

Coming to Terms with a Changed World: English Corona Blend Patterns

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How do language users cope with the Corona crisis linguistically? Specifically, what new words do they create in this crisis? Why is this interesting?

The crisis has changed our world in many ways. Looking at the new words coined in this time of crisis can tell us something about **which aspects of our world people perceive as ‚novel‘ or ‚changed‘** – after all, that’s why we need new words to refer to ‚novel‘ or ‚changed‘ situations or concepts.

In what follows I will sketch a few, preliminary observations about a corpus of 72 novel ‚blended words‘ (‚blends‘), which Olga Schneidt has collected for her MA thesis from English Twitter postings between February and April, 2020. The sheer fact that a search in Twitter postings spanning less than three months yields 72 corona-related blends is remarkable. Obviously, there are a lot of novel concepts to be named out there at the moment.

Blends

Here are some examples from the corpus.

(1) My daughter just coined new@word for next level germafobe #**Coronoid** - a person paranoid of corona 😂😂😂 (<http://twitter.com/yogeshdandawate/statuses/1236207323317592065>)

(2) Invented a new word. #**coronappropriate** refers to acceptable choices during this COVID outbreak. (<http://twitter.com/GellyRoll82/statuses/1244053069513588737>)

(3) Mine have even coined a portmanteau word to cover this: #**coreasons**
"I'm not getting dressed today."
"Why not?"
"For coreasons." (<http://twitter.com/liloakers/statuses/1246337600161529866>)

Blends are word creations that consist of two words, ‚Word 1‘ and ‚Word 2‘, which are merged into a single new word.

What do people talk about with corona blends?

One thing that seems striking in this collection of blends is that words directly referring to the **causes of changes** mostly appear as Words 1 in the blends. And: some of these words are really frequent. The most frequent Words 1 are *quarantine* (e.g. *quarrroutine* – *quarantine* + *routine*), *corona* (e.g. *coronaspiracies* – *corona* + *conspiracies*), *covid* (e.g. *covidient* – *covid* + *obedient*), and *zoom* (e.g. *zoomathon* – *zoom* + *marathon*).

Word 2 in most blends refers to the type of thing denoted – technically speaking, Word 2 functions as the semantic head of the blend. Word 1 ‘modifies’ this semantic head.

For example, a *quarrroutine* is some kind of *routine* (Word 2) that is affected by *quarantine* (Word 1); *coronaspiracies* are *conspiracies* (Word 2) that have something to do with *corona* (Word 1), etc.

So what people mainly talk about with the help of corona blends seems to be concepts that have existed before (e.g. routine, conspiracies, obedience, marathons), but that have been affected or modified by corona or corona-related objects, tools, events, etc..

What the blends, thus, do is they create a **single word** for concepts that have existed before, but that have been affected or modified in the present situation. This single-wordness is important: it signals that people **perceive** the modification as a new concept; the world has changed, and people see the need for new words to refer to the results of these changes. How many of these new-word creations will survive in a post-corona era and become part of the general vocabulary of the language, is an open, and an interesting question.