A Lexical Pragmatic Study of Neologisms and Narrowing in Selected WHO Conferences on COVID-19

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Abstract

Lexical pragmatics (LP) is a research field that aims to explain systematically the pragmatic phenomena concerning meaning modification in use. It depends on the relevance theory (RT) in specifying the embedded or additional interpretations the linguistically-encoded concepts acquire when these concepts are mutually adjusted with context and cognitive effects. According to relevant-theoretic approach, relevance is the only factor that the hearer draws up to disambiguate conversational implicatures achieved through the adoption of lexical pragmatic processes such as lexical narrowing and all the varieties of lexical broadening including neologisms, metaphor, category extension, approximation, etc. Other Grice's maxims are considered redundant and the contextual knowledge shared by a speaker and hearer is a crucial component in LP. This study concentrates on investigating and explaining systematically two lexical processes- lexical narrowing and neologisms in selected texts of WHO conferences concerning COVID-19.

The results show that both processes are used by the speakers in these conferences and the hearers easily arrive at the optimal-relevant interpretations because the power of the Corona context at the current time. A set of conclusions are set up on the basis of these results.

Keywords: Lexical pragmatics, Relevance theory, Lexical narrowing, Neologism

1. Theoretical Background
1. 1 On Defining Lexical Pragmatics

LP is a relatively new research field that has developed quickly since 1990s through a group of linguistic and psychological publications. Its main idea was launched by J.D. MaCawley in his paper *Conversational implicature and the lexicon*(1978). McCawley (1978:257) states that "a lexical item … may make different contributions to the interpretation of a sentence without making different contributions to its semantic structure". He adds that the resulted difference is "systematic and predictable". LP represents more or less substantial departures from Grice's theory of Cooperative Principle (CP) and maxims. Blutner (1998:1) defines LP as "a research field that tries to give a systematic and explanatory account of pragmatic phenomena that are connected with the semantic underspecification of lexical items". In other words, it studies the processes by which lexically specific encoded meanings (literal meanings) are modified in use. Examples of these processes are lexical narrowing (e.g. ,'drink' used to mean ALCOHOLIC DRINK),lexical broadening that involves neologisms (e.g. COVID-19), approximations(e.g. 'empty' meaning RELATIVELY EMPTY), metaphor(e.g. a person who is kind, delicate, pure, etc. is referred to as an ANGEL), etc. (Wilson,2003: 344).

The present study is concerned only with the use of neologisms and lexical narrowing in the WHO conferences on COVID-19 .
1.2 Overlapping of Lexical Pragmatics and Lexical Semantics

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Blutner (1998:19) indicates that LP is recognized as that area of pragmatics that aroused as reaction to some specific problems of Lexical Semantics (LS). Here LS is classically perceived as "a truth-functional, static semantics of lexical items". He proposes, from a Grician perspective, the use of conversational implicatures as a method to overcome the differences between "(formal) meaning and natural language interpretation" that exemplify the divergence between "the classical theory and the natural language demands come into mind" (Ibid :20). Accordingly, he considers the notion of conversational implicatureas a necessary precondition to develop LP. Grice (1989 cited in Blutner, ibid) defines conversational implicatures as " those non-truth-functional aspects of an utterance interpretation" communicated since the participants observe the CP and conversational maxims. On the extreme side, Sperber & Wilson (1986) suggest only one maxim, i.e., relevance.

Based on the above discussion, the overlapping between the goals of ***LS and LP*** seem obvious and complementary. LS aims at explaining the relations between words and the concepts they encode, while LP aims at explaining the fact that the concept communicated by using a word often differs from the concept encoded in the words. To achieve LP's aim , relevance theory (henceforth RT) is considered as the best tool. RT implies that most meanings encoded by words have   to be contextually   specified because speakers frequently   tend to use words in ways that vary   from their encoded literal meanings. This use may be vague, metaphorical, hyperbolical or in other creative forms (Carston 2002, Wilson & Sperber 2002). Here are some examples cited from Rebollar's (2013):

[1-1] She's got a *personality*!

[1-2] The Los Angeles Times proved this last week, with its high-minded but ultimately hilarious attempt to *wikify* its editorial column.
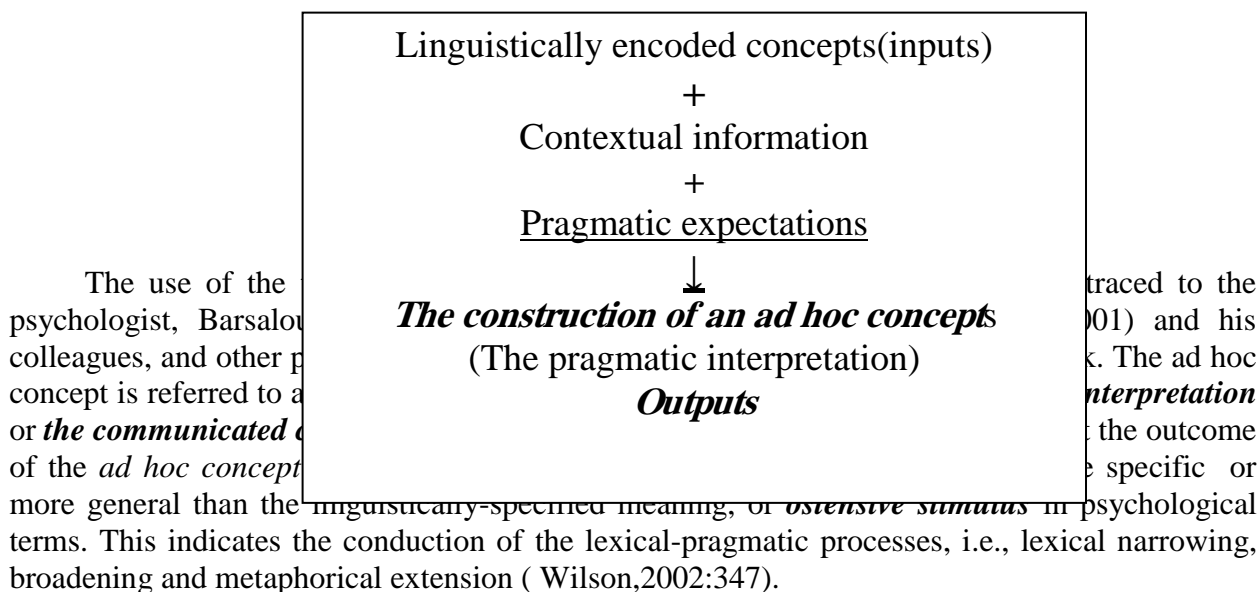
[1-3] His brain is the size of a *pea*.

Semantically, there is nothing new in [1],because all human beings have personality but pragmatically the word *personality* has a narrower and deeper communicated meaning. This means that *she has got a distinctive, effective and independent personality*. In [2], ***wikify*** is semantically empty because it does not encode any literal meaning or concept. Pragmatically, some interpretations can be realized from this word which is coined as a new verb carrying the concept of WIKIFY (to make into a wiki, or to use a wiki approach for). Also in [3], there is a sort of oddity because no human brain can be the size of a pea. Nevertheless, these three sentences are understood by hearers simply because of conducting inferential processes to bridge the gaps between the semantic meaning and the pragmatic interpretation. The role of LP is to identify   how   this   understanding   occurs, i.e.,   how   inferential process is conducted (Rebollar,2013).

This application of the semantics-pragmatics distinction at the level of *individual words or phrases* rather than whole sentences is explored by LP. The advantages earned from this distinction are recognized in pragmatically-oriented approaches to the philosophy of language. They were the starting point for Grice's *William James Lectures*(1989)**.**To be more specific, LP attempts to give answers to enquiries such as the following (Sperber & Wilson ,2002):

- How is disambiguation achieved ?
- How are conversational implicatures worked out?
- How is contextual and encyclopedic knowledge brought to bear?

1. 3 Lexical Pragmatic Mutual Adjustment

According to LP, the meanings of words are pragmatically adjusted and fine-tuned in context so that their contribution to the proposition expressed is different from their lexically encoded meaning. In LP, this integration is called the ***LP Mutual Adjustment*** which can be expressed in the equation below:

> Linguistically encoded concepts(inputs)
> +
> Contextual information
> +
> Pragmatic expectations
> ↓
> ***The construction of an ad hoc concept**s*
> (The pragmatic interpretation)
> ***Outputs***

The use of the [...] traced to the psychologist, Barsalou [...] 001) and his colleagues, and other p[...]k. The ad hoc concept is referred to a[...] *nterpretation* or *the communicated* [...] the outcome of the *ad hoc concept* [...] specific or more general than the linguistically-specified meaning, or ***ostensive stimulus*** in psychological terms. This indicates the conduction of the lexical-pragmatic processes, i.e., lexical narrowing, broadening and metaphorical extension (Wilson,2002:347).

These pragmatically derived ad hoc concepts are decompositional. Carston (2010:165) presents the following example to clarify this decompositionality concerning the word *angel* and its ad hoc concept ANGEL*:

[1-4] My girlfriend is an angel.

ANGEL* is made up of *kind*, *good* and a few other atomic concepts. Therefore, and according to RT, the idea involved in the ad hoc concept is "generally, ineffable, …, as well as not being lexicalized, there isn't a linguistic phrase that fully encodes them either, and the paraphrases are intended as just a rough indication to aid readers in understanding what is in mind in particular cases" (Ibid).

Consequently, the engagement of RT is a necessity in the process of LP mutual adjustment because it emphasizes the relevance property and the importance of contextual specification to decode the communicated meanings of the lexically encoded words represented by these lexical-pragmatic processes. While, the processes are generally and semantically studied in isolation from each other, RT theorists like Carston (2002), Wilson & Sperber (2002) argue for a unified approach which fine-tunes the interpretation of almost every word.

1. 4 Relevance Theory and Lexical Pragmatics

The RT approach to LP was developed by Carston (2002), Wilson (2003), and Wilson and Sperber (2002). The basic idea is that the linguistically encoded meaning of a word is no more than an indication to the actual interpretation or utterance meaning. Hence, the interpretation is not decoded but has to be inferred by a pragmatic process. Wilson (2003: 352-3) states that RT is based on a definition of ***relevance*** and its two general principles: the *Cognitive* and *Communicative* principles of relevance.

1.4.1 Relevance

Relevance is defined as a property of utterances to cognitive processes. Put it psychologically, this represents the mutual adjustment between the external ostensive stimuli such as sights and sounds, and internal mental representations such as thoughts, memories or conclusions of inferences. Accordingly, relevance is not a rule or instruction that needs to be known, but it is derived from "an exceptionless generalization" about human psychology. The perceptual and inferential systems are allocated cognitively to the most relevant information available (optimal interpretation) regardless to Grice's CP and the maxims upheld by rational communicators (Ibid).

Relevance is characterized in *cost-benefit terms*, as a property of inputs to cognitive processes involving the processing of the input, the accessing of contextual assumptions and the

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derivation of positive cognitive effects. The *benefits* are positive *cognitive* effects achieved by processing the input in a context of available assumptions, and the *cost* is the processing effort of perception, memory, and inference needed to achieve these effects. There is a direct correlation between the cognitive effects and relevance and, on the contrary, there is inversed correlation between the processing effort and the relevance of the input. Other things being equal, *the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual who processes it* , while the lesser the processing effort required, the greater the relevance of the input. One obvious advantage of this psychological approach is that cases of metaphor, hyperbole, irony, loose use and other tropes used aesthetically which follow quite straightforwardly from considerations of relevance (ibid).

1.4.2 General Principles of Relevance Theory

1. The Cognitive Principle

This principle proposes that the human cognitive system tends to allocate attention and processing resources for *maximizing* the relevance of the inputs it processes. As a result of constant selection pressure towards increasing cognitive efficiency, our perceptual mechanisms tend automatically to pick out potentially relevant inputs, the retrieval mechanisms of our memory tend automatically to pick out potentially relevant contextual assumptions, and our inferential systems tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way(Sperber & Wilson 1995: 260-66). Communicators should therefore be able to predict, at least to some extent, what stimuli an addressee is likely to attend to, what contextual assumptions he is likely to use in processing them, and what conclusions he is likely to draw(Wilson,2003 : 353).

2.The Communicative Principle

This principle proposes that utterances create general expectations of relevance. A rational hearer has to make an expectation that *is, at least, relevant enough to be worth processing* (the optimal relevant input available to him at the time), and moreover, *the most relevant utterance compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences*. This motivates the following comprehension procedure which, according to RT, is automatically applied to the on-line processing of attended verbal inputs one by one. The hearer takes the linguistically-encoded meaning: following a path of least effort, he enriches it at the explicit level and complements it at the implicit level until the resulting interpretation meets his expectations of relevance; at which point, he stops(Sperber & Wilson 1995: 266-71).This is guaranteed by the following:

(a) *Relevance-theoretic Comprehension Procedure* entails *that the hearer follows* a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects, *considers* possible interpretations in order of accessibility, and then *stops* when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.

(b) *Presumption of Optimal Relevance* entails that the ostensive stimulus(input) is relevant enough to be worth the addressee's effort to process it and it is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 275).

The process of LP mutual adjustment involved in these two general principles is the central feature of *relevance-theoretic pragmatics*. It is seen as taking place in <u>*parallel*</u> . The hearer does not first identify the proposition expressed, then access an appropriate set of contextual assumptions and then derive a set of cognitive effects. In many cases (e.g., in indirect answers to questions), he is just as likely to reason backwards from an expected cognitive effect to the context and content that would warrant it.

Wilson (2003 :354) specifies two important consequences for LP of this *relevance-theoretic* approach to utterance comprehension :

1. There is no presumption of literalness: This involves firstly that the literal meaning is merely a clue or a point of access to the organized array of contextual assumptions from which a non-decoded optimal interpretation is non-demonstratively derived. Secondly, testing the literal meaning first is not hypothesized in this account.

2. Literal, loose or metaphorical understanding of any utterance is a matter of *seeing* its intended relevance or expectations of relevance through the process of LP mutual adjustment and *stopping* when the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance are satisfied (or ignored).

When there is a connection between the linguistically encoded concept (input) and the contextual information, this means that the input is relevant. This relevance achieves the positive cognitive effects. The most important type of cognitive effects is a *contextual implication*: an implication deducible from the input and context together, but from neither input nor context alone. The central claim of the relevance-based account of pragmatic processing is that addressees take the fact that the speaker has spoken an utterance with a certain semantic meaning as a clue to his intentions, and the hearer has to use the following heuristic to derive a warranted inference about the speaker's intended meaning based on the contextual information.

1.5 Theses of Lexical pragmatics

Blutner (1989:30-33) lists the following five theses of LP:

1. *LP is systematic and explanatory*: LP accounts for pragmatic phenomena that are intimately connected with the semantic underspecification of lexical items. The approach combines compositional semantics with a general mechanism of conversational implicatures. Starting off from an underspecified semantic representation (literal meaning), a mechanism of information enrichment is invoked to yield the appropriate specification with regard to the contextual and encyclopedic information.

2. *LP is non-compositional*: To disambiguate a meaning of a compound expression, LP makes it is possible to decompose it into conceptual components which combine together to determine the optimal relevant conceptual interpretation of the whole expression, as mentioned above with example [4].The main doctrine of LP aims at explaining systematically the combination of a compositional semantics and Grice's implicatures.

3. *LP crucially involves non-representational means of manipulating representations*. In LP, the cognitive system is viewed as a network of units connected to each other through links of various strengths. The cognitive activity in these systems consists of a *parallel* spread of activation (connectionist approach instead of the combinatorial sequential procedure. The notion of relevance is candidate for such non-representational means.

4. LP crucially involves economy principles which are crucially involved in determining how non-representational parameters control the selection and suppression of representations. The two basic and competing forces: one force of unification (Speaker's economy)and the paradoxical force of diversification(Auditor's economy), i.e., minimizing articulation and maximizing perception.

5. LP has to explain when conversational implicatures (interpretations) are cancelable and when not. Grice (1989: 87) states explicitly that generalized conversational implicatures, those that have little to do with context, are cancelable.

1.6 Lexical Processes of Meaning Adjustment

The research field of LP is concerned with accounting for mental-lexical processes that are manipulated to modify and enrich the linguistically-specified (encoded) word meanings. Thus, an additional or embedded meaning can be yielded. Pragmatic theorists are concerned with these mental processes that provoke rational hearers to infer the speaker's meaning in both novel cases and standardized or conventionalized ones(Kolaiti and Wilson, 2012:28-9).These processes are mainly classified into two major types: lexical narrowing and lexical broadening and the latter is subdivided into : neologisms and word coinages, category extension, metaphor, approximation, hyperbole, lexical blocking, pun-like cases, etc . Due to its limited space, this study will investigate only the use of two process: neologisms and lexical narrowing.

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6.1.1 Lexical Narrowing

As explained above, the LP mutual adjustment occurs only when there is a blatantly violation of the quality maxim. First, the hearer has to test the *literal* interpretation and then consider a *figurative* interpretation depending on the relevance maxim. *Lexical narrowing* is one of the LP processes that is worked out on this base. The literal meaning of a word or a phrase is narrowed in order to make a *slightly* different sense. In more technical terms, the literal CONCEPT is processed to create an ad hoc CONCEPT*(a narrowed - adhered view of the former). The rational hearer should cognitively get it in order to be cooperative with the speaker. To practically explain the LP process of lexical narrowing, the word *temperature* in example [5] can be employed (Wilson, 2003: 353).

[1-5] Peter: Mary, we have to visit my aunt in hospital.

   Mary: I have a *temperature.*

Peter interprets Mary's reply as refusal to his suggestion because on the base of relevant expectation. He   cognitively adjusts the literal meaning of *temperature* with the contextual knowledge – Mary suffers from fever and cannot make a visit. This is one of normal general expectations (cognitive effects) of relevance in this context. He selects this expectation after following the path of least effort ; it is the most optimal-relevant interpretation which is worth his effort of processing and it is compatible with his abilities and preferences (Rebollar, 2013). Accordingly, the scalar literal concept TEMPSRTURE which achieves no cognitive effects at all is narrowed to the ad hoc concept TEMPERTURE* in Peter's mind on the bases of *Relevance-theoretic Comprehension Procedure* and *Presumption of Optimal Relevance* stated by Sperber & Wilson (1995: 275). The same case can be applied to examples [1] stated previously and [6] below :

 [1- 6] He used to <u>drink</u> too much, so his health has been so bad. (DRINK* refers specifically to Alcohol not any other liquid)

The lexical narrowing process carried out to look for relevance creates this divergence between the meanings TEMPSRTURE / TEMPERTURE* and DRINK/ DRINK*. This is the scope of LP research that is justified through the mutual adjusting of content, context, and cognitive effects or hearers expectations. Wilson (2003 :355) states that "narrowing increases implications". A hearer narrows the encoded meaning "to a point where it yields enough true implications to satisfy the general expectation of relevance raised by the utterance" and this journey of searching for the optimal interpretation stops. Relevant cognitive effects are processed one by one and all the irrelevant effects are ignored. If several possible narrowed interpretations are available, the hearer follows a path of the least effort and leaves out the other paths because of the inversed correlation between cost and relevance.

The application of narrowing can be achieved in various directions and various degrees. For example, the word *money* in [7] below is interpreted as MONEY* that means a significant amount of money even it may be small (Kolaiti and Wilson,2012:29-30):

   [1-7] Bill *has money.*

The indication of a specific degree of possessing money is achieved when the literal meaning of the CONCEPT, context and the optimal cognitive effect are mutually adjusted to select one of a range of occasion-specific ('ad hoc') concepts: MONEY*, MONEY**, MONEY***, and so on(ibid:30).

A word belonging to a certain syntactic class may be meaningfully flexible on the base of its context, as shown below:

1. Narrowing verbs

Certain verbs (e.g., cut, leave, open, etc.) have no standard or stereotypical ways in their applications. Grammatically, this depends on the different nouns functioning as their objects. The verb *cut* in [8] indicates that the CUT is narrowed into different CUT*, CUT **$^{\cdots n}$ and the other two verb concepts LEAVE and OPEN have the same case , as explained below:

[1-8] *Cut* the lawn/someone's hair/a cake/one's finger/a pack of cards.

[1-9] *Open* curtains/one's mouth/a book/a bottle/a road/the mountain/ …

[1-10] *Leave* the house/home/food on a plate/one's spouse/a note/ …

It is worth noting that there are more than one standard methods for *cutting hair, opening curtains, leaving the house,* but no standard or stereotypical way of the general senses of *cutting, opening, and leaving*(Searle 1980).

2. Narrowing adjectives

The interpretations of certain adjectives can be subject to lexical narrowing. The literal meaning of certain adjectives can reflect slightly different interpretations due to the meanings of nouns in their co-text. Murphy (ibid: 237-39) assures this divergence depending on the antonyms of these adjectives. He takes the adjective '*fresh*' as a clear example and studies its meaning in a *fresh* + noun combinations like, *fresh vs. dirty* shirt; *fresh vs. rotten* vegetables; *fresh vs. frozen* fish ; *fresh vs. dirty* water; , *fresh vs. polluted* air; *fresh vs. tired* outlook; *fresh vs. old* idea; etc. According to LP, this indicates that the concept FRESH acquires specified/narrowed/fine-tuned ad hoc concepts in slightly various forms due to the variety of contexts and co-texts. As a result it has one of these ad hoc interpretations FRESH*,FRESH**, FRESH ***' so on.

Levinson (2000: 37 cited in Kolaiti and Wilson,2012:29) states that narrowing should be treated as involving "a default inference governed by an Informativeness heuristic. Thus, Kolaiti and Wilson (2012:29-30)tackle this default-based approach to handle the narrowing process of the adjective-noun combinations like the above ones. They consider the combinations of (*red+ noun*) and assign *red* various default interpretations for each combination and predict that this will "be automatically preferred in the absence of contextual counter-indications". Accordingly, the meaning of *red* is narrowed in different directions in, for example, *red eyes*, *red apple*, *red hair*, etc. based on the variety of shape and the color distribution on the described objects. Another example tackled by Kolaiti and Wilson(ibid) is the *(raw+ noun)* combinations. They state that the literal meaning of RAW in raw flesh is "UNCOOKED" which is modified to RAW* means NOT PROCESSED in *raw material.* The endless meaning modifications continue along combinations of raw power, raw skin, something raw and honest, raw wood, raw adrenalin, raw noise, raw deal, raw emotion, raw nerve, raw data, etc (ibid:36).

1.6. 2 Neologisms and Word Coinages

Wilson (2003 :346) and Rebollar (2013) consider neologisms and word coinages as a variety of lexical broadening. This variety can be a fertile source for the field of LP, simply, because the coinage of new words entails specifying new interpretations to them which certainly would be ad hoc concepts yielded from the mutual adjustment of content, context, and the cognitive effects. That is, the a linguistically-encoded meaning acquire a more general and broader denotation. One way of coining neologisms is the word-class conversion. Wilson (2003 :346) refers to practical researches done by, for example, Clark & Clark (1979) and Clark & Gerrig (1983) that show cases of neologism and word coinage. Generally, certain proper or common nouns are converted to compound verbs or adjectives carrying literal contents related to these nouns. Pragmatically, no significant difficulty is noticed in perceiving these neologisms. Examples of these cases are shown below(Wilson, ibid):

[1-11] The newspaper boy *porched* the newspaper.

[1-12] She *wristed* the ball over the net.

[1-13] He Houdinied his way out of the closet.

[1-14] They have a lifestyle which is very *San Francisco.*

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[1-15] They Learjetted off to Miami.

In [1-11] and [1-12] , two common nouns : **porch** and **wrist** are converted to be verbs reflecting additional meanings that are slightly different from the linguistically-encoded ones in the nouns. Linguistically, proper nouns are also manipulated in the coinage of neologisms. In Both [1-13] and [1-14], the proper nouns of the national identity *Hounini* and the proper noun of American city*San Francisco* are syntactic class-converted . The former becomes a verb while the latter functions as an adjective. In [1-15], a phrase with a combination of proper and common nouns is verbalized. This phrase is Lear Jet that is a name of a famous manufacturing company of planes in the world. It is clearly noticed the converted words behave according to the regular rules of syntax in inflections and distributions.

Acronymy is another common way of coining neologisms. An acronym is a kind of abbreviation used as a word formed from the initials letters of a phrase. Therefore, acronyms are more space saving, eye-catching, and interesting than the completed group words (Li-na, 2016: 293). The adopted initials of a certain phrase constitute a new lexical item and these initials are pronounced as a single word such as USA referring to United States of America, WHO referring to World health organization, etc (Crystal,2003:1). In this study, COVID-19 itself is a new acronym in the present days and this will be tackled in detailed below. The speed and apparent ease of understanding these neologisms depend mainly on knowing the lexically -encoded meaning of the nouns and having appropriate contextual information about them. This assures that "lexical-pragmatic processes apply 'on-line' in a flexible, creative and context dependent way". Also they may contribute to what it is said as well as to what is embedded (Carston 2002; Wilson & Sperber 2002 cited in Wilson, 2003: 346).

2. Methodology and Procedures

As mentioned earlier, this study is intended to investigate the use of neologisms and lexical narrowing in two texts quoted from WHO conferences on COVID-19 held to give updated briefings and answer journalist's questions. These two processes are selected because the first is related to the introduction of the lexical item COVID-19. The aim, here, is to show how this neologism is formed. On the other hand, lexical narrowing, which is "a highly flexible, creative and context-sensitive process" as Kolaiti and Wilson (2012:28) state, identifies many concepts that are narrowed in the corona context to be adopted in these WHO conferences and other related linguistic contexts.

The two selected conferences were held in two different situations. The first was held on 2nd March, 2020 with the participation of five key speakers–members of the WHO representing various related specializations and some journalists as questioners from different worldly press medias . Some questioners were inside the conference room and others were on phone or online –zoom meeting. The key speakers :Tarik Jasarevic (host), Dr. Tedros A. Ghebreyesus (director-general of WHO), Dr. Michael Ryan (executive director of WHO health emergencies program), and Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove (Technical Lead). The second COVID-19 virtual press conference was held on 20th April, 2020 with the same above five key speakers plus seven others from seven different countries and the questioners were certainly there.

The selected sample involves the manipulation of other lexical processes but due to the scope of research, they are excluded. To achieve the purpose of this study, all the processed lexical items are identified and then classified according to their relevance to the processes understudy. Then, the results are analyzed and discussed based on the LP approach. The identified lexical items are discussed and examples are provided to clarify the researcher's viewpoints.

3. Analysis and Discussion
3.1 Analysis of Neologisms

The analysis of the selected sample shows the following (3) neologized expressions:
1**.** *COVID-19*

This neologism consists of three linguistic items: *Corona Virus Disease* plus the number of the year in which the disease emerged. The acronym *COVID-19* is used for many times to give a specified identification of the disease, as in [3-1]. It also functions as adjectival to modify related- meaning nouns like *COVID-19 vaccine*; COVID-19 antibodies, etc. as in [3-2] below:

[3-1] Thank you very much for joining us today for our regular briefing regarding COVID-19.

[3-2]The other question that I have is about a COVID-19 vaccine.

2. *Hospitalized*

This is a verb converted from the noun *hospital* . The verb is narrowed to be interpreted as the action of clinical treatment given to people who are infected with COVID-19 as in:

[3-3] 30% or 40% of people who are hospitalised that would need oxygen support.

3. Lock-down

This neologism is a verb used in corona time as a noun meaning walling off or banning all the social activities to control and contain the disease. Sometimes, it functions as an adjectival with certain related nouns. Both syntactic functions are presented in [3-4] and [3-5] below:

[3-4] So-called lock-downs can help to take the heat out of ….

[3-5] they plan to start lifting the so-called lock-down restrictions.

3.2 Lexical Narrowing
3.2.1**Nouns**

Several linguistically-encoded concepts are narrowed to be interpreted as *COVID-19*. These expressions, which are nouns or noun phrases with more general meaning, are manipulated by the speakers to indicate this disease or some attributes related to it. They are mutually adjusted with the contextual information and the evoked cognitive effects to yield the intended ad hoc CONCEPT . More than (9) linguistic expressions are pointed out in the sample. These are explained in the following points:

1. The virus : This is a very wider term including all the types of viruses causing different diseases. Here the term is used for many times in its narrower sense indicating specifically *COVID-19*, as in:

[3-6] Are we still in the phase where we can contain *the virus*?

2. Corona : This is narrowed to be interpreted as COVID-19 that became an ad hoc concept to Corona which as a virus can be classified into many types according to their biological and pathological characteristics. Covid-19 is only one disease caused by only one member of coronavirus family.

[3-7] It's …, but at the same time it can be contained, *the corona*.

2. Coronavirus: This term is composed of two linguistic items: corona + virus. It is narrower than both, but certainly it is wider than *COVID-19*. Coronavirus depending on the current context and the hearer's expectations refers to the present-day disease as intended by the speakers, as in:

[3-7] The *coronavirus* has spread now to 65 countries.

3. *Epidemic and pandemic:* Epidemic (of Greek origin meaning upon or above people) is the rapid spread of disease to a large number of people in a given population within a short period of time (Marrian-Webster), while the term pandemic refers to " an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population"(ibid). Both terms are narrowed referring to the more occasion-specific sense of

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COVID-19*. Generally, they refer to any disease involved in their definitions, but the LP process of mutual adjustment makes it easy for the hearers to lexically interpret them as COVID-19* no other diseases. In [3-8] below, both terms are introduced in the same example :

[3.8]*We have said this since the beginning of this epidemic/pandemic.*

4. *Pneumonia*: This term is defined as " acute disease that is marked by inflammation of lung tissue …, is characterized by fever, chills, cough, difficulty in breathing, fatigue, chest pain, and reduced ling expansion, and typically caused by an infectious agent (such as …, virus, or…) (merrian-webster.com). This term is narrowed for several times in the sample to mean COVID-19* because the latter is one of the diseases involved under the umbrella of pneumonia and it is nowadays the deadly one.

[3-9] … indicating a signal of a cluster of *pneumonia* cases in China.

5. *Respiratory pathogen*: It refers to a variety of viruses and some bacteria causing inflections of the respiratory tract. This term is lexically narrowed to mean COVID-19* because this disease is caused by one virus of these respiratory pathogens, as in:

[3-10]We have never seen before a *respiratory pathogen* that's ….

6. Outbreak: This term is narrowed in two ways: First, it refers to "a sudden rise in the incidence of a disease" (Merriam-webster.com) not, for example, outbreak of war, and second, it indicates COVID-19* not any other disease, as in:

[3-11] This *outbreak* can actually be contained even where there are many cases.

7. Disease: The literal meaning of the DISEASE is lexically narrowed to be interpreted as COVID-19* as in [3- 12a] and the same concept is narrowed to mean SEASONAL FLUENZA*

[3-12a] Here we have *a disease* for which we have no vaccine and no treatment.

[3-12b] We have *a disease* for which we have a vaccine.

8. Other nouns with general meanings are narrowed to indicate the concerns of COVID-19. The nouns that are pointed out in the sample are: *situation* [3- 13] , *scenario* [3-14]' *concern and questions*, [3-15], spread [3-16], opportunity (meaning containing an controlling the disease [3-17] as in:

[3-13]We're monitoring *the situation* every moment … and analyzing the data.

[3-14] Different countries are in different *scenarios*…

[3-15] We know people are afraid. We know they have many *concerns and questions*.

[3-16] The strategy of containment with slowing down *spread* with…

[3-17] If we're lucky and …, we may get *the opportunity*.

9. *Clinical attack rate*: This phrase is narrowed along the conversations to indicate the CINICAL ATTACT RATE* concerning COVID-19 specifically not any estimated rate of other diseases in that region. The temporal and special contexts contribute to this narrowed interpretation, as in:

[3-18] I was wondering if you have an estimate for *the clinical attack rate* for Wuhan, for Hubei Province, or for China as a whole.

ii) *Adjective + noun* combinations. The analysis of the selected texts shows that the literal meaning of certain adjectives is mutually adjusted with the contextual information and cognitive effects to yield lexical interpretation concerning COVID-19. The results shows (5) adjectives are lexically narrowed to be applicable to COVID-19 context. These adjectives and their meanings are presented in the following points:

1. MILD: This adjective is pragmatically processed to represent an interpretation which is the most optimal and relevant one to the topic understudy. In [3-18], the literal meaning of MILD is narrowed through mutual adjustment to mean specifically NOT SEVERE* which is different from, for example, MILD** in mild disposition or mild cheese (Hornby, 2004: 707).

    [3-18] A WHO staff member… tested positive for COVID-19 and he has *mild* disease.

2. DEADLY in [3-19] below, is lexically narrowed to mean CAPABLE OF CAUSING DEATH*(*Merriam Webster.com*) which is different from , for example, DEADLY** in a deadly conversation.

[3-19] Ending the epidemic will require a … to continue suppressing … this *deadly* virus.

3. AGGRESSIVE : The literal meaning of this adjective is lexically narrowed to be interpreted as FORCEFUL* as in [3-20a], while in [3-20b] , a different interpretation is achieved because the same adjective is processed in a different mutual adjustment because of the different contextual information. That is AGGRESSIVE in [3-20b] indicates BEING HOSTILE* or ENERGIC*towards the disease (Hornby,2004: 24) , as in:

  [3-20a] With early *aggressive* measures, countries can stop transmission.
  [3-20b] That's why we're up here … being so *aggressive* in our language …the time is to be aggressive.

4. READY: This adjective is narrowed to be interpreted as BEING DULLY EQUIPPED FOR THE OCCASION OF RECEIVING PATENTS WITH COVID-19 specifically. This means that to give good care ,the hospitals should be provided with vital equipment such as deliver masks, goggles, test kids, face shields, enough ventilators, enough oxygen , etc.

  [3-21] All hospitals can get *ready.*

5. EXTREME : This adjective is narrowed, as in [3-22] to be interpreted as STRICT*, RIGID*. The adjective has some other interpretations but the context entails this one:

[3-22] China managed with its very *extreme* measures to beat back this quite sizable epidemic in Wuhan.

4. Conclusions

    Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. LP is an applicable approach to the study of the pragmatic phenomena behind manipulating lexical processes. The mental process of mutual adjustment of lexically-encoded meaning, contextual knowledge, and cognitive effects or implications can make hearers perceive what is embedded easily and this asserts the crucial role of the relevant-theoretic approach in identifying the embedded meaning or conversational implicatures.

2. The temporal and special contexts represented by the actual Corona situation motivate an exceed use of neologisms and lexical narrowing. Therefore, the contextual knowledge shared by the speaker(s) and hearer(s) in WHO conferences can be considered as a fertile resource for generating additional or slightly different ad hoc CONCEPTS* from certain literal CONCEPTS. As a result, it economizes the linguistic repertoire of a language.

3. Both processes of neologisms and lexical narrowing are manipulated in the sample but with obvious degrees of diversity. WHO speakers tend frequently to coin new concepts or narrow the meanings of other concepts in their conversations.

4. The narrowed lexical concepts are more frequently used than neologisms because the coinage of new lexical items is a more restricted process than investing an already existing lexical item to create new senses differing from those of the lexical root.

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in Selected WHO Conferences on COVID-19***
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