

Metaphor as a means of new lexemes' formation within the semantic field of COVID-19

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only changed the way and steady pace of our lives, it has also caused a rapid surge in the development of the vocabulary of the world's languages. Thus, units of the primary and, primarily, of the second nomination are actualized to fill in new lexical gaps to ensure successful communication. Simple nomination, conducted by means of word-formation, prevails in Modern English with affixation, telescoping, shortening and composition occupying the leading roles. At the same time, more and more data from various studies indicate that the most productive types of vocabulary development include metaphoric and metonymic transfers, so in this particular regard the analysis of metaphor and semantic derivatives have been of great interest to our investigation. The lexical field of COVID-19 was exposed to a great amount of neologisms that are the products of the semantic progression. Semantic derivation is manifested in metaphorization of terms of other branches of knowledge and commonly used words, replenishment of a number of internationalisms with terms that regulate our social life (*sanitizer, lockdown*). The results of the study also indicate a certain terminologization of vocabulary and processes of migration of lexical units between different functional styles of one language.

Keywords: *metaphor, secondary nomination, terminologization, determinologization, neologism.*

Introduction. COVID-19 outbreak has engendered a tremendous expansion of the vocabulary, which is predicated on the need to fill in lexical gaps to ensure proper communication. For several years, the world's languages have been experiencing a so-called neological boom. They are regularly updated with innovations belonging to the lexical and semantic field of COVID-19. The creation of new words takes place against the background of other active processes in the language: updating of certain vocabulary, transition of terms to the category of common vocabulary, the emergence of their colloquial equivalents, review of (and / or the emergence of new) meanings of words that already exist.

The abovementioned processes are still of great interest to linguists. The relevance of this research is due to insufficient study of the problem and the active replenishment of the series of lexemes that are the object of its analysis.

Literature overview. In the linguistics of the XXI century a prominent place is occupied by a human, a linguistic personality. The whole surrounding world, natural phenomena become the basis for the characterization of man, "a fragment of the mosaic of the metaphorical portrait of man" [5, p. 3]. The need to nominate new concepts encourages the creation of terms based on similarity, analogy, intuitive understanding of phenomena and objects of the environment, trying to understand the new through the prism of what already exists.

Metaphor is regarded as a means of scientific knowledge, restated, metaphorization is an integral part of scientific thought and scientific discourse. It is recognized as a universal mechanism of special communication [2, 1, 15].

Previously incompatible concepts of "term" and "metaphor" are reinterpreted. Metaphor, an artistic means, trope, is considered as an effective means of nomination, as a verbalized way of thinking and a way of creating a language picture of the world [3, 4].

G.Lakoff noted that the emergence of the metaphor – term is inevitable, because the use of metaphors improves the perception of abstract concepts and complex situations

[15]. The linguist represented a metaphor as a tightly structured mapping from a source domain to a target domain within which ontological correspondences, according to which entities in one domain correspond to entities in another, exist. Based on these observations, Lakoff and Johnson introduced the Conceptual Metaphor Theory in 1980.

The **object** of our study is the metaphoric nominations of the lexical-semantic field COVID-19 in English Internet discourse. The **subject** of the study is the principles of metaphorization, which underlie the formation of metaphorical terms to denote new nominations (reterminologization, determinologization) caused by the outbreak and spread of coronavirus COVID-19, which are attested in the media.

Research methodology. Our goal is to determine the role of metaphor in the formation, structuring and functioning of innovations that belong to the semantic field of COVID-19 in the English media landscape. Achieving the goal involves the following tasks: to outline the composition of metaphors associated with coronavirus disease; identify the main sources and models of metaphorization.

In the process of research of factual material the elements of the method of systematic observation, descriptive method, method of analysis and synthesis, method of linguistic observation and components of the method of comparison were used.

Results and discussion. The process of coining new words in English Internet discourse occurs mainly through its own morphological means. Among the ways of marked or external word-formation, the leading roles are occupied by affixation and telescoping. Shortening has proved its increasing potential as it enables fast sharing of information using the least of signs, while abbreviations are one of the types of optimization of the language message. Composition remains a productive word-building type; it has preserved its relevance at the current stage of the English language development.

In semantic word-formation, the most productive types of vocabulary development include metaphoric and metonymic transfers so in this particular regard analysis of met-

aphor and the regarded semantic derivatives is of great interest to the investigation. The prevalence of semantic derivation is manifested in metaphorization of terms of other branches of knowledge and commonly used words, replenishment of a number of internationalisms with terms that regulate our social life (*sanitizer, lockdown*).

It should be mentioned that the lexical field of COVID-19 was exposed to a great amount of neologisms that are the products of the semantic progression, which complies with the hypotheses on potential felicitous word formation communicative situations postulated in the distributional semantics. [22]

The results of the study also indicate a certain determinologization of vocabulary and processes of migration of lexical units between different functional styles of one language.

New coinages are indispensable units in the coronavirus discourse – from denoting its mundane impact on our daily lives, to the bigger scale influence of the social order in most cases just conveying emotive rather than a denotative shade of meaning.

Among the sources of metaphorization of terms related to the topic of coronavirus disease, the biomorphic (anthroponyms, zoonyms) and social spheres are active in English media landscape.

Zoomorphic metaphors are represented by the following phrase: *the elephant in the Zoom*, which is used to describe an unmentioned presence or unacknowledged issue in an online meeting or an elephant themed background or video. It was coined by the analogy to the idiom “*an elephant in the room*”, which according to Cambridge dictionary [7] can be used “If you say there is an elephant in the room, you mean that there is an obvious problem or difficult situation that people do not want to talk about.” They even sound almost the same, with one phoneme difference. Metaphoric transfer is achieved though comparison of something big, evident and difficult not to notice to the animal “elephant”, which is gigantic as well.

The programme Zoom became an extremely popular platform during social distancing allowing students and schoolchildren to stay in contact with their tutors. The word itself has become very productive as it has a number of derivatives: *zoom bombing / zoombombing, Zoomed out, Zoom fatigue, Zoomers*.

The metaphoric neologisms *a quarantine fatigue, Zoomed out, cabin fever* are used to convey the shared exhaustion of people being on a lockdown. They contain negative evaluation expressed by means of the nouns *fatigue, fever* and the adverb *out*.

Common “*Band-Aid*” in COVID discourse stands to denote Zoom, the latter is also referred to as the *New ‘Google’*, having been metaphorically reconsidered.

The neologism *bubble* used by Jacinda Ardern, a New Zealand Prime Minister, appeared to encourage people to *stick to your bubble* and state that *you can’t spend time with other people outside of your bubble*. This specific metaphor has gone through the period of trial and was registered by our minds unlike other conventional ones like *windows* and *chains*, e.g. *We have a window of opportunity to break the chain of community transmission*. Boris Johnson, having recovered from Covid-19 in 2020, made an announcement that adults who lived alone would be allowed to form a *support bubble* with another household.

It is worth mentioning that there is a difference between New Zealand and the UK *bubble* mapping. In the former, bubbles were coined and have been an initial part of the lockdown policy, whereas in the latter, they were a part of a gradual easing of lockdown policy.

The reason why the neologism *bubble* is so productive is its high degree of lexical valency. Due to its high combinability it has entered a number of metaphorical word combinations: *social bubbles, quarantine bubbles, support bubbles, iso-bubbles, home-bubbles, travel bubbles, bubbles mates, school bubbles, year-group bubbles, class bubbles* – and *quaranteam* as a synonym for *bubble*.

Another factor which makes *bubble* highly prolific is that it symbolizes a container, which might be able to protect, support, thus having a positive connotation; whereas *lockdown* is associated with confinement, cell, and prison and conjures up negative emotions.

Similar to *bubble* is the term *cocoon* (used as a noun and a verb) as used in the following example: *COVID-19 epidemic: cocoon the elderly and the vulnerable*. [24] It also brings in mind the image of safety protection, covering shell.

The term *cocooning*, the process of creating a cocoon, conservation, originated within Biology, was metaphorized and began to be used to denote the habit of spending more time at home and less outside, a variant of self-isolation, “Staying at home as much as possible is sometimes called “cocooning”” [11]. In this case, we trace the process of semantic amelioration of the term, as there is the importance of conscious, responsible behavior and limitation of social contacts.

The metaphor, as a linguistic universal, with its inherent clarity and ability to evoke associations, was widely used by the first leaders of the countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Coronavirus was compared to manifestations of extreme weather conditions: tornadoes, vortices, blizzards, eg. *An epidemic is like a storm in more than the metaphorical sense. The Coronavirus Blizzard* [26]. Also, the fight against the disease was perceived similar to military action [20]. Chinese President Xi Jinping after a visit to Wuhan, where the Covid-19 pandemic was still raging, declared that “China would have won the “*people’s war*” against the coronavirus» [12].

In a video address on the occasion of the announcement of the lockdown in France, E. Macron noted that “*We are at war*” [21]. Similar allusions were also made by B. Johnson [13], D. Trump (he called himself a “*wartime president*”) and A. Merkel [18].

Journalists drew parallels between a pandemic and images of a monster or crime: “*As coronavirus has invaded the world... ‘defend the city’ against coronavirus.*” [6] One way or another, what they all have in common is disaster and death, and they are almost beyond control.

K. Malik, a British writer and specialist in neurobiology, in his article “*Like a moth to a flame, we’re drawn to metaphors to explain ourselves*” dedicated to the study of metaphor, argues that “The coronavirus is both a physical threat and a metaphor for everything from the failures of globalisation to the menace of foreigners.” [17].

Using such metaphors, top public officials seek to awaken the collective consciousness, sense of duty, personal responsibility in the fight against coronavirus disease.

Tony Thorne, a linguist and professor at King's College London, has registered several newly coined metaphors, which comply with war mapping, in his Glossary of Coronacoinages, Covidictionary. *Common invisible enemy* (used by Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General) / *invisible enemy* – denoting a virus [19].

If we take a look at the examples Collins online Dictionary gives to illustrate the use of the word combination *invisible enemy* [8], we cannot but notice that the majority of them refer to Covid-19. Here are a few of them:

For now, however, victory against the *invisible enemy* still looks a distant prospect. [9]

At 8pm last night, a fretful nation paused for applause to show its gratitude to those fighting in the front line against the *invisible enemy*. [14]

If we are at war with an *invisible enemy*, we need to think about tradeoffs as we would in wartime. [6]

Another metaphor in this dictionary is *corona warriors* or *covid-19 warriors*. It designates people working to control the pandemic, frontline professionals. *Covid marshals* stands for officials sent to public locations to enforce new UK social distancing rules from September 2020 as well as *zoom bombing* -when someone gets into the meeting mediated by the Zoom uninvited.

However, experts warn that the possible consequences are the opposite: the spread of panic and fear. There are calls to avoid such comparisons, as the "military metaphor" in this case simplifies a very difficult situation and encourages extreme, illogical actions - the accumulation of stocks and panic buying of goods [25]. After all, quoting the article by K. Malik, "In political and social debates, metaphors are primarily ways of framing issues, and of shaping the ways in which people think about them... we need to pay greater attention to the metaphors we wield." [17] Instead, they should be used as a tool for restrained, covert reporting of unpleasant news or phenomena.

A striking example of this is the phrase "*flattening the curve*" and its synonyms *stretching*, *extending*, *pushing down*, *drawing out the curve* / *epidemic*, which are used to mean "if we can postpone, slow down," "reduce" the peak of the epidemic for a while and restrain "a jump in the number of" patients from a steep rise, the medical system will have time to prepare to increase the number of patients who will need to be hospitalized". The phrase flatten the curve later became a hashtag.

A newly coined metaphor *covid waltz* is used to describe maneuvering to avoid close contact with passersby while distance restrictions are in place. In this case, we have terminologization of the musical term *waltz*, as it has entered commonly used register and acquired a metaphoric sense describing specific features of walking.

Somatisms are attested by such metaphoric nomination as *facial sauna* (or *mini-sauna*) used to describe breathing in a facemask.

Infrared temperature gun is a sarcastic metaphoric neologism, which is based on visual objective similarity of

two things.

Names of professions also serve as the basis for new nominations within the terms relating to the coronavirus. Thus, *vaccine hunters* and *vaccine sommeliers* have appeared. The first are "a byproduct of the chaotic vaccination rollout in the US, defined by supply shortages, sluggish distribution and discarded doses" as defined by CNN on February 2, 2021 [16]. While the latter are "people (across Brazil) who are refusing to receive their shot if the vaccine being used is not to their satisfaction." [10] The notion, as we may see, first emerged in Brazil to refer to those cherry-picking their vaccines.

Reterminologisation can be traced in a lexeme *decompression*, the term originally found in Physics (the release of pressure and the opposition of physical compression) and diving (the reduction in pressure and the process of allowing dissolved inert gases to be eliminated from the tissues during ascent from a dive). Now acquires a new meaning: the release of inhibitions and surge in misbehaviour expected following the opening of UK pubs and restaurants accompanied by another coinage *wet pubs* or 'wet-led' *pub* (Irish) – pubs selling only drinks and relying entirely on the sale of drinks for its business, so the last to be allowed to open after lockdown [23], came into being in the process of metaphorization.

A ubiquitous term is *elbow bump*, the primary meaning of which is: a blow to the shoulder or shoulder and/or damage resulting from this action. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, people are trying to avoid the usual handshake, so such a gesture, 'shaking elbows' has replaced greetings and farewells.

The study allows us to draw a number of conclusions and generalizations.

Conclusion. The analysis shows that metaphor is a productive way of forming terms, belongs to the number of universals of natural languages. It is common in terminology, which, despite the fundamental tendency towards order and unambiguity of individual elements of the terminological system, remains a product of natural language development.

Metaphor as a term-coining tool has certain features: clarity, the ability to evoke associations, thereby ensuring a deep assimilation of information, facilitating perception. The vocabulary of the pandemic testifies to the use of secondary nominations that emerge as metaphors for terms in other fields of knowledge.

Metaphor as a subject for investigation is the valuable material for the analysis, since it is a means of illustrating the duality of language nature, which serves as a tool for both communication and cognitive processes. Thus, metaphorization is now recognized as a fundamental process of human conceptualization and reasoning. Neologisms which appear as products of this mechanism have become more widespread and frequent and should not be regarded as separate entities but rather as motivated units having a double layered structure.

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