* being the most frequent. Another feature of derived verbs with the prefix *over-* is that they are frequently premodified by subjuncts, especially additive and time-relationship subjuncts.

Most of adjectives with the prefix *over-* are formed by derivation following the pattern *over-* + verb + *-ed* suffix/ past participle → derived adjective, while only a small number of adjectives is formed by zero affixation or conversion. The majority of adjectives registered occur attributively and modify countable nouns. They also modify uncountable nouns and compound nouns but in a fewer number of cases. Some *over-*adjectives are used predicatively mostly with verbs *become* and *feel*, and less frequently with verbs *be*, *seem* and *remain*.

The prefix *over-* occurs with 37 different nouns in the structure *over-* + noun → derived noun, followed by the pattern *over-*number/noun+ inflectional suffix for plural-*s* → derived noun. The majority of NPs with *over-* nouns as heads function as prepositional objects within an *of-* phrase that postmodifies another noun, and occur less frequently as direct objects, subjects, subject and object complements.

*Over-*adverbs are not frequent, and we registered only 6 of them, a good number of which belong to space adjuncts. Time duration and manner adjuncts are less frequent. Among registered *over-*adverbs, only *overall* belongs to the class of summative conjuncts.

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UČESTALOST I UPOTREBA IZVEDENICA SA PREFIKSOM *OVER-* U TEKSTOVIMA O KOVIDU 19

Rezime

U radu su prikazane tvorbene riječi nastale derivacijom uz pomoć prefiksa *over-* u novinskim člancima o kovidu na engleskom jeziku. Ideja je da se utvrdi vrsta riječi dobijena ovom prefiksacijom, značenja izvedenih riječi, njihova morfosintaksička obilježja, kao i kolokacijske veze.

► **Ključne riječi:** izvedenice sa prefiksom *over-*, novinski tekst o kovidu 19, frekvencija, kolokacijske veze.

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