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Lexical Innovation and Semantic Shift in Post-Pandemic English

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into English a flood of new vocabulary and expressions, altering the modes of everyday and professional interpersonal communication. This paper discusses lexical innovation and semantic shift as a result of the crisis in world health. It considers new words, metaphors, and metaphorical extensions introduced to the lexicon through mass media, public health messaging, and online communication. The methodology is corpus-based, tracing frequency trends and contextual meanings applied to pandemic terms—old and new—such as lockdown, social distancing, quarantine, vaccine hesitancy (to name just a few), besides other earlier-inthe-pandemic-used words whose meaning changed significantly during the pandemic itself: bubble, remote, essential. The study draws a relation between linguistic innovation and social adjustment, collective apprehension, and the transformation of social norms. It discusses changes in English during the pandemic as an illustration of its flexibility in a time of global crisis. It also underlines the way these new additions to vocabulary and to meanings will carry over into post-pandemic communication. Hybrid terms and neologized meanings continue to inform current discourses about health, work, and education. The study thus specifies the mechanisms by which crisis-induced linguistic change functions as a social and cultural response to upheaval, illustrating the dynamic interface between language, media, and communal experience.

Keywords: Lexical innovation, Semantic shift, Post-pandemic English, Language change Sociolinguistics

الابتكار المعجمي والتحول الدلالي في اللغة الإنجليزية ما بعد الجائحة

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مديرية التربية في بابل

أدت جائحة كوفيد-19 إلى تدفق هائل من المفردات والتعابير الجديدة في اللغة الإنجليزية، مما غيّر أنماط التواصل الشخصي اليومي والمهني. تناقش هذه الورقة الابتكار المعجمي والتحول الدلالي نتيجةً للأزمة الصحية العالمية. وتتناول الكلمات الجديدة والاستعارات وامتداداتها المجازية التي أُدخلت إلى المعجم عبر وسائل الإعلام، ورسائل الصحة العامة، والتواصل الإلكتروني. تعتمد المنهجية على تحليل المدونات اللغوية، حيث تتتبع اتجاهات التكرار والمعاني السياقية المطبقة على مصطلحات الجائحة - القديمة والجديدة - مثل الإغلاق، والتباعد الاجتماعي، والحجر الصحي، والتردد في تلقي اللقاح (على سبيل المثال لا الحصر)، بالإضافة إلى كلمات أخرى استُخدمت في وقت سابق من الجائحة وتغير معناها بشكل كبير خلالها: فقاعة، عن بُعد، أساسي. تربط هذه الدراسة بين الابتكار اللغوي والتكيف الاجتماعي، والوعي الجماعي، وتحول الأعراف الاجتماعية. وتناقش التغيرات التي طرأت على اللغة الإنجليزية خلال الجائحة كمثال على مرونتها في أوقات الأزمات العالمية. كما تُبرز الدراسة كيف ستنتقل هذه الإضافات الجديدة إلى المفردات والمعاني إلى التواصل في مرحلة ما بعد الجائحة. وتستمر المصطلحات الهجينة والمعاني المُستحدثة في التأثير على الخطابات الحالية حول الصحة والعمل والتعليم. وبذلك، تُحدد الدراسة الآليات التي يعمل من خلالها التغير اللغوي الناجم عن الأزمة كاستجابة اجتماعية وثقافية للاضطرابات، مُوضحةً التفاعل الديناميكي بين اللغة والإعلام **والتجربة الجماعية.**

الكلمات المفتاحية: الابتكار المعجمي، التحول الدلالي، اللغة الإنجليزية في مرحلة ما بعد الجائحة، التغير اللغوي، علم اللغة الاجتماعي

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is primarily a global public health and societal crisis. It shall also become remembered as a period of unprecedented linguistic change in contemporary English-in which speakers rapidly coined and adapted neologisms to express experiences, technologies, and social realities for which there were previously no terms. Common people's vocabulary almost instantly acquired words such as "social distancing," "lockdown," or using Zoom to refer to videoconferencing that reflected the new order of daily life. Thus, English witnessed lexical and semantic changes at an unusual speed for linguists to observe in real-time detail. Change normally takes years or even centuries to percolate through all levels of language1(Peter Holmes:2013:204). The pandemic year was thus an extraordinary opportunity-in momentary slow motion-to observe first hand innovation in lexis and shifts in semantics taking place over a matter of months1(Peter Holmes:2013:204; Thorne ,2020 :94). Now that the world is slowly heaving its way into a post-pandemic context, it becomes important to consider how English has been shaped by these developments and what they reveal about language as a responsive social tool.

The present paper thus explores lexical creativity (invention of new words and phrases) and semantic change (meanings that have changed or expanded for existing words) in the wake of the pandemic, building on and considerably widening both conceptually and empirically a previous study dealing with the

"Corona language" phenomenon during COVID-19 (Al-Heeh, Salameh, & Abu-Srour 2022). It studies how English speakers created terminology to describe wholly new situations and how familiar words—to use Tom McArthur's phrase—acquire senses in the context of the pandemic. For instance, covidiot (a blend of COVID and idiot to label someone flouting public health guidelines) or quarantini (a playful name for cocktails mixed in quarantine) became parts of colloquial parlance, at the same time as newer senses related to pandemic life were attached to words like bubble or masking. The rapid changes illustrate the flexibility of language in fulfilling new communicative needs (Hoff, 2006: 60). They also demonstrate the relationship between language and thought and the link between language and social experience (Gleitman & Papafragou, 2005: 87).

The importance of studying neologisms is in what it turns out about the society, social responses, and resilience. Every new coinage and turn of meaning reflects linguistically the pandemic's cultural, psychological, and communal impact (Singh & Singh, 2020: 169). By listing and analyzing the post-pandemic innovations in English, insight is provided into how speakers coped with and made sense of a unique reality through language. This research will also help adjust sociolinguistic theory to provide a case study on rapid language change under extreme global stress to complement previously recorded observations of language evolution during historical crises (Pennebaker & Lay, 2002: 275). Documenting such lexical changes would serve practical lexicographic interests as well since dictionaries update new words pertaining to the pandemic for use by teachers who create materials for learners (Rashed et al., 2020: 3).

The next section of this paper presents previous works on language changes during crises and theoretical models of lexical innovation and semantic shift. After that, it describes the method through which new pandemic-driven terms are identified and analyzed. This is followed by a presentation involving major findings that comprise types of neologisms, linguistic mechanisms creating them, and social domains most affected by them. It finally concludes by drawing the implication of these results for what happens to language in a post-pandemic world as a change, together with discussing which among these linguistic innovations have permanent staying power in English usage.

Literature Review

Language Change in Times of Crisis

Language is never static. It constantly changes as people modify their vocabulary and expressions to suit new realities (Holmes, 2013: 204). Normally, this change is slow and barely noticeable within short periods. However, dramatic historical

events can first an abrupt shift in language. Rarely do sociolinguists get the opportunity to observe changing language in progress because change normally takes place over long periods. Crises provide exactly such an opportunity (Holmes, 2013: 204). Wars, natural catastrophes, depressions and pandemics-a surge of lexical innovation often follows such upheaval when people scramble to find ways both to explain and mentally come to terms with unfamiliar situations (Pennebaker & Lay, 2002: 272; Borden et al.,2020:283). In a crisis the existing words suddenly appear inadequate or obsolete;there is an urgent felt need among speakers to create wholly new terms that encapsulate seemingly sui generis situations(Pennebaker&Lay ,2002 :272 ;BenSaïda&Litimi ,2021 :4800) . Some of the old vocabulary may appear "clumsy" or unable to convey the gravity and nuance of novel experiences, prompting a creative outpouring of neologisms (Borden et al., 2020: 283). Indeed, research on language use during crises has shown that people readily generate and adopt ambiguous or newly coined terms when required by communication needs (Pennebaker & Lay, 2002: 274).

Historical examples of societal woes being a "linguistic womb" for new expressions are abundant. During World War II, technological advances also necessitated the creation of words such as RADAR (an acronym for Radio Detection And Ranging, coined in 1940 by U.S. Navy engineers to name a then-secret innovation in detection technology—Cobb, 2007: 78). War begets invention, scientifically and lexically; socially, the adjective frustrating is purported to have been first used by the English novelist Mary Ann Evans (pen name George Eliot) in her novel Middlemarch to satisfy a social yearning and pressure to which at that time there was no succinct label (Marques, 2019: 220). Each troubled era, from economic depressions to cultural revolutions, has yielded vocabulary born of necessity. Precedent was set for what happened during COVID-19, an explosion of creative language to make sense of a suddenly transformed world.

What makes the COVID-19 pandemic unique is not only the first wave of scale and intensity but also a set of new terminologies that were almost instantaneously and sim ultaneously coined across many languages (Wargadinata et al., 2020: 60; Kitishat et al., 2020: 318). By the beginning of 2020, similar phenomena-infections, lockdowns, and implementation of social distancing measures-had been taking place all over the world, with people both inside and outside the English-speaking world inventing similar words to describe them. In English, quite a number of neologisms appeared so that scholars and lexicographers compiled pandemic dictionaries and glossaries almost contemporaneously with real time (Thorne, 2020:94). Since the start of the pandemic in popular use, British linguist Tony Thorne meticulously compiled an extensive "Coronaspeak" glossary covering COVID-19-related slang, technical terms, and catchphrases. This glossary

and parallel compilations listed scores of items, from "covidiot" and "coronacation" (corona + vacation, a sudden holiday from work or school because of the pandemic) to jargon-like abbreviations such as "WFH" (meaning working from home), to darkly comic slang, for instance, "boomer remover," a grim moniker hinting at the virus's fatal effect on the baby boomer generation (Thorne 2020: 95). The lexicon itself quickly put academic antennae on alert among language-watchers that everyday talk was being rapidly transformed by the pandemic (Thorne 2020: 94–95).

Other than informal slang, highly technical terms also found mainstream currency because of the pandemic. Epidemiological and medical vocabulary-"coronavirus," "flatten the curve," "PCR tests," "antibodies," "ventilators," and such-became part of daily news discourse and household conversations (Rashed et al., 2020: 3). Ordinary people became fluent in what had previously been specialist terminology, reflecting a crossover between scientific language and common parlance (Rashed et al., 2020: 3). Linguists and computer scientists compiled corpora of COVID-19-related texts to support natural language processing and information sharing during the crisis, creating standardized lexicons of biomedical terms and definitions (Rashed et al., 2020: 4). This ensured both humans and AI systems could quickly interpret all the new words and acronyms that were suddenly emerging in the context of the pandemic (Rashed et al., 2020: 4; Deshpande & Schuller, 2020: 2).

Many changes were actually semantic, involving the shift in meaning of already existing words. Common English words acquired new senses-some general, some very specifically 'aligned' to the COVID era. Bubble (either a soap bubble or an economic term), came to mean a small exclusive group for infection control (social bubble, household bubble). Mask (a noun or a very unspecific verb) developed the specialized sense of wearing a medical face mask in public (mask up as a newly widespread phrasal verb). Zoom (long an unspecific verb meaning to move rapidly) semantically extended to videoconference -derived from the popular platform Zoom- another case of a proper noun, brand name becoming common verb virtually overnight. Such changes show the economy and flexibility with which language operates: old words acquire new senses to fulfill fresh communicative needs, often just slightly stretching existing meanings (Jackman, 1998: 300). This is what other works term semantic augmentation; thus, in this sense, change does not always warrant the creation of a totally new form but may equally well be satisfied by extending or modifying the sense of an already familiar word to suit some new concept (Fromkin et al., 2018: 12). General linguistic literature on semantic change records that words frequently experience shifts in meaning due to cultural and technological innovations (Traugott, 2017). During the

pandemic, culture change was fast and deep hence immediate semantic adjustment in the lexicon.

Technological and Social Drivers of Linguistic Innovation

Factors specific to the COVID-19 crisis comprise those that made people turn more intensely to digital communication technologies during lockdowns and social distancing orders. As face-to-face contact decreased, the internet and social media and messaging platforms were massively used as alternatives in communication. It was an environment of hyper-digitalization that facilitated term crowdsourcing across virtual communities and sped up meme diffusion so very much faster than ever before (Malecki et al., 2021: 699). Pandemic-related colloquial expressions and hashtags propagated over the globe within hours through such social media as Twitter and Facebook. A slang word coined in one country could be quickly adopted by users in another with slight adaptation, online connectivity bringing down geographical barriers to changes in language (Boberg et al., 2020: 5). Research on crisis communication via social media found that the perception of the public toward any event is very much attached to specific language trends and keywords dominating discourse online (Malecki et al., 2021: 699). During the pandemic, trending terms such as “StayHome”, “FlattenTheCurve” or “Plandemic” (a conspiracy-driven pejorative twist on pandemic) reflected not only information spread but also emotional and political undercurrents in society (Boberg et al., 2020: 5; Borden et al., 2020: 285). The choice of linguistic elements in these online contexts-for instance, whether someone says “coronavirus,” “China virus,” or “novel coronavirus”-more often carried ideological weight and signaled the stance of the speaker or sources of information (Gorbalenya et al., 2020:2; Singh & Singh, 2020:170).

Another factor was the sudden ubiquity of certain technologies whose names became verbs or generic descriptors. The clearest case is Zoom, the video conferencing software whose usage skyrocketed for work, education, and social life. “Zoom” quickly entered English as a verb (“Let’s Zoom tonight”) and gerund (“I spent the afternoon Zooming into meetings”) meaning to hold a virtual meeting (Zou et al., 2020: 334; Murphy, 2020: 500). The brand name attained status as a common noun and verb much as “Google” did in earlier years for web searching. Related phrases like “Zoom fatigue” (mental exhaustion from excessive video calls) and “Zoom-bombing” (the disruptive intrusion into a video meeting) were also coined-and widely used by mid-2020 (Zou et al., 2020: 335). Similar trends were observed with other platform names: different user groups have all used “Skype,” “Teams,” and “WebEx” as verbs at various times, even though it was “Zoom” that dominated the vocabulary of remote communication during the

pandemic in English. Technological adoption drives linguistic changes, as highlighted by Zou et al. (2020: 335) when a tool becomes highly available to everyday activities its name often permeates the language as a verb or generic term. In crises, this kind of adoption happens very quickly because there is an urgency to communicate.

The pandemic's social and demographic trends also shaped language use. With schools closed and activities curtailed, children and parents initially spent lengthy hours at home together, changing the way languages were spoken within families. Some researchers expressed fears that such prolonged home isolation, especially among immigrant or multilingual families, would have incipient effects on the development and maintenance of formal language skills in the youth generation (Al-Balushi & Essa 2020:164; Wang 2021:1146). Informal home or heritage languages dominated daily interactions. The contact with standard or academic English variety-at this point usually reinforced at school-had diminished (Wang 2021:1147). On one hand, this situation could contribute to the enrichment of pandemic-related home slang or mixed-language expressions but on the other hand "language loss" or delayed acquisition of formal registers may also be observed. For instance, an English learner who mostly hears family coinages or community slang of a hypothetical mix between the English corona and some local word for elder has fewer chances to practice formal English. On the other hand, educators complained about the impossibility of teaching languages in virtual classrooms and resorted to new terminology and techniques (Kitishat et al., 2020: 319). As student-teacher navigation through e-learning takes place, terms such as online learning, distance learning, or informal coinages like Zoom University become common (Kitishat et al., 2020: 320). Not only do such terms describe new modes of education, but they also carry social meaning- for instance, Zoom University is a wry label attached to the perceived diminished college experience when it has been reduced to online instruction.

Another trend observed was the intergenerational linguistic gap that the pandemic may have catalyzed. Younger people, more generally active on social networks and better initiated into internet culture, were at the forefront of coining and circulating new slang (Breiseth, 2020: 2; Al-Balushi & Essa, 2020: 165). Words like "OK Zoomer" (a play on "OK Boomer," directed at someone struggling with video calls) or "coronacut" (self-inflicted haircut during lockdown), propagated mostly by younger cohorts through TikTok, Twitter, and other youth-dominated platforms, would have exposed older adults less to these viral neologisms, such that they continued using more formal or neutral terms. More importantly, the mode of communication changed. Where older generations might prefer longer emails or phone calls. The move from what can be described as "the age of long e-

mails to short texts" had already begun shaping language use, but remote work and scant social interaction accelerated this trend during the pandemic thus normalizing quick and efficient forms of messaging (Al-Balushi & Essa, 2020: 165; Wang, 2021: 1155). Long term effects may be what one study describes as "completely different forms of a regular language used by two generations living together" (Al-Balushi & Essa, 2020: 165). Parents and their teenage children under one roof during lockdown both engaged in pandemic related discussions but with different linguistic styles and vocabularies-from more formal to trendier neo-log shorthand filled internet born terms.

Previous Research on COVID-19 Neologisms

A group of researchers studied COVID-19 for scholarly documentation and analysis in response to those large-scale linguistic changes. Early on, linguists diagnosed that what a new variety of English would informally be "Coronaspeak" was emerging (Thorne, 2020: 93). Continuous media monitoring and social platforms allowed Thorne (2020) to log dozens of pandemic neologisms and catchphrases that proved highly infectious in many countries worldwide. Lexicographers at major dictionaries also supplied special updates. This included breaking its rules by issuing interim reports in 2020 on the vocabulary related to the coronavirus, recording first-time-ever usages of several words besides noting new coinages (OED, 2020 as referenced by news reports). Another study shows through German online news corpuses how fast pandemic-related terminology both imported into and began evolving within usage itself-this was not just an English phenomenon but indeed global linguistic trends taking place. Later, comparative lexicology projects would show how various languages formed analogous terms-say, English "lockdown" and French "confinement," or English "covidiot" and Spanish "covidiota"-as an indication of parallel innovation across linguistic communities. Whatever the specifics by language, the underlying process was people innovating leixcally to deal with COVID-19. The process has been universal even if the outcome is specific to a particular language (Wargadinata et al., 2020: 61).

There is also work within media and communication studies on content and framing of crisis discourses. For example, Boberg et al. (2020:5) analyze how alternative news media on Facebook use distinctive terminology in "pandemic populism"–for instance, loaded terms like scamdemic to create distrust.[1] Their computational content analysis shows that lexicon choice (e.g., "Chinese virus" or "coronavirus") was heavily wired to political narrative and conspiracy theories (Boberg et al., 2020:5). Borden et al. (2020:285) also work within social media crisis communication to identify linguistic categories and markers for crisis

situations. They argue that recognizing atypical or innovative language use on social media-for instance, abnormal context usage spikes of words like earthquake or outbreak-can improve automated detection of crises (Borden et al., 2020:286). In the COVID-19 case, sudden frequency bursts of medical jargon in everyday tweets signaled the onset of the health crisis. Another relevant work by Oyebode et al. (2022: 180) used natural language processing on Twitter data to determine key issues during the pandemic, indirectly emphasizing which terms became uppermost in public preoccupation (so many words reflecting true and false narratives: vaccine, mask, 5G, etc.). These all show the different levels of interest that pandemic language attracts: not only is it a linguistics topic but one for social scientists interested in communication patterns; or psychologists studying how language expresses anxiety or coping; or information scientists building tools that process new vocabulary.

To conclude, the literature agrees that the COVID-19 pandemic set off a wave of lexical innovation and semantic change in English. Comparable in scale to other great social transformations but unusual in its rapid global synchronicity, previous work establishes that crises can fast-track linguistic change. The COVID-19 era provides a living example of this dynamic! What remains as key gaps is an attempt at systematically distinguishing between lexical innovation (new words/phrases) and semantic change (new meanings of existing words) within the context of the pandemic and analyzing changes through linguistic mechanisms (morphology, analogy borrowing, etc.)1 This study aims to address these gaps by offering a structured linguistically informed and theory-based analysis supported by corpus evidence of pandemic-attributable English neologisms and meaning changes.

Theoretical Framework

Any discussion on the linguistic phenomena that have been associated with COVID-19 should therefore begin in theory with how new words are formed and how word meanings may change. Two key concepts here are the semiotic nature of language (how words signify meaning) and the principle of arbitrariness and convention in linguistic signs (how word meanings are established by social agreement). These concepts help explain why and how speakers were able to innovate lexically in response to new experiences.

Signs, Symbols, and Convention in Language

In linguistic theory, words are considered a type of symbolic sign – they stand for meanings not by any inherent connection, but by social convention (Fromkin et al., 2018: 12; Jackman, 1998: 300). Charles Peirce's classic semiotic framework distinguishes three types of signs: iconic (signs that resemble what they signify,

like a pictorial road sign of falling rocks indicating a rockfall hazard), indexical (signs that have a causal or factual connection to what they signify, like smoke indicating fire), and symbolic (signs that have an arbitrary relationship to their referent, established only through usage and agreement) (Abu-Akel & Bailey, 2001: 270). Language falls largely into this third category: the word *"virus,"* for example, does not *look* or *sound* like a virus; it is a symbolic label we have collectively agreed represents that concept. This arbitrariness means that, in principle, new symbolic signs (words) can be created at any time to represent new concepts – as long as a community of speakers consents to their use (Jackman, 1998: 300). Conversely, existing words can be imbued with new meanings if users start using them in novel ways that catch on. The conventionality of language implies that usage is key: once a person or group starts using a new term and others accept and repeat it, a convention begins to form (Kimmelman, 2015: 144). Over time, through repeated social reinforcement, a neologism can become an entrenched part of the lexicon, or a novel meaning can become an accepted sense of a pre-existing word (Jackman, 1998: 300).

Philosopher John Hospers described the process of lexical change as essentially a chain of social decisions: an individual or small group decides to use a sign (a word or phrase) to denote something, and if others independently find this usage effective or catchy and also adopt it, the practice spreads (as paraphrased in Alison et al., 2014: 173). In the pandemic context, one can imagine how a term like *"social distancing"* (initially a technical public-health term) became a conventional phrase: authorities introduced it, media repeated it, and soon everyone was saying it to describe the new norm of physical separation. Similarly, slang like *"covidiot"* might have started as a witty insult by one internet user, but as it resonated with many people's frustrations, it rapidly proliferated and became commonly understood. By contrast, some attempted coinages fail to catch on if they do not resonate or if no consensus forms around them. The theoretical takeaway is that lexical innovation is a communal act – even though it often begins with individual creativity, it requires collective adoption to survive and enter the language (Alison et al., 2014: 173). The pandemic created the ideal conditions for such communal acts of word creation, as millions shared the same novel situation and sought a mutual vocabulary to discuss it.

Lexical Innovation: Mechanisms of Word Formation

From a linguistic morphology perspective, there are well-documented processes by which new words (neologisms) can be formed in English. The pandemic-era neologisms adhered to these familiar word-formation processes, even as they produced novel combinations:

- Compounding: joining two or more existing words (or roots) to form a new term. For example, *"coronavirus"* is itself a compound (from Latin *corona*, "crown," and *virus*), and in the pandemic many new compounds arose: *"coronacation"* (corona + vacation), *"herd immunity"* (herd + immunity), *"community spread"*, and *"care mongering"* (a positive twist encouraging community care, modeled on fear-mongering) are a few instances. Compounding was prolific because it allows a descriptive approach – combining known words to pinpoint a new idea.

- Derivation (Affixation): creating a new word by adding prefixes or suffixes to a base. The pandemic introduced or popularized terms like *"lockdown"* (the noun *lockdown* existed pre-2020 but surged in use), and creative uses of suffixes can be seen in *"coronaphobia"* (adding -phobia to *corona* to mean an intense fear of COVID-19) or *"vaccination"* taking on near-daily usage. Even *"masker"* and *"anti-masker"* (mask + agentive -er) emerged to label those who wear masks versus those who refuse, showing derivational morphology at work in real time.

- Blending: merging parts of words (rather than whole words) to form a new term. Pandemic blends were especially colorful. The infamous *"covidiot"* combines *COVID* with *idiot*. Another example is *"infodemic"* (information + epidemic), a term popularized by the World Health Organization to describe the spread of misinformation about the virus. Blends like *"coronacoaster"* (corona + rollercoaster) described the emotional ups and downs during lockdown, and *"quarantine + teens"* gave rise to "quaranteens," referring humorously to teenagers in quarantine or the generation experiencing their youth in lockdown. Blending is a particularly creative mechanism because it often yields catchy, media-friendly words that can go viral linguistically (Thorne, 2020: 95).

- Clipping and Abbreviation: shortening existing words. The very name *"COVID"* is a clipped form (from *COVID-19*, which itself is an acronym: *Coronavirus Disease 2019*). People commonly referred to *"the rona"* as slang for the coronavirus (clipping *corona*). Other examples include *"sanny"* for hand sanitizer and *"iso"* (in Australia) for isolation. Clippings can make technical or long terms more casual and shareable.

- Acronyms and Initialisms: forming new words from initial letters. Beyond *"COVID"* itself, we saw *"WFH"* for working from home, *"PPE"* for personal protective equipment (a term that leapt from specialist use to common knowledge), and *"ICU"* (intensive care unit) spoken of frequently on the news. While these were not invented in 2020, their currency skyrocketed and they became part of everyday vocabulary for people far removed from their professional origins.

- Semantic Shift / Extension: as noted, not all new usages required new word forms; some reused existing words in new senses. This can be seen as a lexical innovation mechanism as well, often called metaphorical extension or metonymy when an old word is applied to a new concept by association. The term *"shielding,"* for instance, traditionally means protecting, but it took on a specific meaning of "staying home to protect oneself (or vulnerable others) from infection." The word *"bubble"* (mentioned above) is another case of metaphorical extension to mean a contained social group. Even military metaphors like "frontline" found extended usage: health care workers were dubbed *"frontline heroes,"* drawing on war terminology to frame the fight against the virus (Holmes, 2013: 210 – noting how metaphors can drive semantic change).

These demonstrations are available in linguistic literature (Fromkin et al., 2018: 13; Schmitt, 2013: 45), and the pandemic presented real-world demonstrations of each. A very important theoretical insight is that speakers intuitively apply existing rules of word formation in their language to create new terms that will be understood by others. Even in an emergency, humans do not randomly generate words; they make them in recognizable patterns (for instance, '-ing' or '-er' as a verb or agent noun from a noun, as in 'Zooming' or 'Zoomer'). This makes sure that the neologisms are transparent or can be deciphered by peers and hence aids their spread and acceptance. Lexical innovation is, therefore, a creative but rule-governed process.

Semantic Shift and Pragmatic Framing

The phenomenon of semantic shift-meaning change over time or from one context to another-is also principled. Most often new senses develop through metaphor, analogy, or contextual re-specialization. One could observe how terms were pragmatically reframed during the pandemic. For instance, "quarantine" historically refers to a 40-day isolation (rooted in 17th-century plague measures), but in 2020 it came to mean any period of isolation (often much shorter) or even a verb ("to quarantine someone" or colloquially "to be quarantined"). The pressure of context can rapidly enforce these shifts; everyone understood in 2020 that "after travel, I had to quarantine for two weeks" did not mean a literal 40 days but a new convention of ~14 days, an adaptation of meaning through pragmatic usage (Hoff, 2013: 15). Pragmatics and critical discourse are also important: a term's connotation can be shifted by the way it is used in discourse. The word pandemic itself, initially technically classificatory of a global epidemic, very quickly acquired heavy emotional and social weight in media discourses-sometimes hyperbolically or politically construed.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the language choices with the construction of power, ideology, and social structures to provide a lens for such analysis. For instance, it is invisible enemy wartime frame that politicians have power to invoke carries ideological implications in a rally against common foe (Thorne 2020: 95; Singh and Singh 2020: 170). A CDA perspective would be quick to spot that there can be influences in public perception if health measures are referred to as lockdown instead of stay-at-home order- the former sounding more coercive borrowing from prison terminology while the latter sound bureaucratic. Authorities experimented over the pandemic on terminologies for public compliance(Malecki et al 2021 :700). In England ,where slogans shifted from Stay Home to an eventually evolved version of stay alert ,at one point subtle semantic difference debate confused or inspired. Therefore, sometimes semantic changes took place through deliberate engineering (top-down, institutional) and at other times organic generation (bottom-up, public). This interplay highlights the flexibility of meaning in language and the fact that it is often contested during moments of societal upheaval.

To sum up, the theoretical framework of this study integrates an understanding of the structure of word formation (morphological processes of neologism) with a semantic-pragmatic understanding of change in meaning, all based on the concept of language as a system of conventional signs. These perspectives inform the analysis concerning how pandemic-related lexical items were created and how their meanings were negotiated. The next section describes how the study was conducted to collect and analyze instances of such lexical innovations and shifts in English during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

The study is qualitative and corpus-based regarding forms and instances of lexical innovation and semantic change that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, instead of attempting a large quantitative survey listing all new words, it focuses on carefully selected exemplary terms and phrases reflecting general tendencies in language development. The methodology has three basic stages: first, data collection (compiling the corpus with new terms); second, categorization (classifying the terms according to type of innovation and domain of use); third, analysis-applying linguistic analysis to each category.

Data Collection: A mini-corpus of English lexical items on COVID-19 was compiled from different sources between early 2020 and mid-2021. These included: - News media and official communications: Headlines, articles, and press briefings (particularly those that introduced or popularized terms like “social distancing” or “essential workers”). - Social media and internet platforms: Twitter

hashtags, trending words on platforms like Reddit and Facebook, and entries from collaborative slang databases such as Urban Dictionary. - Lexicographic resources: Online dictionaries and sites that monitor language. The British National Corpus (BNC) was specifically queried for the occurrence of major pandemic terms to provide an idea about their frequency and contexts of use in contemporary English. The BNC is not up-to-date to 2020 in its entirety, it has monitor corpora extensions; besides, other large corpora (such as the Coronavirus Corpus released by English-Corpora.org) and Google Books/News were consulted so results could have wide coverage (Rashed et al., 2020:3). We also referenced the glossary compiled by Thorne (2020) for guidance on prominent slang terms, and checked the Oxford English Dictionary's special updates for any officially recognized neologisms.

The original shortlist amounted to about 50 different single and multi-word forms. There were totally new coinages (for example, "covidiot", "coronacation", "doomscrolling"), existing words given new pandemic-specific senses (for example, "bubble", "mask"(verb),"Zoom" (verb)), abbreviations and acronyms (WFH, PPE, CDC in the context of general everyday discourse), and recycled phrases/slogans ("flatten the curve," "new normal" in their new senses). The next step was to look up each term on the list-in-context to confirm its meaning and usage; this involved reading sample sentences (via Key Word in Context(KWIC) concordance outputs) showing how the term was being used and trying to note earliest instances of or source for the term when available(for instance, identifying that quarantini was popularized through social media posts in March 2020).

Categorization: The following metadata were documented for each term in the corpus:- Type of lexical innovation: New word (neologism) or existing word used with a new meaning (semantic shift). In the case of the former, the morphological process was identified (compound, blend, clipping, etc., as per the theoretical categories above). In the case of the latter, the type of meaning change was identified (extension, metaphorical shift, narrowing, etc.).- Domain of usage: Main social domain/context of use. Based on the finding by Al-Heeh et al. (2022) that pandemic-related language covered domains such as health/medicine, family life, education, business/economy, technology, politics, psychology and religion, For example, "PPE" and "triage" fall under health/medicine while "Zoom classroom" is education/technology; "stimulus check", economy/politics; "drive-in worship", religion/community and the pragmatic use, psychology/family to describe the strain of lockdown on people's freedom to move around or cabin fever.- Connotations and pragmatic notes: if it is positive, negative, humorous or neutral term; any interesting pragmatics (for example covidiot is clearly derogatory while quaranteam - meaning a team or group one forms during quarantine -is playful).

Understanding connotation is important in analysis to see how people used language to cope, satirize or criticize during the pandemic.

This categorization facilitated structured analysis, allowing us to discuss groups of terms together (for instance, all terms that are blends, or all terms related to technology use, etc.). The categorization scheme was not rigid; some terms naturally fell into multiple categories, which is itself an interesting point (for example, "Zoom church" is both religious domain and technology, as well as being a phrase created by compounding a brand name with a common noun).

Analytical Approach: The present paper incorporates the use of descriptive linguistics and a soft focus on critical discourse analysis (CDA). Descriptive linguistic analysis breaks down the structure of neologisms (roots, affixes, source words in blends) and explains the mechanisms of semantic shift (for example, identifying the metaphor in calling a surge of cases a "wave"). Each major example is examined for how its form relates to meaning and why that form might have been chosen by speakers. Why say covidiot instead of COVID-idiot? The blending without the hyphen creates a snappier, more pejorative-sounding word. Which likely aided its popularity. Why did "social distancing" prevail over alternatives like "physical distancing"? Possibly because social distancing captured the broader social-life impact, and alliteration made the phrase memorable (Singh & Singh 2020:170).

The CDA part included analyzing what attitudes and power relations are revealed by the choice of certain words. These include politically charged terminology, for example, rhetoric of calling healthcare workers "warriors" or anti-mask protests as "freedom rallies," and noting how language was a site of contest—such as the debate over saying "Covid-19" versus "Wuhan virus" (Gorbalenya et al., 2020: 2). To keep the analysis firmly based on evidence, any such interpretation was cross-checked with usage examples from our corpus or supporting literature. If analyzing the term "Chinese virus," actual quotes of political figures using it and public/media reactions were considered rather than purely theorizing.

There were no human subjects involved directly (textual data, publicly available sources) so the ethical considerations in this study are quite minimized by traditional standards. However, this is more of a methodological limitation: while very large and diverse, the corpus is not exhaustive. New words emerge even as this research takes place-some will be mere faddish expressions while others shall persist. Attempt has been made to include those whose usage had already become widespread-by frequency-in-cor- pora or media coverage-as likely imprints on English of change that will have a lasting effect. Very transient or niche slang was observed but found less analytical emphasis.

Through this mixed qualitative approach – part corpus analysis, part discourse analysis – the study comes up with both a taxonomy of pandemic-related linguistic changes and provides deeper insights into their significance. The following section presents the results of this analysis, organized by themes such as the nature of new coinages, changes in meaning of existing words, the linguistic processes involved, and the social domains most impacted by these lexical changes.

Analysis and Discussion

Emergence of New Words During the Pandemic

This is a qualitative and corpus-based study on forms and instances of lexical innovation and semantic change that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, instead of attempting a large quantitative survey listing all new words, it focuses on carefully selected exemplary terms and phrases reflecting general tendencies in language development. The methodology has three basic stages: first, data collection (compiling the corpus with new terms); second, categorization (classifying the terms according to type of innovation and domain of use); third, analysis-applying linguistic analysis to each category.

Data Collection: A small English mini-corpus on COVID-19 was compiled from various sources spanning early 2020 until mid-2021. These were: - News media and official communications: Headlines, articles, press briefings (particularly those that introduced or popularized terms like “social distancing” or “essential workers”). -Social media and internet platforms: Twitter hashtags, trending words on platforms such as Reddit and Facebook, collaborative slang databases (Urban Dictionary) entries. -Lexicographic resources: Online dictionaries and sites that monitor language. The British National Corpus (BNC) was specifically queried for the occurrence of major pandemic terms to provide an idea about their frequency and contexts of use in contemporary English. The BNC is not up-to-date to 2020 in its entirety, it has monitor corpora extensions; besides, other large corpora (such as the Coronavirus Corpus released by English-Corpora.org) and Google Books/News were consulted so results could have wide coverage (Rashed et al., 2020:3). We also referenced the glossary compiled by Thorne (2020) for guidance on prominent slang terms, and checked the Oxford English Dictionary’s special updates for any officially recognized neologisms.

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phrases/slogans (“flatten the curve,” “new normal” in their new senses). The next step was to look up each term on the list-in-context to confirm its meaning and usage; this involved reading sample sentences (via Key Word in Context(KWIC) concordance outputs) showing how the term was being used and trying to note earliest instances of or source for the term when available(for instance, identifying that quarantini was popularized through social media posts in March 2020).

Categorization: The following metadata were documented for each term in the corpus:- Type of lexical innovation: New word (neologism) or existing word used with a new meaning (semantic shift). In the case of the former, the morphological process was identified (compound, blend, clipping, etc., as per the theoretical categories above). In the case of the latter, the type of meaning change was identified (extension, metaphorical shift, narrowing, etc.).- Domain of usage: Main social domain/context of use. Based on the finding by Al-Heeh et al. (2022) that pandemic-related language covered domains such as health/medicine, family life, education, business/economy, technology, politics, psychology and religion, For example, "PPE" and "triage" fall under health/medicine while "Zoom classroom" is education/technology; "stimulus check", economy/politics; "drive-in worship", religion/community and the pragmatic use, psychology/family to describe the strain of lockdown on people's freedom to move around or cabin fever.- Connotations and pragmatic notes: if it is positive, negative, humorous or neutral term; any interesting pragmatics (for example covidiot is clearly derogatory while quaranteam - meaning a team or group one forms during quarantine -is playful). Understanding connotation is important in analysis to see how people used language to cope, satirize or criticize during the pandemic.

This categorization facilitated structured analysis, allowing us to discuss groups of terms together (for instance, all terms that are blends, or all terms related to technology use, etc.). The categorization scheme was not rigid; some terms naturally fell into multiple categories, which is itself an interesting point (for example, “Zoom church” is both religious domain and technology, as well as being a phrase created by compounding a brand name with a common noun).

Analytical Approach: The present paper used descriptive linguistics and softly focused critical discourse analysis (CDA). Descriptive linguistic analysis broke down the structure of neologisms (roots, affixes, source words in blends) and explained the mechanisms of semantic shift (for example, identifying the metaphor in calling a surge of cases a “wave”). Each major example was examined for how its form relates to meaning and why that form might have been chosen by speakers. Why say covidiot instead of COVID-idiot? The blending without the hyphen creates a snappier, more pejorative-sounding word. Which likely aided its

popularity. Why did "social distancing" prevail over alternatives like "physical distancing"? Possibly because social distancing captured the broader social-life impact, and alliteration made the phrase memorable (Singh & Singh, 2020: 170).

The CDA part was also interpretative, about what choices of words indicate attitudes and power relations. These included politically charged terms, for example rhetoric of calling healthcare workers "warriors", or anti-mask protests as "freedom rallies" and noting how language was a site of contest—such as the debate over saying "Covid-19" versus "Wuhan virus"(Gorbalenya et al., 2020: 2). To keep the analysis firmly based on evidence, any such interpretation was cross-checked with usage examples from our corpus or supporting literature. If analyzing the term "chinese virus," actual quotes of political figures using it and public/media reactions were considered rather than purely theorizing.

There were no human subjects directly involved in this research (the data were all textual, from publicly available sources), so ethical considerations in its traditional sense were minimal. However, one methodological limitation needs to be noted: while very diverse, the corpus is not exhaustive. The dynamic nature of language innovation means that new terms were emerging even as this study was being conducted; some may just be faddish expressions while others will last. We tried to incorporate those terms whose usage had already become widespread (as indicated by frequency-in-cor- pora or media coverage) to focus on changes likely to have a lasting imprint on English. Very transient or niche slang was ob- served but found less analytical emphasis.

Through this mixed qualitative approach – part corpus analysis, part discourse analysis – the study comes up with both a taxonomy of pandemic-related linguistic changes and provides deeper insights into their significance. The following section presents the results of this analysis, organized by themes such as the nature of new coinages, changes in meaning of existing words, the linguistic processes involved, and the social domains most impacted by these lexical changes.

Shifting Meanings of Existing Words

Apart from the absolutely brand-new words there were changes at the level of semantics and phraseology. A large number of quite ordinary English words assumed new contextual meanings directly out of the situations imposed by the pandemic—what linguists would describe as semantic shift or extension. One obvious example among so many is "bubble." Formerly, bubble could conjure up in the mind a child's soap bubble or perhaps an economic bubble; but during COVID-19, people redefined it as a small exclusive social group one interacts with while maintaining outsiders at arm's length to minimize infection risk. This new

sense of safe space became so common that even government adopted it in public guidelines (e.g., "You may expand your bubble to include one other household"). The meaning was metaphorical-in comparison with the protective boundary of home to the transparent but anyhow contained nature of a soap bubble-and it clicked because, in so many simple words, it could express the concept of a restricted interpersonal sphere. Even now, post-lockdown context, someone might say We're still bubbling with our neighbors or He's part of my bubble assuming the pandemic sense is intended. Whether this meaning will persist long-term remains to be seen, but it is a vivid instance of semantic shift in action.

Another top case was "lockdown." Until 2020, most likely to be associated with the security measures in prisons or perhaps a quick emergency response to an active threat—such as locking down a school when some incident is going on inside. The pandemic broadened its meaning: any government order telling people to stay home, businesses shut down. In almost every country, common parlance for such measures that the media spoke of "the first lockdown," "a second lockdown," and so on without feeling the need to clarify what exactly they were referring to. Its connotations—being locked into place—added dramatic flair to public discourse and probably influenced how people felt (some felt it was draconian; as the word implies a loss of freedom). The semantic shift here was one of generalization: from a term used in specific security contexts to any situation of enforced confinement. Notably, some governments attempted to eschew the term for its negative connotations, preferring phrases like "stay-at-home order" or "circuit-breaker." Nonetheless, lockdown took root in popular vocabulary, indicating that often the most evocative term wins out in semantic competition. It's telling that even after restrictions were eased people continue to talk about things in terms of pre-lockdown and post-lockdown, showing the word's integration into the temporal lexicon as a reference point.

New terms also included personal protective behaviors. "Mask" as a verb (to mask up) became popular. Pre-COVID-19, if someone said "Please mask," the immediate interpretation might not have been "put on a face mask." But during the pandemic, particularly within American English, "mask up" became a quick way to command someone to wear a mask. The word mask moved from being only a noun for something that covers t becoming a verb for the action of using that cover. This type of functional shift or conversion from noun to verb is quite common in English but never noticed how fast it was accepted here? The noun "mask" itself acquired new gravity: it was at the core of political and social contestation, with such phrases as "mask mandate," "anti-mask," and "unmasking" (removing one's mask in public) abounding. The concept of anti-masker (someone who is against wearing masks) shows how easily by just adding a simple suffix -er

to an already existing word (mask) with a new context (mask-wearing as a norm), we get a label for a new social category. Such a term would have been nonsensical or obscure pre-2020; within the pandemic, everyone understood it.

Nor were 'vaccination' and 'vaccine' new words, but as the mass vaccination program proceeded, they developed and spawned short forms and idioms. For instance, a clipping form of vaccine or vaccinate, 'vax,' became acceptable in informal usage-and even in marketing-(some people called 2021 the year of the vax). Adjectives that emerged out of social media to specify someone has received the full dosage required by a vaccination: fully vaxxed, double-vaxxed. From being part of medical vocabulary long before the pandemic to becoming an object of family discussion-using slang like vaxxed-this shows how domestic or familiarized the term has become. Increased global usage from UK media influence comprises minimal cross-dialectal borrowing into wider English usage,

Note also that the semantic shifts moved in negative and pejorative directions. For example, during the pandemic, an act of semantic violence was committed against “Karen” (originally just a common personal name) to become a noun denoting a stereotype of an entitled, middle-class white woman vocally complaining or refusing to follow rules. Often viral videos would catch her in the act—maskless inside some store, harassing employees. The “Karen” meme predates COVID-19 but as usage intensified during mask mandate confrontations, the name acquired a new cultural inflection in its semantic load. This is a case of a proper noun undergoing semantic shift to a common noun meaning a certain type of person. The process happens now and then in English(e.g., “Scrooge” for miser from literature). Similarly, “frontliner” or “frontline worker”—also not exactly new at the time—became honorific titles for health care and essential workers thus giving the originally military term of most exposed combat position a sense of heroism in public health battle (Kim et al., 2019: 7, noting how language of war was repurposed in health crises). The semantics of praise and sacrifice were attached to these once-neutral occupational descriptors.

The above examples show semantic shifts working on several levels: providing new definitional content to be added as dictionary senses, changing the emotive tone or connotation of words, and even altering grammatical function (as with mask). In all cases, context was king-in this case, either adding these meanings or making certain latent meanings far more salient. What is crucial to note-and what underlines the novelty of these shifts-is that they are not uniformly retained once the context recedes. Some words keep their crisis-born meanings-long after the event is over in history (for instance, “inflation” has an everyday economic meaning that grew after historical hyperinflation episodes, extending beyond its

original sense of "filling with air"), while others might lose the specific sense when the event is over. Phrases like "pre-pandemic," "post-pandemic," and "the new normal" themselves are now firmly part of how we structure time and normalcy, which is a deep semantic embedding of the pandemic experience into language.

Word-Formation Processes and Linguistic Creativity

Pandemic-related new word formations thus confirm that creativity was exercised in stretching all possible rules and tools of morphology to fulfill the speaker's communicative needs. In a rough breakdown of collected terms, most were compounds (including multi-word phrase terms), another large set were blends or hybrids, several clippings or abbreviations, affixation or conversion (change of part of speech). Very few totally new roots emerged-almost every innovation reused existing morphemes or words; creativity is combinatorial rather than totally random. Nobody created strings of sounds to name COVID phenomena; people constructed names-from familiar pieces in new combinations, thereby making sure they would be understood.

Virtual happy hour, drive-through testing, and mask etiquette are compounding examples besides social distancing and contact tracing. These may appear bland, but in fact, they pair words that were previously seldom or never conjoined. Virtual happy hour (an online social drinking session) fuses the concept of virtuality with a traditionally in-person social event, highlighting how technology mediates social life. Drive-through testing brings together the drive-through concept (more familiar from fast food restaurants) and medical testing as an indication of how pandemic life hybridized existing practices. Mask etiquette implies there are normative behaviors around mask-wearing, again a new idea needing language to crystallize it. In each case, the compound is immediately understandable because it uses known words, yet it introduces a new compound concept specific to the time.

Blends and Abbreviations: As already discussed, many of the most eye-catching were blends. Another to add is "long COVID," which is actually a clipped compound used as a blend of long-term and COVID, describing the condition where symptoms remain for a long time after the initial infection. The phrase long COVID came from patients themselves on forums and was eventually adopted by the medical community. It's the lay linguistic encapsulation of a complex concept ("post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 infection" in medical terminology) into a punchy two-word term, demonstrating how lay terminology can influence professional language. Similarly, "COVID-19" itself while an officially coined term was rapidly abbreviated in speech to just "COVID" (dropping "19" and the word disease). This is common linguistic economy-once reference is clear people shorten terms for ease. It got to the point where "Covid" (capitalization aside)

became a standalone noun (e.g., "Many people got Covid last winter"). Rarely has an acronym become so ubiquitous that it's treated as a basic noun in so short a time.

Affixation and novel derivations: There were playful affixes observed in the data. The prefix corona- became already productive bound form during the pandemic period which people freely use when speaking or writing to mean home haircuts done within a lockdown period(corona-cuts), babies born during the pandemic baby boom(also referred to as COVID babies, playfully millennials, coronials), adjectival use to mean not having coronavirus (corona-free). The prefix corona- is used basically like some modifier to indicate something related to the corona/COVID situation. This was mirrored in earlier times when productivity bursts of new words with prefixes like eco- (for ecologyrelated) or i- (for internet-related) happened. On the other hand, creative uses for the "-demic" suffix (from pandemic) also appeared: people coined a "Zoom-demic" or a "fake-demic." These never went mainstream, though. They were used in very narrow contexts to label phenomena perceived as parallel to or part of the pandemic (a Zoom-demic referring to the overuse of Zoom, fake-demic in conspiracy circles denying the pandemic's reality).

Inflectional morphology, therefore, is seen to play a minor role in signaling new usage. Consider, for example, how one would say something like "two Pfizers and a Moderna," referring to vaccine doses by brand in casual speech. Using plural forms on brand names (Pfizers meaning doses of the Pfizer vaccine) is some creative inflectional stretch beyond normal grammar—typically proper nouns would not be pluralized that way—but it made sense in context and people readily understood it. "The Zooms" was sometimes heard jokingly to refer generally to Zoom meetings, treating Zoom as a countable noun taking regular plural -s.

Conversion: A final note on morphological flexibility: conversion (also called zero-derivation) was rampant. We already talked about Zoom (noun to verb). Similarly, "to Google Meet" someone (based on Google's platform) or "FaceTime me" (using Apple's FaceTime as a verb) were heard. Even "Netflix party" became "Netflix partying" (verb form) to describe using the Netflix Party extension to watch films with friends remotely. This illustrates how quickly brand names or new concepts can generate whole families of lexical forms (noun, verb, gerund, etc.) when the need arises.

The bottom line is that the pandemic showcased the English language's inherent resourcefulness, with speakers employing every morphological strategy to fill linguistic gaps. This prolific word formation under pressure supports linguistic theories that emphasize the adaptive, dynamic nature of vocabulary (Schmitt,

2013: 50). It also provides rich material for applied linguistics – for instance, teaching new English learners about these terms or analyzing them computationally. Indeed, one study posits that monitoring neologism formation via social media could serve as an early warning system or at least a real-time record for emerging cultural trends (Oyebode et al., 2022: 185). In the COVID-19 case, any algorithm scanning English media would have detected unusual spikes in words starting with "corona-" or the sudden ubiquity of terms like lockdown in early 2020, flagging a seismic shift in topic and vocabulary.

Social and Domain-Specific Dimensions of Pandemic Language

What is striking about the COVID-19 lexical innovations is how totally they spanned different domains of life. If some technological jargon remains confined within the tech domain or youth slang within peer groups, pandemic-related language broke any such constraints and pervaded virtually every sector of society. New terms covered domains (Al-Heeh et al. observe in their study) that include family life, education, health, psychology, business/economics, politics, and religion among others. Key vocabularies were developed by individual domains; there was considerable overlap between them and a cohesive "COVID lexicon" tying them together.

- Families and Home: Families inside homes developed their own micro-vocabularies to articulate their experiences. 'Locktail hour' (lockdown + cocktail hour) was coined for that period of drink-based family or roommate bonding when bars had closed. Even parents joked about 'corona homeschooling' while they were trying to keep children learning at home. And then you get the ironic, ' COVID puppy,' where families took home puppies during the lockdown boom in pet adoptions. These terms are colloquial but are signifiers of the deep level that the pandemic was interiorized and language modified to speak it.

- Education: With schools and universities having gone online, terminology in the education sector shifted rapidly. Other than formal terms such as remote learning and hybrid classes, students were quick to coin phrases-Zoom University (sometimes even listing, mockingly, Zoom University as their alma mater on social profiles if they graduated during lockdown). Teachers spoke of learning loss, a new catchword for an age-old problem that has suddenly become quantitatively nuanced in policy discussions worldwide. Meanwhile, Moodle, Blackboard, or Google Classroom became household words in many homes where previously they might have been obscure platform names. Kitishat et al. (2020: 321) highlight the challenge of e-teaching of language and note that terms and expectations around teaching had to be redefined. Academic conferences went virtual thereby giving us

such expressions as “webinar fatigue” analogous to “Zoom fatigue.” The lexicon of education expanded with tech and health terms blending in (e.g., “COVID-safe graduation ceremonies”).

- Health and Medicine: Naturally, the core technical terms came from health, but even within healthcare, the language evolved. There was confusion and evolution in what to call the virus and disease early on: coronavirus, novel coronavirus, 2019-nCoV, and COVID-19 until WHO’s standardization (Gorbalenya et al., 2020: 2). After standardization, then focus turned to naming variants (Alpha, Beta, Delta, etc.), which is itself a linguistic strategy of not letting places be stigmatized by variant names. Terms like “asymptomatic,” “R number”(reproduction number), and “herd immunity” became common dinner-table topics long out of the sole domain of epidemiological jargon. People learned in lay terms the difference between isolation and quarantine. Importantly for mental health terminology gaining its pandemic twist: depression and anxiety were often discussed in context-of-lockdown related triggers meanwhile cabin fever saw a revival. Psychologists coined and emphasized concepts such as ‘social isolation fatigue’ or ‘Zoom fatigue,’ to legitimize new phenomena (Marques, 2019: 210 might indirectly relate as it discusses how social conditions create new psychological expressions). The phrase ‘we are all in this together,’ with its psychological and social resonance, became the mantra to the point of cliché—a ready example of a multi-word expression that became semantically loaded during the crisis.

- Business and Economics: The economic fallout and adjustments introduced new phrases like essential businesses (stores allowed to remain open), furlough scheme (in the UK, government subsidy to keep employees paid), stimulus checks (in the US, government relief payments), and the COVID recession or even portmanteaus like pancession (pandemic + recession, as noted humorously in media). The shift to remote work either introduced or popularized terms such as telecommuting (given new life after years of obscurity), the home office (no longer just a room, but a concept of work-from-home), and digital transformation (a buzzword as companies rushed to digitize). By late 2020, job postings commonly listed remote or hybrid in descriptions. Business jargon adjusted. People spoke of return-to-office (RTO) plans. Each of these is linguistically an existing word or compound, but they became so central that their meaning deepened – remote no longer just an adjective but practically a mode of existence; hybrid specifically shorthand for hybrid work model. Also, terms like “gig worker” and “gig economy” gained more attention as such workers (e.g., delivery drivers) became lifelines during lockdowns, thereby their plight was discussed in new language.

- Politics and Society: The pandemic provided governance and societal debate, a totally brand new household lexicon. Public health directives became household words: “mask mandate,” “travel ban,” “quarantine rules,” all among tiers of lockdown. Protests against restrictions provided the phrase “anti-lockdown protests” and protestors were labeled as “anti-maskers” and “anti-vaxxers” (the latter pre-existed COVID but became far more widespread due to mass vaccination efforts in hesitancy movements). Political rhetoric shaped language. Leaders spoke about defeating the invisible enemy (noted already in terms of war metaphors), some unfortunately resorted to calling it the China virus, Wuhan virus, thereby sparking discussions on racism, neutrality, and importance (Gorbalenya et al., 2020: 2). So the lexicon became a contested space too: debates over terms were essentially debates over narratives–for instance, calling someone “essential” versus “sacrificial” worker (some activists used “sacrificial workers” to highlight that “essential” workers were being put at risk). This is indicative of how new terms can carry ideological weight. In any major crisis, the naming and framing (neutral vs. charged terms) have real impact on public perception, as noted by Singh and Singh (2020: 170).

- Religion, and Culture: Sometimes, new vocabulary was even imposed by religious activity. Many groups now met via the Web, termed such as ”Zoom church,” “virtual Shabbat,” or ”tele-prayer.” The previously referred to ”drive-in worship services created a kind of “drive-in church” where the people prayed from their cars.” Clergy debated how to conduct ceremonies under “social distancing” rules so “socially distanced weddings/funerals” entered into vocabulary. Cultural phenomena introduced such terms as a “quarantine concert” (i.e. musicians playing from home), and the arts industry was speaking of “theatre lockdown” or ”Broadway shutdown.” In popular culture, one heard jokes about “pandemic Oscar,” movies being released on the Internet, or “era of COVID travel” affecting the themes of films and literature. It even infected language registers, with fashionable ‘mask fashion’ and ‘pandemic chic’- both free translation of ‘chic home wear and pretty good alternative to pajamas’ if less official.

In discussing domains, an important insight emerges: the pandemic was a unifying context that brought disparate domains into one conversation. Everyone from economists to educators to clergy were suddenly using overlapping vocabulary (like lockdown, reopening, virtual, social distance). This led to a kind of cross-pollination of jargon: business people talked about being “on the frontline” (a term borrowed from healthcare and military contexts), and health officials talked about “shielding the vulnerable” (shielding having been a specific term in UK policy for vulnerable persons, now used more broadly). In a linguistic sense, boundaries

between registers blurred to an extent, as high-register and low-register terms mixed in public discourse. A television interview might mention R (R naught, a technical term) in one breath and "covidiot" in the next, showing an unprecedented layering of technical and slang language (Malecki et al., 2021: 700).

Critically speaking, those who learned to use the new COVID-speak also learned to navigate both information and social interaction during the crisis better. There was an obvious learning curve to acquiring this vocabulary. For example, consider an English learner or someone who does not keep up with the news regularly trying to understand a sentence like this: "Our R number is above 1, so the circuit-breaker lockdown will continue; remember to wear a double-mask if you attend any super spreader events – don't be a covidiot." The whole sentence would hardly make any sense without some knowledge of its components. However, by late 2020 most engaged readers would find it quite comprehensible though laden with jargon. It thus highlights how crucial language is in managing crises: knowing what terms mean signals part of informed citizenship. In that sense, the success of the public communication for the neutral terms such as social distancing can be considered as a reflection of collective psychology for expressive terms and successful adoption at large of these words.

Of course, there is no guarantee about how many of them are going to be carried by the "post-pandemic" English language. Most words disappear as soon as the context changes, but some become permanent additions or at least historical markers. It is very likely that COVID-19, pandemic, lockdown, and social distancing remain both in dictionaries and actual usage for future reference — this period or any similar events discussed henceforth. Remote meetings have become normalized; common verbs like Zoom may persist. Highly specific slang will probably fade with novelty (and necessity) for such exact concepts again: quarantini; corona coaster. But they could still appear retrospectively — humorously! Another set left signifies idiomatic expression pandemic has framed timeline expectation new normal BC before COVID.

Basically, the pandemic vocabulary has a social memory. Therefore, it cannot simply be forgotten. It was tied to a global shared experience. We might compare it to how World War II gave English terms like "blitz" (originally German, for intense attack) or "cold war" (for prolonged tension without direct conflict)—these remained in use well beyond their immediate context because they captured concepts or experiences that defined an era. COVID-era words encapsulate concepts (social bubble, vaccine passport, etc.) that will likely endure in memory if not in active use. The English language has been put under a stress test and comes out with an increased arsenal of signs; some will definitely find usage during

peacetime or get reused for future crises—proof of the cyclical nature regarding lexical innovation and semantic shift.

Conclusion

The pandemic was responsible for one of the largest short-term changes to the English language in modern history. Within a matter of months, a wealth of new words and phrases-and also meanings for existing words-developed among English speakers worldwide, owing to an urgent need to describe new realities and to express and understand intended meanings under novel constraints. This paper is based on a study conducted with the objective of documenting and analyzing the change titled "Lexical Innovation and Semantic Shift in Post-Pandemic English," which highlights and brings out very explicitly the dynamic nature of Lexis responding positively to crisis situations.

Lexical innovation was prolific and multifaceted. New words already numbered several dozen-for example, covidiot, coronacation, Zooming, social distancing-and most of them reused preexisting linguistic material in creative ways. All the major structural processes by which new words are formed-compounding and blending, clipping, acronyms, affixation-provide further evidence that even for absolutely novel vocabulary items to express new concepts,[1] comprehensible to other language users,[2] familiar structural patterns can be used.[3] Fill lexical gaps with emerging concepts-from healthcare practices to social behaviors-the principle that vocabulary develops upward to meet communicative needs (Hoff 2006: 60; Fromkin et al. 2018: 12) downward is illustrated.[4] Very quickly some of these neologisms' slang usage crawled into mainstream and even formal usage attesting utility in communication. The analysis inside the structures of the words shows not only creativity but intentionality-linguistic-many carry intentional humor or commentary (e.g. doomscrolling implicitly critical toward reading bad news), intentional blends and compounds. This goes on to prove that in describing a global crisis, people consciously use wordplay for emotional expression and social bonding.

Second, we found big semantic changes in some existing English words during the pandemic. Apart from adding new senses to them, these words shot up high on the scale of salience: “bubble,” “mask,” “quarantine,” and “Zoom.” Most elasticity in semantics was provided by metaphor and metonymy (for example, bubble as metaphor for closed group), and pragmatic recontextualization (lockdown extending its meaning from prison jargon to everyday life). That familiar words can so quickly be semantically redefined proves how flexible inside conventions semantic change can be when an outside parameter alters (Jackman 1998: 300). It also demonstrates the extent to which shared global experience can readjust

language almost simultaneously across speech communities. As we have now entered the post-pandemic phase, however, this shift will hold to varying degrees. Many will stay in the language to some degree if not active use then as part of the cultural lexicon referencing this historical period-something like the way terms such as rationing or Iron Curtain instantly evoke WWII or Cold War contexts. English has now acquired a set of terms that can be brought into immediate use should similar health emergencies or societal lockdowns take place again, without hesitation and invention marked by early 2020. In that sense, yes, COVID-19 lexicon learned from COVID-19 because the global community itself learned new public health behaviors.

Thirdly, this finding highlights the fact that linguistic change in crisis is a socially mediated process. Through a theoretical lens, we explained how language as a system of symbolic signs is governed by social convention – new words or meanings gain traction only through collective acceptance and usage (Kimmelman, 2015: 144; Alison et al., 2014: 173). The pandemic provided a near-ideal condition for rapid convention formation because the impetus for certain words was universally felt. The entire speech community (indeed, multiple language communities worldwide) confronted the same realities, which greatly accelerated consensus on what words to use. We saw this in the swift global adoption of terms like “COVID-19” and “social distancing.” Conversely, where there was social or political division, language reflected that too (e.g., contested terms like “plandemic” or “Chinese virus” remained limited to sub-groups and carried heavy ideological undertones). This proves that language change never comes neutrally but rather innovates and is shaped by social attitudes. A critical discourse analysis of pandemic language would unveil the power relation and cultural values therein: “heroes” defined health workers within a valorized frame, while “covidiots” used to denote rule-breakers imposed social responsibility through shaming. In other words, linguistic innovation thrived or failed in an environment of either social cohesion or conflict.

In addition to detailed documentation of a case study on real-time language change, this paper also relates broader linguistic scholarship by reaffirming long-held linguistic theories that lexical change is necessitated by need and that exogenous shocks act as catalysts in developing changes which would normally take much longer (Holmes, 2013: 204; Pennebaker & Lay, 2002: 275). It provides very pragmatic insight-for dictionary compilers and language teachers who can use our compiled examples to update dictionaries/ curricula so that what is taught/ recorded after 2020 reflects actual usage. And finally-from sociolinguistics and psychology through communication/ computational analysis-the very fact that pandemic language is best understood as a phenomenon from more than one

perspective. For example, findings from psychology (such as how fast humans can acquire the meaning of an ambiguous word if necessary (Cobb, 2007: 369)) and technology (such as the role in speeding up the process of spreading neologisms by social media (Malecki et al., 2021: 699)) complemented our linguistic analysis.

To conclude, COVID-19 has left a prominent mark on English-in new words and subtle shifts in meaning that will probably stay long in collective memory. Post-pandemic English is laced with hardship-born, resilience-born, creativity-born words; they tell the story of what was endured and how adaptation took place. As always, language is a mirror to society: during COVID-19 it reflected fear-phrase solidarity-humor-word ingenuity-all encapsulated in the turn of a or the coinage of a new word. Future generations may well come across dictionary or literary entries such as COVID-19, lockdown, social distancing, and remember this era; linguists will study this period as an exceptional case of accelerated language evolution. For the present generation of speakers, one minor positive outcome of the pandemic is expressed in new words and phrases. It provided more means of expression and emphasized shared humanity through common linguistic evolution. New words and phrases will continue trickling in - slower, perhaps- but constantly carrying the imprint of years 2020-2021. The pandemic has left a linguistic legacy: richer English lexis born out of a dark time for it to show that even at the most benighted times, communication capacity and innovation shine through.

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