

The Linguistic Realisation of “Pandemic” Concept in Contemporary English

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Abstract—A concept can be treated in two different ways: as a linguistic-cognitive phenomenon and a cultural one. The components of the conceptual system are perceived as individual signals created while reflecting information about this world. The purpose of the paper is to compare, analyse and classify the linguistic structure of the concept of "pandemic" in the modern English language. The concept of “pandemic” is socially important as a key element included in the linguistic picture of the world of almost every language nowadays. The concept of pandemic comprises various nominative units: different grammatical forms of the word “pandemic”, phrases with the word “pandemic”, synonyms to the word “pandemic”, pandemic-related words. The research methodology consists of selection of cognitive classification features and further ranking their brightness by the frequency principle. The concept of pandemic was analysed according to the combination of the following linguistic methods: acquisition, computer analysis, quantitative method, induction and deduction. The first stage of the research included grammatical analysis of the empirical material. In the second stage of the research neologisms (new words), new meanings of the existing words and new collocations were found. The research has proved the recent changes in the structure and perception of the concept of "pandemic" in the contemporary English language. The vocabulary of the English language has been, on the one hand, enriched while, on the other hand, has narrowed the meanings of some particular words. Further research is prospective as the concept of the pandemic still tends to be enriched.

Index Terms—concept, pandemic, nominative units, neologisms

I. INTRODUCTION

The object of the research is the contents of ‘pandemic’ concept in the contemporary English language.

There are two main approaches to understanding a concept: a linguistic-cognitive and a cultural one. They are not mutually exclusive but only differ in the vectors of research in relation to a person. A linguistic-cognitive concept is directed "from a person to a culture" while a linguistic-cultural concept leads "from a culture to individual consciousness". A linguistic-cultural approach is sometimes opposed to a cognitive value component concept and is recognized as a dominant one. Adhering to the opinion of some scholars of different linguistic conceptual schools, the concept is viewed as a structure verbalized in society which is formed by figurative and value components.

The notion of the concept sphere is an important element of cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology. The concept sphere is defined as a generalization of knowledge, including concepts that reflect the worldview of native speakers, generalizing various knowledge and organizing concepts, schemes, symbols and thought processes (Pryhodko, 2003).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

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The value approach plays a fundamental role in shaping a national picture of the world and enables to study the culture and language subject associated with value preferences in society, with stereotypes of consciousness and behaviour.

The problem of unity of the language, speech, thinking and linguistic consciousness is considered with an emphasis on its semantic aspects. The relationship between the form and content of the language units of different levels, the language meaning and extra-linguistic knowledge is based on the material of sensory images, memory and imagination. "A fragment of existence of the material world, reflected in the ethnic consciousness", says V. Zhayvoronok, "falls into a cycle of cognition of intra-similar permanent connections and becomes a vital symbol-allegory..." (Zhayvoronok, 2000, p. 109).

The representatives of the cognitive picture of the world in people's minds are concepts and different types of frames. Cognitive categories are essentially traditional, logical, psychological, sociological categories in their modern interpretation (Dirven, 2004). The main range of linguistically relevant concepts discussed in science in connection with the conceptual activity of reflected consciousness were defined in the philosophical works of Aristotle, T. Hobbes, J. Locke, P. Florensky. Conceptual analysis of thinking and speech, initiated by such prominent philosophers as L. Wignstein, G. H. von Wright, M. Gadda Mayor, M. Heidegger and others, took a prominent place in linguistic research, addressing the problem of creating a holistic concept of the relationship between language and thinking, ways of expression in the language of extra-linguistic reality, knowledge of the world, the laws of organization of the linguistic picture of the world. Priority in the development of conceptual structure and concept theory belongs to scholars M. Barsalov, R. Jackendoff, J. Fodor, G. Frege, K. Schwartz, M. Bierwisch. In the second half of the twentieth century, this problem was actively discussed by philosophers L. Brutyan, G. Brutyan, R. Pavilionis and others who unequivocally defend the position that the difference between the linguistic and conceptual picture of the world is the problem of the concept of meaning and concept. In the theory by R. Pavilionis, the conceptual system acts as a system of views and knowledge about the world, which reflects the cognitive experience of a man, both at the verbal and linguistic level, but not identified with any linguistic entity. The components of the conceptual system are considered individual signals, or concepts that are formed in the process of cognition of the world and reflect information about this world (Sossior, 1985).

Nowadays, many works of both domestic and foreign scholars are devoted to the problem of reflecting the objective world in concepts. Not a little interest of scientists in the concept gives rise to appropriate remarks about the "conceptual expansion of linguistics".

Linguists agree that the term "concept" should be used to "represent the world view, intellectual and emotional intentions of the individual, reflected in its creations that are texts" (Selivanova, 2006, p. 181).

The works by S. T. Vorkachev, V. Z. Demyankov, M. A. Krasavsky, D. S. Likhachev, H. M. Prykhodko, G. G. Slyshkin, I. O. Sternin and others are devoted to the analysis of concepts.

The concept, which includes three components:

- 1) the main, relevant feature (well-known information);
- 2) additional, or several additional, passive signs that are already irrelevant, historical (information known to individual native speakers);
- 3) an internal form, usually not at all conscious, imprinted in an external, verbal form (etymological information).

Presumably, such terminological differences indicate the diversity of the nature of the concept, the complexity of its structure and the uniqueness of its functions (Evans, 2004). Despite the diversity of interpretations of the concept, methods of its study and methods of representation, a single approach to solving the problem of the concept has not been developed, and there is no single meaningful interpretation. Based on this, the issues of the structure of the concept and the possibilities of its modelling, the question of the relationship of the concept with the meaning of the language sign, etc. remain relevant. The purpose of the paper is to compare and analyse the main approaches to the study of the concept in general, the concept of "health" in particular, to formulate the optimal definition and to classify the linguistic structure of the concept of "pandemic".

The priority direction within the framework of cognitive linguistics is the study of social and culturally demanded conceptual entities that supplement the open list of anthropologically significant concepts (A. Wierzbicka, S. G. Vorkacheva, V. Z. Demyankov, R. Ratmayr, L. O. Cherneyko, Z. Kovacs, H. Tissari, and others).

Thus, having analyzed various approaches to the definition of this concept, it can be concluded that the concept is a complex, multi-level structure. At the same time, the concept is inextricably linked with culture; it is an element of human consciousness, being the result of mental activity (Cruse, 2000). Moreover, the concept depends on a person's experience and knowledge of the world.

The concept is considered to be a part of a higher level formation of a concept sphere. A. Prykhodko defines the concept sphere as an objectively existing set of verbally designated and verbally unmarked nationally labelled units of linguoculture, highlighting the characteristic principles of consistency, multiplicity, integrity, connection and structuring (Pryhodko, 2003).

This paper is devoted to one of the vital concepts of the contemporary world culture – the concept of pandemic, a meaningful unit of the mental lexicon that has fully changed people's comprehension of the concept of health on the whole since the beginning of 2020.

III. METHODOLOGY

One of the most effective methods of studying the abstract concept is the study of the explication of linguistic consciousness obtained by means of a psycholinguistic model that can follow perception and reaction to one or another concept. The figurative, the most complex by definition, component of the concept consists of “perceptual image and cognitive images”. The cognitive image, in its turn, consists of features formed by “metaphorical comprehension of the corresponding phenomenon (so-called cognitive or conceptual metaphor)” (Harras, 2000, p. 59).

1000 English words and phrases have been chosen that are directly or indirectly connected with the concept of pandemic used in various media sources for the period from January 2020 to August 2020. The most popular are 424 ones (used more than 20 times within the mentioned time) have been sorted out and classified by their linguistic and semantic structure.

The research methodology consisted of the selection of cognitive classification features and further ranking their brightness by the frequency principle. The phytomorphic image of the concept of pandemic was analysed according to the reactions in the form of a verbal model (Jackendoff, 1990).

The combinations of the following linguistic methods were used: acquisition, computer analysis, quantitative method (to choose the most widely-used lexical units), induction and deduction (to classify the results).

With the help of the method of conceptual-thematic analysis and distribution techniques, the distribution of the entire body of selected lexical units by categorical signs of the concept of “pandemic”, the classification was carried out.

Thus, the algorithm for studying the linguistic social features of the implementation of the concept of “pandemic” into modern English has the following form:

- selection of English-speaking texts from printed and electronic sources;
- detection of lexical units of discourse, which relate to the concept of “pandemic”;
- classification of lexical units according to the concept sphere;
- conducting contextual analysis of lexical units in order to disclose the nature of its functioning in the journalistic text, as well as determining the degree of occasional or comprehension;
- counting the number of most and least frequency lexical units in order to refer to the nuclear or peripheral field of the concept of “pandemic”;
- conducting linguistic interpretation of the results of the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of “*pandemic*” is considered to be socially important, especially in the current situation. It is the key element included in the linguistic picture of the world of almost every language nowadays. This concept composes the enormous and most important mental formation in the naive and national language pictures of the world.

There have been a number of epidemics and pandemics that humanity faced at different periods of its development. However, COVID-19 pandemic turned out to be a real challenge and the most long-lasting one within the previous hundred years. The pandemic of the 21-st century, though not the first one, influenced all spheres of people’s lives: social, economic, political etc. Being an international phenomenon, SARS pandemic is reflected in the linguistic systems of most languages. The naive language picture serves as the foundation to form a national picture of the world and the main mechanism of national thinking.

To research into the English language terminology connected with the notion of pandemic, it is necessary to do a semantic study of the word itself. First of all, lexical units denoting the disease itself came to the fore in the language. This area is the most significant, since the very nature of the epoch is determined by a medical and biological phenomenon - the coronavirus pandemic. Of course, medicine has been and remains one of the most important areas in the life of society, since it is related to people's health. Despite the successes of medical sciences, the human body is still not fully understood. The task is still to defeat diseases that are a potential threat to humanity. The word “pandemic” is defined in most dictionaries of the English language which define this concept in a similar way.

For example, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term *pandemic* has the following definition: “a pandemic is an occurrence of a disease that affects many people over a very wide area” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/>).

The Oxford dictionary defines *pandemic* as “a disease that spreads over a whole country or the whole world” (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/pandemic>).

The Collins dictionary says that “a pandemic is an occurrence of a disease that affects many people over a very wide area” (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pandemic>).

Merriam-Webster dictionary interprets pandemic as “occurring over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affecting a significant proportion of the population” and “characterized by very widespread growth or extent” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pandemic>).

Any pandemic is first of all a problem of medicine and it is significant to know the scientific way of understanding the pandemic.

According to the official definition of the World Health Organization, a pandemic is “an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people” (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>). The classical definition includes nothing about

population immunity, virology or disease severity. By this definition, pandemics can be said to occur annually in each of the temperate southern and northern hemispheres, given that seasonal epidemics cross international boundaries and affect a large number of people.

The new disease that broke out at the end of 2019 did not get its name immediately as now the process of naming the disease becomes a matter not only for doctors, but also a political and economic event. At the same time, the disease needed to be named as soon as possible in order to characterize various aspects of its manifestation, transmission, spread, severity of the course, as well as its treatment.

The name was fixed in the International Classification of Diseases and facilitated the interaction of specialists in the fight against it.

The original name - 2019-nCoV – from the English Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia (pneumonia caused by a new type of coronavirus). At the same time, the inconvenience of pronunciation forced the search for a new nomination, and, according to the recommendations developed earlier jointly with the World Organization for Animal Health, as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, on February 11 two thousand twenty The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the assignment of the name COVID-19 to this disease - an abbreviation of coronavirus disease, where 19 is the year of registration of the first case of the disease: “COVID-19.

The concept of pandemic comprises various nominative units: different grammatical forms of the word “pandemic” (pandemic, pandemics, pandemical, pandemically), phrases with the word “pandemic” (Global Pandemic, hazardous pandemic, new pandemic, dangerous pandemic), contextual synonyms to the word “pandemic” (Coronavirus, Covid-19, SARS-CoV-2, a new disease), pandemic-related words that can be divided into several sub-groups: symptoms, treatment, preventive measures, social reaction.

From the point of view of their grammatical structure, the words can be classified by the parts of speech, the number of words used etc.

The first stage of the research included grammatical analysis of the empirical material. All words and word combinations under research were divided into two big groups: separate words and phrases, which, in their turn were subdivided into smaller categories. Separate words were sub-grouped into nouns, verbs and adjectives while phrases fell into noun-based, adjective-based and verb-based phrases. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
GRAMMATICAL DIVISION OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

words (152)			phrases (272)		
nouns	verbs	adjectives	noun-based	adjective-based	verb-based
76	56	20	72	114	86

The table above clearly illustrates that the concept of “pandemic” is mostly represented with variously-based phrases (272 phrases to 152 separate words), the most common of which are adjective-based ones. As for separate words used to describe the researched concept, the number of nouns is prevailing while the number of adjectives is the lowest (76 and 20 correspondingly).

It should be mentioned that most nouns denote preventing measures (e.g. lockdown, isolation, quarantine, distancing, shielding, immunisation, vaccination, inoculation etc.), the name of the disease in a synonymous way (e.g. coronavirus, corona, Covid-19 etc.) and symptoms (e.g. fever, cough, sneezing, fatigue, rash etc.).

Verbs mainly point out actions directed to taking anti-pandemic measures (e.g. minimize, isolate, indicate, vaccinate, confirm, administrate, protect, ensure, approve etc.).

A low number of adjectives can be explained by the fact that they are mostly combined with nouns and it is proved by a high amount of adjective-based phrases in the empirical material (e.g. global pandemic, new disease, underlying health condition, social restrictions, continuous cough, personal protective equipment etc.).

Verb-based and noun-based phrases are represented by an approximately equal number of examples (86 and 72 correspondingly). Verb-based phrases are mostly connected with describing the anti-virus measures (to keep distance, to trace contacts, to stay at home, to wear medical masks, to implement travel restrictions, to increase testing capacity etc.), treatment (e. g. to activate emergency-response mechanisms, to struggle with the virus, to tackle the virus, to get injected, to ventilate the lungs, to prescribe remedy etc.) and the symptoms (to get coroned, to catch coronavirus, to develop symptoms etc.).

From the cognitive point of view, the words can be categorized into:

1. New words (neologisms),
2. New meaning of the existing words,
3. New collocations.

Within the second stage of the research was aimed at investigating new words and the change in the meanings of the existing words that appeared in the English language due to the current pandemic. At this stage neologisms (new words), new meanings of the existing words and new word collocations were established. The outcomes are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
STYLISTIC DIVISION OF THE PRACTICAL MATERIAL

new words	new meanings	new collocations
26	87	114

At first, the number of neologisms was counted within the empirical material. It is obvious from the table above that new words have the lowest number of cases (26). New words mainly covered the name of the new disease itself used in a synonymous way (COVID, Covid-19, coronavirus, corona, etc), the names of newly-developed vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, Janssen's COVID-19 vaccine, Novax's COVID-19 vaccine, Sputnik V etc.) and, as a result, there are not a lot of them.

Then it was established which new meaning or meanings of the existing words of the English language have appeared and come into use recently. To make it possible, three mass media sources (*The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Observer*) of four different periods were studied. The periods researched are 1995 – 2000, 2000 – 2005, 2010 – 2015, and 2015 – 2020. The analysis was based on target word search, there were chosen five target words: pandemic, virus, quarantine, lockdown, vaccine. All the materials that existed in paper versions only (up to 2000) were digitalised and checked for target words with the help of a free computer programme <https://keywordtool.io>. As a result, a statistical analysis was carried out and interpreted linguistically.

The word "pandemic" always had a negative connotation and caused fear, but in most articles, it was referred to as either something from the past or something from non-developed countries, wild tribes etc. The word "pandemic" for the recent thirty years used to be associated with some historical events rather than a current danger. Most frequently the word was mentioned in the meaning of plague and smallpox while after the year 2000 it was written much about influenza and cholera. In historical reviews, journalists remembered different kinds of diseases that lead to a pandemic. The geographical location mentioned in the articles is also essential: in some African and Asian countries which are dramatically affected by various diseases the word is used more often. In current issues (beginning from the end of 2019) the word "pandemic" is linked to immediate excitement, fear, danger and nervousness not depending on the area or nationality an article is about.

The word "virus" was and is still used more often than the word "pandemic", but it used to have a wider meaning. Within the periods under research (till the year 2021) this word was used to describe a hundred different viruses whereas during the previous fourteen months the word "virus" has become almost a synonym to "coronavirus". Other viruses are mentioned mainly to compare them to the present one.

The word "quarantine" in most cases was used to describe travel restrictions and the transfer of animals and plants. It is also used to describe different events in history. In terms of frequency and direct impact on the well-being of each person, the "stay-at-home concept" (the concept of staying at home) is definitely the most common in the language of the pandemic. There are a number of terms that, having the same meaning, differ in connotations. By introducing the "stay-at-home regime", the authorities of English-speaking countries began to use terms such as "self-isolation" (self-isolation), "quarantine" (quarantine), "self-quarantine" (stay in self isolation), "shelter-in-place" (variant "shelter-at-home") (shelter in place) (a variant of shelter at home), "cocooning" (self-isolation).

At the same time, the meanings of the above-mentioned terms are mixed in English.

Quarantine is a more technical term designating a restraint upon the activities or communication of persons or the transport of goods designed to prevent the spread of disease or pests. Quarantine is a term denoting the restriction of activity, communication of people or the transportation of goods, which allows to prevent the spread of quarantine diseases).

Self-quarantine obliges the person to refrain from any contact with other individuals for a period of time (such as two weeks) during the outbreak of a contagious disease usually by remaining in one's home and limiting contact with family members. (Self-isolation obliges a person to refrain from any contact with others during the outbreak of the disease people staying at home for a certain period of time (for example, two weeks)). The noun "self-quarantine" was introduced into use in the XX century, while the verb "self-quarantine" appeared quite recently, about 20 years ago.

The term "self-isolation" was first used in 1834 in *The Metropolitan Magazine*.

The word "lockdown" was used to illustrate military actions (e.g. lockdown during bombing) or restrictions within a small area or building (e.g. lockdown in a hospital).

The word "vaccine" has been frequently used for all the years studied, but, like in case with the word "virus", used to comprise a wider notion: vaccines for different children's diseases, developing new vaccines against serious diseases (e.g. mumps, tuberculosis etc.).

So, currently, all the five words have narrowed their meaning and/or got some specific meanings.

New collocations are based on new words and have become most common if compared to new words and new meanings of the new words. They are used in all spheres of current life situation: medicine (red-zone patients, to confirm positive, to trace contacts, to struggle with the virus etc.), politics (to roll back restrictions, to step up the massively important testing program, to implement travel restrictions, to limit public movement, to launch vaccination, to implement a nationwide lockdown etc.), work (distant work, Zooming, loss of business etc.), study (distant form, mixed studying, zooming etc.), everyday life (to keep distance, to protect oneself, to stay away from other people, to be tested for the virus, to wear medical masks etc.).

Another significant change caused by the pandemic is related to the organization of labour. This format of working from home is not new to the modern world, while at the moment we can observe how this form of labour organization is becoming relevant. And if previously working at home was a matter of choice, now it has become a forced measure. Therefore, relevant terms began to appear, such as: "remote work", "WFH" ("work at home") "home office" "distance learning".

Furthermore, in addition to standard words and phrases, the pandemic has brought "folk" neologisms into the language. They are mostly witty slang words created by combining two or more roots. Though it can be seen as arguable to study them at the moment as some of them are still treated as occasionalisms, the researchers consider it important to study some of them, at least the ones that have been used in the media three or more times.

- coronababy (a child born during quarantine);
- quaranteen (a teenager in isolation or isolation with teenagers; for example: "I am quaranteened and soon will go crazy," says an exhausted parent);
- covidivorce (divorce due to the fact that the spouses were in a confined space in quarantine and could no longer live together);
- zumping (when someone throws someone over a video link; this is a combination of the word Zoom (video conferencing program) and the verb to dump (to throw someone));
- covexit (exiting quarantine and isolation; for example: What are you going to do after covexit? — "What will you do after leaving quarantine?");
- covidate (date during quarantine);
- coronageddon (the same is the end of the world caused by the coronavirus pandemic; a combination of the words coronavirus and Armageddon);
- coronator (the person who defeated the coronavirus; formed from the words coronavirus and terminator);
- coronaphobia (fear of coronavirus; a combination of the words coronavirus and phobia);
- coronawashing (selling ordinary goods as helping to prevent infection with coronavirus or cure it; formed from the words coronavirus and whitewashing);
- coronavoid (streets deserted due to coronavirus; formed from the words coronavirus and void);
- moronavirus (the rough name of the coronavirus that has already got everyone; formed from the words coronavirus and moron);
- mascne (acne or skin rash caused by wearing a mask; derived from the words mask and acne);
- covidiot (covidiot, that is, someone who is unnecessarily careless or, conversely, succumbs to unnecessary panic because of the coronavirus, buying buckwheat or toilet paper; formed from the words Covid and idiot);
- covidol (its opposite, that is, an exemplary citizen who reasonably observes all the rules of self-isolation and hygiene; formed from the words Covid and idol);
- quarantrends (classes that have become fashionable among people who are in self-isolation; formed from the words quarantine and trends);
- isobear (beard grown during the stay in self-isolation; formed from the words isolation and beard);
- quarantini (alcoholic cocktail of the times of self-isolation from a mixture of what is at home and at hand; formed from the words quarantine and martini);
- quarantine shaming (indicative criticism of people who violate quarantine and leave the house);
- new normal (new normality, that is, our whole new reality, changed because of covid, which we could not imagine a year ago; for example, dating on zoom or Skype, working from home, wearing masks and much more — all this is new normal).

V. CONCLUSIONS

Language, being a social phenomenon, is always one of the first to reflect the changes in any area of human life. The research has proved the recent changes in the structure and perception of the concept of "pandemic" in the contemporary English language. Due to the current situation, the topic under investigation has caused global discussion not only in the spheres of medicine, social sciences and politics but also in linguistics. The pandemic of 2020 resulted in forming several neologisms, changes in the meaning of existing dictionary words together with the appearance of new phrases and collocations. The vocabulary of the English language has been, on the one hand, enriched while, on the other hand, has narrowed the meanings of some words. Further research is prospective as the concept of pandemic still tends to be enriched.

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