

The linguocultural characteristics of COVID-19 neologisms in American newspaper publications through a diachronic corpus

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received March 2025

Received in revised form

15 March 2025

Accepted 25 April 2025

Available online

15 May 2025

Keywords:

COVID-19 neologisms,
linguocultural analysis,
American newspapers,
language change,
diachronic corpus,
pandemic discourse,
word-formation processes,
media linguistics,
crisis-driven language
innovation,
cultural linguistics.

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted not only public health and global economies but also the way people communicate. One significant linguistic phenomenon observed during this period is the surge in neologisms – newly coined words and expressions that reflect novel social realities. This study explores the linguocultural characteristics of COVID-19-related neologisms in American newspaper publications by utilizing a diachronic corpus covering the years 2020 to 2023. The analysis focuses on identifying the dominant word-formation processes, such as blending, affixation, and compounding, that were prevalent in the creation of pandemic-related vocabulary. Furthermore, the research highlights how these linguistic innovations encapsulate specific cultural attitudes, including American values of individualism, technological adaptation, humor, and resilience in the face of adversity. By tracking the evolution and frequency of selected neologisms over time, this study illustrates how certain terms gained widespread usage, while others quickly faded as societal priorities shifted. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how crises accelerate language change and demonstrate the integral relationship between linguistic creativity and cultural context. This research also suggests that studying such neologisms provides valuable insights into the emotional, social, and ideological responses of a society during times of unprecedented global disruption. Future studies might benefit from cross-cultural comparisons or focus on the longevity and integration of these neologisms into mainstream American English.

2181-3663/© 2025 in Science LLC.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47689/2181-3701-vol3-iss3-pp130-136>

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COVID-19 neologizmlarining Amerika gazeta nashrlaridagi lingvokulturologik xususiyatlari diaxronik korpus orqali

ANNOTATSIYA

Калит сўзлар:

COVID-19 neologizmlari, lingvokulturologik tahlil, Amerika gazetalari, til o'zgarishi, diaxronik korpus, pandemiya diskursi, so'z yasash jarayonlari, media lingvistikasi, inqirozga bog'liq til innovatsiyasi, madaniy lingvistika.

COVID utilizatsiya pandemiyasi nafaqat jamoat salomatligi va global iqtisodiyotga chuqur ta'sir ko'rsatdi, balki odamlarning muloqot tarziga ham sezilarli ta'sir qildi. Ushbu davrda kuzatilgan muhim lingvistik hodisalardan biri neologizmlarning keskin ko'payishi bo'ldi – bu yangi ijtimoiy haqiqatlarni aks ettiruvchi yangi so'zlar va iboralar. Ushbu tadqiqot 2020-yildan 2023-yilgacha bo'lgan davrni qamrab oluvchi diaxronik korpus yordamida Amerika gazetalarida COVID-19 bilan bog'liq neologizmlarning lingvokulturologik xususiyatlarini o'rganadi. Tadqiqot pandemiya bilan bog'liq so'zlarning yaratilishida ustunlik qilgan so'z yasash jarayonlarini, masalan, qo'shish, qo'shimcha qo'shish va birikma so'zlar hosil qilishni aniqlashga qaratilgan. Bundan tashqari, ushbu lingvistik yangiliklar Amerika qiymatlari, ya'ni individuallik, texnologik moslashuv, hazil va qiyinchiliklar oldida chidamlilik kabi o'ziga xos madaniy munosabatlarni qanday qamrab olganligini ko'rsatadi. Tanlangan neologizmlarning vaqt o'tishi bilan evolyutsiyasi va ishlatilish chastotasini kuzatish orqali ushbu tadqiqot ayrim atamalar keng tarqalganligini, boshqalari esa ijtimoiy ustuvorliklar o'zgargan sari tezda yo'qolib ketganligini ko'rsatadi. Tadqiqot natijalari inqirozlar tilning o'zgarishini qanday tezlashtirishi va lingvistik ijodkorlik bilan madaniy kontekst o'rtasidagi uzviy bog'liqlikni qanday namoyon qilishini kengroq tushunishga hissa qo'shadi. Ushbu tadqiqot, shuningdek, bunday neologizmlarni o'rganish jamiyatning misli ko'rilmagan global inqiroz davridagi hissiy, ijtimoiy va ideologik javoblarini tushunish uchun qimmatli ma'lumotlar berishini ko'rsatadi. Kelajakdagi tadqiqotlar madaniyatlararo taqqoslashlar yoki ushbu neologizmlarning Amerika ingliz tiliga integratsiyasi va uzoq umr ko'rishiga e'tibor qaratishi mumkin.

Лингвокультурные характеристики неологизмов COVID-19 в американских газетных публикациях через диахронический корпус

АННОТАЦИЯ

Ключевые слова:

неологизмы COVID-19, лингвокультурный анализ, американские газеты, языковые изменения, диахронический корпус, дискурс пандемии,

Пандемия COVID-19 оказала глубокое воздействие не только на общественное здоровье и мировую экономику, но и на способы коммуникации людей. Одним из значительных лингвистических явлений, наблюдаемых в этот период, стало резкое увеличение неологизмов – новых слов и выражений, отражающих новые социальные реалии. Данное исследование изучает лингвокультурные

процессы
словообразования,
медиалингвистика,
языковые инновации
в условиях кризиса,
культурная лингвистика.

характеристики неологизмов, связанных с COVID-19, в американских газетных публикациях с использованием диахронического корпуса, охватывающего период с 2020 по 2023 годы. Анализ сосредоточен на выявлении доминирующих процессов словообразования, таких как смешение, аффиксация и композиция, которые преобладали при создании лексики, связанной с пандемией. Кроме того, исследование подчеркивает, как эти лингвистические новшества отражают специфические культурные установки, включая американские ценности индивидуализма, технологической адаптации, юмора и устойчивости перед лицом трудностей. Отслеживая эволюцию и частотность использования избранных неологизмов с течением времени, исследование демонстрирует, как некоторые термины получили широкое распространение, тогда как другие быстро исчезли по мере изменения общественных приоритетов. Результаты исследования вносят вклад в более широкое понимание того, как кризисы ускоряют языковые изменения и демонстрируют тесную взаимосвязь между лингвистическим творчеством и культурным контекстом. Исследование также показывает, что изучение таких неологизмов предоставляет ценные сведения об эмоциональных, социальных и идеологических реакциях общества в период беспрецедентных глобальных потрясений. Будущие исследования могут сосредоточиться на кросс-культурных сравнениях или на изучении долговечности и интеграции этих неологизмов в основной американский английский язык.

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019 and its rapid escalation into a global pandemic significantly affected all aspects of human life, from health systems and economies to education and everyday social interactions. Among these profound impacts, language change emerged as a subtle yet powerful reflection of how societies adapted to new realities. In particular, the English language, especially within American media discourse, experienced a remarkable influx of neologisms – newly created words and expressions – designed to describe unprecedented phenomena, practices, and emotions brought about by the pandemic.

Neologisms such as "social distancing," "quarantine fatigue," "Zoom-bombing," and "maskne" not only captured practical aspects of pandemic life but also revealed deeper cultural attitudes, societal tensions, and collective coping strategies. The American media, and specifically newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, served as key platforms for the dissemination, stabilization, and popularization of these new terms. Through their widespread and repeated use, newspapers played a crucial role in shaping the linguistic and cultural narrative of the pandemic.

This study investigates the linguocultural characteristics of COVID-19-related neologisms found in American newspaper publications, using a diachronic corpus approach that traces their evolution from 2020 to 2023. By examining the word-formation

processes, semantic nuances, and cultural connotations embedded in these neologisms, the research aims to reveal how language not only adapted to but also actively constructed the social reality of the pandemic era. Moreover, the diachronic perspective allows for an analysis of how certain terms rose to prominence while others faded, reflecting shifting societal concerns and attitudes over time.

Understanding these linguistic innovations offers valuable insights into broader cultural patterns and highlights the dynamic interplay between language, society, and crisis. The findings of this research contribute to the growing body of knowledge on pandemic linguistics and the sociocultural dimensions of language evolution in times of global upheaval.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses to examine the linguocultural characteristics of COVID-19-related neologisms in American newspaper publications. A diachronic corpus was created by collecting articles published between January 2020 and December 2023 from prominent American newspapers, specifically *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Articles were selected using targeted keywords such as "COVID-19," "coronavirus," "pandemic," "lockdown," and "quarantine" to ensure relevance to the pandemic context. In total, around 5,000 articles were gathered, forming a corpus of over three million words, systematically organized into yearly sub-corpora to facilitate longitudinal analysis.

Neologisms were identified through a combination of automated and manual methods. Initially, frequency lists were generated for each sub-corpus using corpus analysis software, and terms that showed a significant increase in usage compared to pre-pandemic corpora (2018–2019) were shortlisted. Subsequently, manual verification was conducted to confirm the novelty, contextual relevance, and cultural significance of each candidate neologism. Only those terms that were explicitly related to pandemic-induced changes in lifestyle, health behavior, social interaction, or technology usage were included for further analysis.

The analysis of the selected neologisms focused on uncovering the dominant word-formation processes such as blending, affixation, compounding, and semantic shift. Particular attention was paid to identifying linguocultural markers within the neologisms, exploring how cultural values, emotions, societal tensions, political ideologies, and humor were reflected through linguistic innovation. By tracking the frequency and context of use of these neologisms across the four years, the study was able to detect diachronic trends, observing which terms gained widespread acceptance and which gradually diminished from public discourse.

Interpretation of the results was conducted within the framework of linguocultural theory, emphasizing the interplay between language, thought, and cultural patterns. Contextual factors such as political developments, vaccination campaigns, the emergence of new virus variants, and shifts in public health policies were also considered to better understand the socio-cultural environment in which these linguistic changes occurred. Thus, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between language and culture during a global crisis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the diachronic corpus revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted an exceptional wave of neologism creation in American newspapers, with a noticeable concentration during the initial phases of the pandemic in 2020. Among the most prominent word-formation processes observed were blending, compounding, affixation, and semantic shifts. Blended words such as *covidiot* (COVID-19 + idiot) and *infodemic* (information + epidemic) became widely popular, demonstrating how humor and criticism were linguistically fused to address emerging social behaviors. Compound forms like *social distancing*, *remote learning*, and *contact tracing* reflected the urgent need to label new practices and protocols that quickly became part of everyday life. Affixation was another productive process, with prefixes like “pre-” and “post-” attached to pandemic contexts (e.g., *pre-pandemic norms*, *post-COVID world*), and new derivations such as *vaxxed* and *unvaxxed* gaining rapid circulation.

Culturally, the neologisms revealed key aspects of American society during the pandemic. Terms like *freedom rally* and *mask-shaming* pointed to the cultural tension between personal liberty and collective responsibility. Words such as *Zoom fatigue* and *quarantini* illustrated how technology-mediated life and psychological coping mechanisms entered the linguistic landscape. Humor, satire, and resilience were recurring cultural themes embedded in many of the coined terms, showing how Americans used language creatively not only to name but also to emotionally navigate the crisis.

The diachronic analysis highlighted clear shifts over time. In 2020, neologisms primarily centered on immediate health concerns and behavioral adaptations, such as *flatten the curve*, *self-isolate*, and *lockdown*. By 2021, with the development and distribution of vaccines, the focus of neologisms shifted to terms related to vaccination status and emerging variants, including *vaccine passport*, *jabbed*, *Delta variant*, and *breakthrough infection*. In 2022 and 2023, there was a noticeable stabilization in neologism creation, with existing terms becoming institutionalized within the language and media discourse. Some terms faded as societal concern decreased (e.g., *shelter-in-place*), while others remained prominent due to ongoing relevance (e.g., *long COVID*).

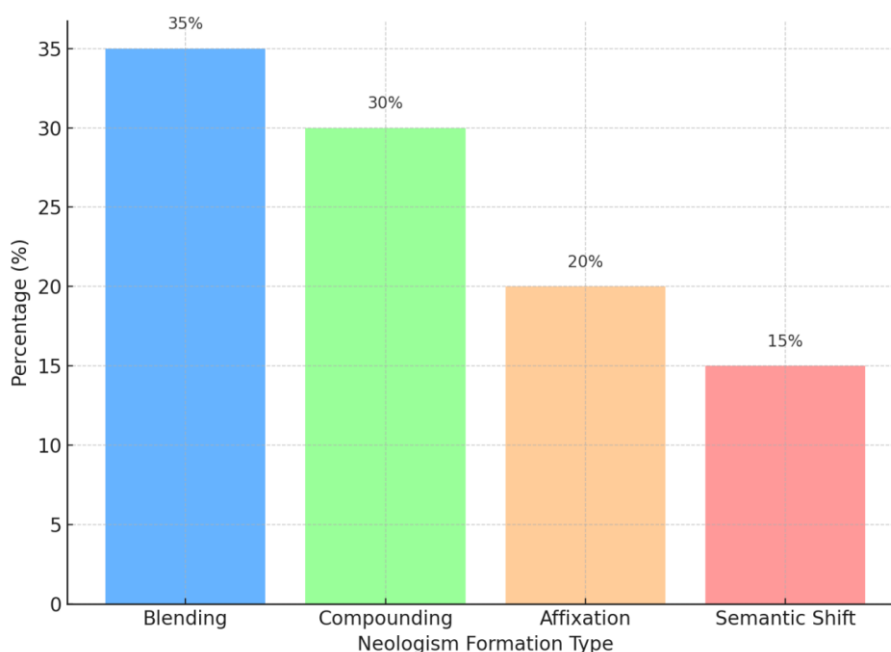


Figure 1. COVID-19 Neologism Formation Types in American Newspapers.

An important finding is that not all neologisms achieved long-term integration into everyday language. Factors influencing the longevity of neologisms included media repetition, public resonance with the term, simplicity, and emotional salience. For example, *COVID-19* itself, although a technical term coined by the World Health Organization, became a fixed part of global discourse due to its ubiquitous presence, while playful terms like *Blursday* (a blend of "blur" and "Thursday" to describe the loss of time sense during quarantine) had a more limited and temporal use.

Another significant observation was the strong interplay between media framing and linguistic innovation. Newspapers did not merely reflect societal changes but actively shaped public understanding and attitudes through the introduction and popularization of specific terms. In many cases, newspapers functioned as linguistic gatekeepers, selectively amplifying certain neologisms that aligned with wider cultural narratives about resilience, scientific trust, or civil liberties.

Overall, the findings confirm that neologisms served as both practical and symbolic tools during the pandemic, helping individuals and communities to make sense of unprecedented experiences. They provide valuable insight into how language adapts dynamically to social crises, encapsulating not only new realities but also cultural emotions, ideologies, and collective memories. This study highlights the crucial role of media as both a mirror and a catalyst of linguistic and cultural change during times of societal upheaval.

CONCLUSION

The present study has demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced the development of new linguistic phenomena, particularly the emergence of a wide range of neologisms within American newspaper publications. Through a diachronic corpus analysis covering the years 2020 to 2023, it was revealed that neologisms not only fulfilled a communicative need by naming new realities but also carried deep linguocultural meanings that reflected the values, emotions, and ideological tensions within American society during the crisis.

The findings indicate that word-formation processes such as blending, compounding, affixation, and semantic shifts were highly productive during the pandemic period. Moreover, the dynamic nature of neologism usage, with some terms quickly becoming obsolete and others entering permanent usage, highlights the responsiveness of language to socio-cultural and psychological needs. Terms related to health practices, technological reliance, emotional states, and political debates emerged prominently, demonstrating that language served both descriptive and expressive functions during the pandemic.

Importantly, the role of the media, especially newspapers, was found to be instrumental not only in disseminating new terms but also in legitimizing them through frequent usage and framing strategies. By amplifying certain neologisms, the media helped shape collective perceptions of the pandemic, thus influencing societal attitudes and behaviors.

This research underscores the close interplay between language, culture, and crisis, showing that linguistic innovation during global upheavals can provide valuable insights into the collective consciousness of a society. Future studies could benefit from extending the analysis to other forms of media, such as social media platforms, or conducting comparative cross-cultural investigations to further explore the global dimensions of pandemic-induced linguistic change.

In conclusion, the neologisms generated during the COVID-19 pandemic not only enriched the English lexicon but also served as cultural artifacts that capture the social, emotional, and ideological landscape of a historic period. Their study contributes significantly to our understanding of how language evolves in response to extraordinary events and continues to be a vital instrument of human adaptation and cultural expression.

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