Lexical and Semantic Features of COVID-19 Neologisms

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Abstract— This study analyzed the lexical and semantic features of Covid-19 neologisms formed thru blending that are present on the Junior High School students' written outputs and its implications in language learning for the S.Y. 2021-2022. This study utilized the descriptive method of research and used textual analysis as research instrument. Findings revealed that Quaranteen, Covidient/Covidiot, Quarantini, Zoombombing, Coronacation, Covideo Party and Infodemic were the commonly used Covid-19 neologisms which are formed thru blending that are being used by learners in their written outputs. Findings also revealed that these terms were coined in order to have a name for a specific thing or experience during the surge of Covid-19 which become a practical tool for talking about coronavirus-related issues. Further, in language learning and translation, it is found out that neologisms pose several problems for learners and translators. Since most of these neologisms are new to the users, more often than not, these terms are given different interpretation and meaning, thus, they are being used wrongly too, in different contexts. To ensure intelligibility and for the learners not to give the literal meanings of neologisms, it is recommended that instructions in neologism recognition, comprehension and translation should be done in creative and authentic platforms.

Keywords— Blending, Lexical, Neologisms, Semantic.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a social fact, which is prone to change, development, and evolution. The dynamic nature of languages enables them to cope with events, new discoveries, upheavals and unforeseen circumstances. Language change, really, is a universal property of living languages. According to Jones and Singh (2005), this change is typically influenced by multiple factors ranging from formal linguistic aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics to non-linguistic factors of social and pragmatic aspects of language use and cultural interaction. Indeed, languages are evolving as the world is constantly changing. Not only during wars and political upheavals, new inventions and technology new words are being coined, which have later become part of languages, also with epidemic and pandemic the world is currently facing. Coronavirus at present has also led to an explosion of new words and phrases, both in English and in other languages.

According to Lawson (2020), the novel coronavirus has dictated its terms, forcing people to adapt to the new situation by using specific terms which help them "make sense of the changes that have suddenly become part of our everyday lives." Truly, being first sketched in 1759 in France, the issue of neologisms stays relevant up today. Khadgi (2013) noted that Neologisms form a highly relevant linguistic category for many reasons. They are the elements that make a language living and dynamic rather than dead, they are indicative of language change. Further, Neologism or newly coined

words, expressions, or usage manifests the capability of a language to undergo and sustain change (Ahmad, 2000).

Quarantini, coronageddon, covidiot and covidient, to mention a few of these Covid-19 neologisms are formed thru blending. These newly-coined Covid-19 lexicons formed by adding the first and last syllables of two terms are indeed bombarding not just the Philippines but the whole wide world. These Covid-19 neologisms formed through blending are also found all over print and broadcast media. Further, Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Tiktok air Covid-19 awareness by using these completely new words having the public as their audience.

Meanwhile, it is the observation of the researcher that newly-coined Covid-19 neologisms formed through blending are also found in Learners' Self Learning Modules and Learning Activity Sheets of students. Consequently, it is not much surprising that learners of today also use them in their written outputs such as in their essays and in their portfolios. However, the question is, do students understand very well the origin, how these words are formed and the meanings of these newly-coined terms? Also, in speaking or written activities, do students use Covid-19 neologisms in proper and appropriate contexts? More often than not, it is the observation of the researcher that learners actually just use these new lexicons because these terms are on trend. They feel that they indeed belong to Generation Z if they themselves use them because these newly coined-

terms are all over the news, media, Facebook, Tiktok and Twitter. The COVID-19 crisis, developing at a rapid pace, makes learners extensively use the words and ideas associated with it.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study analyzed the lexical and semantic features of Covid-19 neologisms present on the Junior High School students' written outputs and its implications in language learning for the S.Y. 2021-2022.

Specifically, this sought answers to the following questions.

1. What are the Covid-19 neologisms formed through blending which emerged in the students' written outputs along form and function?
2. What are the contextual meanings of the identified Covid-19 neologisms?
3. What are the implications of the Covid-19 neologisms in learning?

METHODOLOGY

This study analyzed the lexical and semantic features of Covid-19 neologisms formed through blending which

are present on the one hundred twenty Special Program in Journalism Junior High School students' written outputs and its implications in language learning for the S.Y. 2021-2022.

This study utilized the descriptive method of research. Specifically, qualitative method was used to determine the implications of the learners' use of Covid-19 related lexicons in language learning.

The research instrument used was textual analysis. This involved the analysis of the Covid-19 neologisms found in SPJ students' written outputs in English 10 Quarter 2 such as essays, compositions, scripts and portfolios under Performance Tasks.

This study also utilized unstructured interview to the participants, this allowed the researcher determine the implications of the newly coined Covid-19 related lexicons to the learning of the target language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1A presents the Covid-19 neologisms formed through blending which emerged in the students' written outputs under Performance Tasks and how many times they were used by the participants.

Table 1: Covid-19 Neologisms formed through Blending which emerged in Students' Written Outputs

Covid-19 Related Lexicons	No. of Times Used	No. of Participants	Rank	%
Quaranteen	187	109	1	91%
Covidient/ Covidiot	185	106	2	88%
Quarantini	152	104	3	87%
Zoombombing	149	102	4	85%
Coronacation	147	101	5	84%
Covideo Party	132	99	6	83%
Infodemic	120	95	7	79%

As shown in the table, there were seven Covid-19 neologisms that emerged in students' written outputs which are formed through blending. Same findings were noted in Akut (2020) study entitled "Morphological Analysis of the Neologisms during Covid-19 Pandemic".

Terms such as Covidient, Covidiot, and Covideo-Party were also the respondents' top answers when asked about their frequently used Covid-19 neologisms. These terms vividly describe the usual activities that people commonly do during the outbreak.

This implies that any new situation or phenomenon requires specific terms to refer to the actions or experiences of the people.

From the results, we can make a conclusion that the vocabulary presented has become a practical tool for talking about coronavirus-related issues.

The outburst of neologisms and lexical innovations we have already seen for a year shows the ways we cooperate with the world.

This new vocabulary also helps people express their worries about the biggest health crisis we have ever seen.

Table 2 reflects the Covid-19 related lexicons emerged in the students' Written Outputs, their meanings, functions and the morphological processes involved in the formation of the neologisms.

Table 2: *Covid-19 Neologisms' Form, Function and Meaning*

COVID-19 NEOLOGISMS	FORM	FUNCTION
Quaranteen	Blending (Quarantine + Teens)	Noun
MEANING: This term is used to refer to those who are born during the quarantine period and will be stepping into teenage in 2033-34.		

Covidient/ Covidiot	Blending (Corona + Obedient/ Idiot)	Noun
MEANING: -Covidiot refers to those who do not follow physical distancing rules and other precautionary measures. **-Covidients are the people who strictly follow the directives and orders of the government during the coronavirus outbreak.**		

Quarantini	Blending (Quarantine+Martini)	Noun
MEANING: This term refers to a drink specially created to get through the quarantine period.		

Coronacation	Blending (Corona + Vacation)	Noun
MEANING: This means a holiday or vacation taken during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.		

Covideo Party	Blending + Compounding (Corona + Video + Party)	Noun
MEANING: This includes online parties via video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Skype.		

Infodemic	Blending (Information + Pandemic)	Noun
MEANING: This refers to too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environment during a disease outbreak.		

The findings show that all Covid-19 Covid-19 neologisms that are formed through blending are all nouns. Nordquist (2019) supports this finding with him positing that a language is considered as a blend of ideas and thoughts which automatically generates and coins new words to accomplish the needs of conversational situations. Hence, the emergence of these new words related to Covid-19 helps express people's feelings, opinions, anxiety and fear in such time of uncertainty.

During the unstructured interview conducted to the participants, when asked why did they use these terms in their writings, one participant said that it's actually the language of the current generation. Learners use it everywhere, be it in everyday conversation, social media and even in school, in formal writings. Learners of the present generation have the freshest ideas blending words to create new terms and have the access to what is actually on trend due to being so active in varied social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter Tiktok and Instagram. When these words form through blending are introduced to middle ages who don't access Social Media very much, they won't even understand what do these terms mean although they refer to Covid-19

pandemic at present situation. This confirms the theory that youth speech patterns sound strange to adults because they are not used to hearing them. According to Wild (2020), new words or terms that are created are informal and not formal like a written language, so it might not yet be suitable for business letters or formal writings. But that does not mean they are wrong or bad, they are just newer. Those new words are very popular on social media and are used in general conversation. They are also used by books, news media, and articles related to COVID-19. These new words are a part of the elements that make a language live and not die, and they help show the productive morphology of the language. They are describing the language of change (Janssen, 2011).

Neologisms formed through Blending: Contextual meanings and their implications to language learning

Large set of neologisms found in learners' outputs were formed through blending. These Covid-19 related lexicons were Quaranteen, Covidient/Covidiot, Quarantini, Coronacation, Covideo Party and Infodemic. It can be observed that students made use of these neologisms more than twice in their writings.

Below are lifted sentences from students' written outputs:

*... Will the **quaranteen** babies believe that schools and entertainment establishments closed in 2020 and 2021?*

*...**Covidiots** just make this whole Covid situation even worse! Thanks to some few **Covidients** who still save the day.*

*... One current issue aside from Covid-19 pandemic, is **Infodemic**; it's rampant, it's everywhere!*

*... Wouldn't it be so nice to have a sip of your **quarantini** while enjoying a **covideo** party?*

*... With this setup that we currently have, every day is considered as **coronacation**!*

These new words and phrases are popping up practically every day, not to mention the thousands of memes, puns, jokes and videos that people are sharing with each other and on social media. Humor and irony are helping people cope with the dramatic consequences of the current crisis. The new terms reflect how living, working and socializing have changed. These newly-coined terms formed thru blending define the new forms of social life, such as Covideo Party, a virtual video watching party, quarantini, an alcoholic beverage you can sip if you are on a quarantine or on a vacation in this time of crisis which is termed as coronacation. How people behave in this crucial time was also given descriptions and all the renowned dictionaries of the world defined these terms comprehensively. We can easily guess the meanings of the two portmanteau words namely Covidiot and Covident. Covidiot is a combination of 'coronavirus' and 'idiot' and it refers to a person who does not follow the directives and orders such as 'social distancing' and behaves like an idiot. Covident is a combination of 'coronavirus' and 'obedient'. Urbandictionary.com, which coined the word 'Covidiot' defines it as "someone who ignores the warnings regarding public health or safety".

It was also noted that when asked about these terms, the participants were able to answer what do these terms mean by identifying their root words first. They are even aware of some other neologisms made popular this time of Covid-19 formed thru blending such as Coronageddon, lockstalgia, Isodesk and a lot more. This finding implies that it's much easier for learners to identify what neologisms mean if they know what the root words actually mean. So, in the language classroom, in order to understand Neologisms which have completely new structure or acoustic patterns, one of the words in each compounds should be at least

already familiar to the students. This could potentially guide them towards the actual meaning of the neologisms. Further, knowledge of blending sounds and words is very important because being able to mentally join speech sounds together to make words helps students to decode unfamiliar words using letter-sound patterns when reading. That's why difficulties with the ability to blend is a hallmark sign of struggling readers.

This finding also strengthens the idea that the most noticeable part of any generation's language is the words they invent. Young people tend to be the most linguistically innovative, thus, it must be the Gen Z who currently have the newest and most vibrant vocab. They love making new word meanings by experimenting and blending two words. As Lawson (2020) posits, in the case of pandemic, learners of today were able to combat fears using these fun neologisms which brought positivity and good vibes to the community.

McMahon (2001), in her largely diachronic study of semantic change, she talks about lexical creativity which she points out to be the formation of new words using a language's own resources, including productive morphological processes and blending. This finding strengthens her point that one of the identifiable aspects of language which allow semantic change to occur is the fact that words are typically polysemic. Hence, words can lose or gain meaning relatively easily and do not have to lose an earlier sense to gain a new one.

It was also duly noted that some of the participants were not able to arrive at the lexicons' proper meanings in their writings. These are shown below:

*...Though it would sound insensitive, being an introvert that I am, I could say that I love being a **quaranteen**!*

*...**Coronials** who are experiencing mental health issues in this time of crisis should be given proper attention.*

It can be observed that the participants mistakenly assigned different meanings to the lexicons. Coronials (Corona + millennials) is referring to kids who were conceived by their parents during the quarantine that resulted from the coronavirus. Most of these babies are born post- December 2020. They may also be referred to as COVID-kids. The same applies to quaranteens (quarantine + teens), which refers to 'the generation who will become teenagers in 2033/2034. When the participants were asked of the rootwords of Coronials and Quaranteens, they were able to identify them correctly. However, when asked how do they understand the newly coined words, they failed to give the correct meanings. For them, Coronial refers to the millennials

who are experiencing the current pandemic. Thus, for them, Coronials are they, themselves. Same thing with Quaranteens, for them, it refers to teens who are under quarantine. So, this implies that even though leaners know the root words of newly coined terms, there would be instances that confusion will still take place when these lexicons are already used in varied contexts.

This finding supports the idea of Bauer (2003). According to him, neologisms created to suit new social preferences can be misleading. Some new expressions may not also be found in a dictionary. Therefore, some of the new forms should not be taken literally without considering hidden meanings in varied contexts. In the case of our leaners who are L2 speakers, the help of a native speaker is valuable in understanding these newly coined terms formed thru blending. This finding also implies that providing meaningful contextual clues and background information along with neologisms will help learners properly decode meanings. According to Kerremans (2015), although contextual clues are not always reliable predictors of word meaning they can provide students with extra aid as to the meaning and usage of a neologism. Further, besides contextual clues, it is also helpful to provide the students with the background information concerning the etymology of the neologism or its stylistic usage.

Further, this finding implies that in language learning and translation, neologisms pose several problems for learners and translators. Since most of these neologisms are new to the users, more often than not, these terms are given different interpretation and meaning, thus, they are being used wrongly too, in different contexts. Strongman (2017) supports this idea emphasizing that the growing popularity of neologisms, specifically, new words formed through Blending creates problems which may require the learner or translator to do substantial research before understanding them, and using them correctly. Indeed, it is important for learners and translators to have some background knowledge of the neologisms to help them understand the concepts implied therein and enable them to render the message content accurately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the light of the findings, it is therefore recommended that learners may be given and provided authentic venues to experience the of use the newly coined Covid-19 related lexicons in actual scenarios, not just in writing or speaking activities inside the classroom. This may be done thru immersion activities such as conducting interviews with Health Frontliners or Covid-19 survivors, and rendering community campaign on Covid-19 awareness, control and prevention. Further, to ensure intelligibility and for the learners not to give the literal meanings of neologisms, it is recommended that instructions in neologism recognition, comprehension and translation should be done in creative and authentic platforms. Leaners may also be encouraged to compile their own glossary of Covid-19 related neologisms and use online dictionaries of neologisms when necessary.

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