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COVID-INFECTED BULGARIAN DISCOURSE?

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В статье рассматриваются причины и следствия появления неологизмов в болгарском языке и их заимствования из других языков.

Ключевые слова: КОВИД-19, национальный язык, устный дискурс, медийный дискурс.

The paper is a part of a bigger research on the advent of neologisms into the Bulgarian language as a result of the pandemic. The focus is on some of the new linguistic choices that

appeared in Bulgaria mostly as a result of the global impact COVID-19 has. The neologisms encountered in conversation were listed and then compared with the linguistic entries in the reference books and their frequency of use was checked through search engines. One of the main conclusions reached is that despite the fact that the analysed neologisms are not part of the official lexicon they are widely used in the social and the mass media, which means they are an active part of the everyday life of Bulgarians.

Keywords: COVID-19, national language, oral discourse, media discourse, CDA.

Discourse is a social construct and as such it is shaped by society. Nobody can deny the fact that COVID-19 brought upon the world unprecedented challenges to deal with. English as the primary international language for communication across the world had and still has its influence in various places as COVID-19, and mostly the way information about it is understood by the general public, has been and still is created through the media discourse [1; 2; 3; 4] on the virus. Thus, in a way, Bulgarian language was also infected by the pandemic and its purity was tainted by the various neologisms that were spurred on by the process. These new occurrences in the language prompted a study on the extent COVID-related neologisms have entered the Bulgarian language. The findings presented in this paper are the result of the initial analysis based on the author's personal observations on the oral discourse on COVID-19 and the new coinages that have entered it³. For the purposes of the current study CDA and DA have been applied as main methods of analysis as both of them study discourse in a particular context and in relation to a specific social reality.

The topic of globalization and the influence of English on other languages is not a new one [see 5; 6; 7] and the driving factors behind the development of neologisms, either as a result of borrowings in terminology for example or because of some other word-creating processes have been studied in detail [3; 8]. The general idea is that neologisms are created to fill in a void in the local language. Analysing the thematic fields that get mostly enriched with new coinages Nedkova [3, p. 44] comments on the new lexis in the sphere of medicine and cosmetics saying that the terminology in this field predominates, however, the lexemes are frequently assimilated on phonetic, grammatical and semantic level [3, p. 47; see also 2]. The latter is of utmost interest in terms of the analysis at hand, and formulates one of the tasks set at the advent of the study, i.e. to analyse the characteristics of the neologisms encountered and discuss their naturalness or the disruption of national identity.

³A more sophisticated amount of data is being collected at the moment and would be presented at a later stage.

Through personal conversations with various “informants” (a total of 28), such as students, journalists, accountants, and colleagues, the author has listed some interesting recurrent usages which are not so common, in their bigger part, for the Bulgarian language. Out of all new coinages that were encountered in conversation only those that occurred at least two times used by two independent users were taken down and 5 of them are analysed here. The linguistic units were then checked in the online Dictionary of Bulgarian Language (<https://ibl.bas.bg/rbe/>) and then in the Bulgarian National Corpus (BNC available at <http://dcl.bas.bg/bulnc/en/>), both of them developed by the Bulgarian Academy of Science (BAS), to establish their frequency of use. Finally, the units were checked through a search engine to assess their spread.

In this short and preliminary analysis, we will apply the types of neologisms presented by Blagoeva [2], namely: 1) Lexical neologisms (newly formed or newly borrowed words), newly created abbreviations/ acronyms; 2) Semantic neologisms – new meanings added to already existing linguistic units mostly as a result of metaphoric or metonymic transfer [see also 8], and 3) Collocations.

Starting with the term used to denote the disease itself, there are some interesting coinages developed on the basis of *COVID-19* or *CORONA virus*, such as a usage of *COVID* denoting people infected with the disease, where the term has changed its status from a proper to a common noun and has acquired the grammatical characteristics of such: e.g. 1) *Там са ковидите* ‘There they keep the COVIDs’⁴ – meaning the people infected with the disease. The example was first uttered by a speaker explaining the fact that the patients diagnosed with COVID-19, and especially those in need of medical attention, are accepted on the tenth floor of the local hospital. In this case the name of the disease is metonymically used to refer to its carriers and the newly coined word falls within the group of lexical neologisms as defined by Blagoeva [2] above. The same root morpheme has given rise to two examples of participles used to denote COVID-19 patients as well: e.g. 2) *Съседите ми и те ковидяхали. Боя се, че и аз ще ковидясам*. ‘My neighbours, they also got down with COVID, I am afraid I will get it, too.’ In this example the lexeme used is a verb and shows the grammatical characteristics of such as the speaker has used different forms for 3 p. plural and 1 p. sg. which are also in reiterative mood in the case of *ковидяхали* (‘having COVID’), and in future tense in the case of *ще ковидясам* (‘will get down with COVID’).

⁴ The translated versions of the examples are provided by the author who has tried to render the meaning of the Bulgarian expression in English as close as possible to the original.

In both cases we can also observe a process of adaptation as the term has changed class and has acquired the characteristics of verbs in Bulgarian. Both occurrences mark another case of lexical neologisms. A similar usage, though considered a semantic neologism is marked by coinages that use the other term for the disease *CORONA* which is a homophone of the Bulgarian word for crown, e.g. 3) *Нали всички са при короните* ‘They are all by the crowns/ Coronas, you know’ said in relation to the fact that there were no doctors in the emergency room to accept a patient with acute appendicitis. In this case we can also notice the metonymic transfer in which the disease stands for the person diagnosed with it, however, here we can talk of addition of new meaning to an already existing lexeme. A participle denoting people with the disease was also employed: 4) *Братът на приятеля ми и той коронясан*. ‘The brother of my boyfriend is also crowned’. The adoption of the Bulgarian grammatical system is visible in these examples as well, along with an example of passive voice, which is in contrast to the analysed examples so far as they showed only usages in the active voice. The last example that would be mentioned here was actually prompted by a coinage used in the commercial of Lidl a bit after mass quarantine was imposed in March 2020 on the population. At a later stage the neologism was used in a personal conversation: 5) *Ами, к’во, ще си вкъществувам, пък*. ‘Well, what can I do, I’ll #stayathome’. It is not perchance that the hash tag was used in the translation as it is our firm conviction that this use was prompted by semantic transfer of the hashtag appeal frequently used in the media at the time of the quarantine⁵.

In conclusion it can be stated that the analysed coinages sound strange to the carriers of the language and can be attributed to a particular idiolect or jargon. It could be assumed that in time such neologisms will die out as they are not natural and have not penetrated the language on a bigger scale. However, as the study has showed, even though the analysed items in their majority have not entered the official lexicon and reference books of the language they are in active use by the population as is seen by the multiple hits that their search in the social and mainstream media returned.

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⁵ When checked in the Bulgarian National Corpus (BNC) for frequency of use, as well as in the Dictionary of the Bulgarian language to establish whether they have already entered the official lexicon, it turned out that none of the analysed coinages were present in the dictionary or the corpus.

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