



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in European,
American and
Postcolonial
Languages and
Literatures

**Changes to the English Language and the Introduction of Anglicisms into
the Italian Language as a Result of the Covid-19 Pandemic**

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Academic Year

2020 / 2021

Abstract

Modifications made to the English language and the introduction of various anglicisms¹ into the Italian language, both created as byproducts of the Covid-19 pandemic, are the central topics of this dissertation. Changes made to a language are consequences of political, social/cultural, economic, and technological events. Because pandemics are closely related to each of these event types, they do have a history of creating changes to languages. Some examples of this modification phenomenon include the Black Death, Spanish flu, and, presently, Covid-19.

Modifications made to the English language, including those that happened during Covid-19, are tracked by authoritative English dictionaries such as the Oxford English Dictionary (British-English Dictionary) and the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (American Dictionary) with their different methodologies, as well as informal sources such as the Urban Dictionary.

The impact of Covid-19 on the English language has spread to other languages such as Italian, in which Covid-19 anglicisms are highly prevalent, especially in the media. The importance of these English terms being used in the Italian language triggered speculation in linguists and non-experts alike regarding the role of English during the pandemic. The conservative position toward pandemic-age anglicisms held by the linguistic institution known as the "Accademia della Crusca" will be analysed, as will the results of the survey conducted among Italians which focused upon the role of anglicisms as permanent modifications to the

¹ Anglicism is a word or construction borrowed from English by another language (Wikipedia)

Italian language coupled with the presence of English words as a factor that influenced Italian knowledge about Covid-19.

Keywords: Covid-19, pandemics, language changes, English, Italian, anglicisms, the media

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the writing of this dissertation I have received a great deal of support, assistance and encouragement.

I would first like to thank my supervisor, Professor Newbold, and co-supervisor Geraldine Ludbrook, whose expertise helped to shape and improve the dissertation.

I would also like to thank Helen for her valuable and incomparable support to this project. You provided me with the tools that I needed, but above all, you have been supportive through the difficulties of these months.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents for always being on my side and for helping to make my desires come true. You are always there for me. Finally, I could not have completed this dissertation without the help of friends and acquaintances who took part in the survey project of the dissertation. You have been immensely helpful.

Introduction

With numerous neologisms and expressions having been created during Covid-19, through this dissertation, I seek to investigate the relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent modifications made to the English language. Past pandemics such as the Justinian Plague and the Black Death have left impacts upon the English language. The Justinian Plague favoured the affirmation of the English language, and the Black Death helped English be spoken in England, replacing French, which was the dominating language at the time.

Mantiri (2010) wrote the following in his essay: “Languages do indeed change and some languages flourish, some expand, and some languages even die.” He added: “Linguists have traditionally studied the variations in a language, and the causes that lead to language changes.” The factors responsible for language modifications can be broad, but Mantiri categorised them as either being political, economic, social, cultural, or technological. Considering these categories, the hypothesis of the dissertation is whether or not pandemics can be classified as political, economic, social, cultural, and/or technological disasters aside from being obvious medical crises, and whether or not they can be responsible for language modification.

The other matter being discussed is the fact that various legitimate English sources have registered, tracked, and shown the changes in English during this pandemic. Covid-19 became such a linguistic phenomenon that the authoritative English dictionaries (the English Oxford Dictionary and Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary) took notice of it, and provided updates when such changes were made. For this reason, the new Covid-related lexicon present in the authoritative English dictionaries as well as in the informal Urban dictionary and in the media

will be evaluated. Specifically, the Covid-related lexicon is composed of Covid-related words from web-based corpora, as well as old words with new Covid-related meanings, and specific technical words now commonly used, such as various medical, IT, and social media terms, as well as slang.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was considerable in the English language, but also was similar in other languages. For this reason, the phenomenon of linguistic changes caused by Covid-19 will be explored in the form of studying English words that became parts of other languages, with a particular focus on the anglicisms that entered the Italian language because of the pandemic. The anglicisms will be analysed directly from the media, and then explored through the perception of Italians. In the case of the relationship between Italians and Covid-19 anglicisms, the most important questions that needed to be asked (via formal survey) are the following:

- Can people properly utilise the Coronavirus anglicisms?
- Do they know the technical terms related to Covid?
- Has the presence of English words affected the Italian public's understanding of Covid-19?
- Do Italians only know the commonly used anglicisms ?
- Are Italians able to establish the future of Covid anglicisms?

Designing a survey to investigate the presence of Covid-19 anglicisms in the Italian language was coupled with the need for the genuine opinions Italians held regarding Covid-19 anglicisms. Until now, the few available articles and studies on anglicisms in the Italian language were conducted by the conservative Accademia della Crusca. The authoritative linguists belonging to said institution frequently expressed skepticism about the high presence

of English words in the Italian language. However, Italians have never been asked about their opinions on the matter.

In summary, the first questions being discussed are the following:

- Can pandemics cause changes to the English language?
- What kind of language changes has Covid-19 caused?
- What are the resources that keep track of the language changes?
- What methodology do they use?
- How have the language resources acted during Covid-19?

Later in the dissertation, we will answer the following questions:

- What is the future of English Covid-related language, and the Covid anglicisms used in Italian?
- Will the new terms survive once the pandemic is over?
- Has this pandemic made people more linguistically conservative, particularly in the case of Covid-19 anglicisms in the Italian language?
- Do media play a specific role in the diffusion of Covid-related anglicisms into Italian?
- Will Italians be able to use more English medical and technical terms after the pandemic?

Chapter 1: How Language Changes Over Time

Languages are living and evolving things, and, like human beings, they are born, grow, change, and at a certain point, might even die. For example, according to the Global Language Monitor², the organization in charge of monitoring the status of the English language, new words in the English language are up 1% every 15 years³.

Languages need to evolve in order to be on track with the times they are living in. For this reason, they change in pronunciation (phonology), fill the gaps by creating new words or borrowing words from other languages (lexicon), or even modify their structure (morphology and syntax). The nature of these changes vary. Some linguistic changes are slower, such as word order. In Old English, word order was freer and clearer than that of Modern English. Because of the declension in Old English, word position in a sentence could have been changed without changing the meaning of it (Birner, n.d. paras.9-10)⁴. Other linguistic changes are much faster, such as the introduction of new words into languages due to external events (Birner, n.d. para.1)⁵.

² The Global Language Monitor analyses and tracks trends in language usage world wide, collecting documents and language sources

³ <https://www.quora.com/How-many-new-English-words-are-added-to-the-dictionary-every-year>

⁴ <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/english-changing>

⁵ <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/english-changing>

1.1 Types of language changes

In the following passage, there will be more specific explanations for each type of language changes.

1.2 Lexical changes

The British library's Robinson wrote, "Lexical change refers to a change in the meaning or use of a word, or a generational shift in preference for one word or phrase over another. Lexical change is probably the most frequent type of language change and certainly the easiest to observe" (2019). Some of the most common lexical change mechanisms are borrowings, which are words taken from other languages; compoundings, which are words created by the fusion of two terms (adjectives, verbs, nouns); loss of words, or words in disuse which refers to shifts in meaning or words with changed meaning; and coinage, a term for the linguistic processes necessary to create new words.

There are several relevant examples of lexical changes, some being:

- The words "encyclopedia", "virus", and "skeleton" are examples of English borrowings from Latin (linguistic changes) (Yuan)
- The adjective "nice" originally meant "ignorant," while now it means "pleasant" (shifting in meaning) (Yuan)
- The word "wife" originally meant "any woman" (narrowing in meaning) (Yuan)
- "Facebook" and "YouTube" are two of the most recent examples of compounding words⁶.

⁶ <https://semanticsmorphology.weebly.com/other-word-formation-processes.html>

1.3 Semantic changes

Semantic changes are related to the evolution of a word's meaning. Due to external events and developments, the contemporary meaning of a word might differ from a previous one (Mantiri, 2010, para.5)⁷. Common types of semantic changes include amelioration (better meaning), pejoration (worse meaning), broadening (expansion in meaning), semantic narrowing (limitation in meaning), bleaching, metaphor (figurative meaning), and metonymy.

Here are some examples of semantic changes:

- Foot as a body part → to the base of a mountain, bed, stairs, etc.
- Broadcast as throwing seeds out broadly → to sending out TV or radio waves
- Ace as the highest card → to get an A on a test
- Meat as all food → to animal flesh
- Hall as a large room in a castle or building → to a corridor

1.4 Syntax changes (Grammar)

Syntax changes are grammatical changes. Technically speaking, they consist of a modification of the agreed regularities that characterise the system of a language.⁸ Some examples of grammar changes are shifts in verb structures or in pronoun and noun forms. Syntax changes are responsible for the modification of language structures, but they take longer to be accepted by speakers than lexical changes. For this reason, syntax changes allow the

⁷ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2566128

coexistence of both old regional linguistic forms of dialects, and the new linguistic forms derived from the regional forms.

The use of second person pronouns [thou (ðəʊ), thee (ði:), thy (ðaɪ), and thine (ðam), for instance] might sound old-fashioned to most English speakers, but they are still widely used in some parts of Northern England, especially amongst elderly speakers⁹. In Modern English, the pronoun *you* is used both for the singular and plural forms, while in Old English, a distinction between singular and plural was made. The “thou” was used for one person, and the “ye” was used for cases involving more than one person (“Why Did We Stop Using 'Thou'?” n.d. para.1)¹⁰.

Verbs are a unique aspect of the English language, especially the past tense form of irregular verbs. Beowulf exhibited seven different rules for creating the past tense in Old English. As time went on, regular verbs seemed to have usurped the irregular ones. Today, only less than 3% of English verbs are irregular, and all new ones are regular (upcycled, yarn-bombed) (Yong,2009, para.7.).

Researchers found they could compute the precise rate by which irregular verbs became “regularized” in the same way physicists calculate the half-life of radioactive materials. In general, linguistic experts discovered that a verb used 100 times less frequently evolved 10

⁹ <https://www.bl.uk/british-accent-and-dialects/articles/grammatical-change-in-the-english-language>

¹⁰ <https://attach.matita.net/silvialuraghi/file/20%20Luraghi.pdf>

times as quickly and could be changed from the irregular to the “ed” form (Gellene, 2007, paras 2-3-4)¹¹.

Irregular verbs are still particularly powerful, despite being scarcer than regular verbs. Some of the most used English irregular verbs are be, have, do, go, say, can, will, see, take, get, make, and come. Because of the high frequency of their usage, it is hard to foresee their abandoning the language (Yong, 2009, paras.9-10)¹².

1.5 Phonetic and Phonological changes

Before outlining phonetic and phonological changes that have affected the English language, it is important to make a distinction between what is meant by the terms phonetic and phonological.

Phonetics concerns the physical way sounds, or phones, are produced. Phonology refers to the combinations of sounds in relation to words and their meanings, for example, bat /bæt/, pat /pæt/. As reported by the university advisor, Dennis Preston in 2011, “human ears hear phonetics (the production and the perception of sounds), whereas the brain hears phonology (the combination of sounds that create words)”.

¹¹ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-oct-11-sci-verbs11-story.html>

¹² <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/the-evolution-of-the-past-tense-how-verbs-change-over-time>

1.5.1 Phonetic changes:

- Dropping sounds

Sounds are more likely to disappear at the end of words, and this is particularly evident in the phenomenon of shortening words. Shortened words, like 'pro' and 'grotty', are two examples of English words losing their endings (Chelsea, n.d. para.1)¹³

- Appearance of new sounds

Vowels can be added to make the pronunciation of specific words easier. Two examples of this phenomenon are the pronunciation of “umberella” instead of “umbrella” and “athalete” instead of “athlete.” The same process can happen with consonants. However, adding consonants might make the pronunciation of words more difficult, as in the case of “fambly” instead of “family” (Okrent, 2019, para.1)¹⁴.

1.5.2 Phonological changes:

The sound pattern of a language changes over time, and the two main factors that contribute to this phenomenon are regional variants and time. The following are examples of some variations in sounds that are the result of the passage of time.

In the early twentieth century:

- The vowel in words such as “cloth” and “cross” switched from being pronounced like “thought” to being pronounced like “lot”

¹³ <https://english--language.weebly.com/phonetic-changes.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/51362/4-changes-english-so-subtle-we-hardly-notice-theyre-happening>

- People stopped making the distinction between similar words such as “flaw” /flɔ:/ and “floor” /flɔ:(r)/
- The quality of the long O /oʊ/ vowel changed (goat /gəʊt/, home /həʊm/, know /nəʊ/)
- The quality of the short A /æ/ vowel changed (back /bæk/, man/mæn/)
- People stopped using a “tapped” r-sound between vowels (Mantiri, 2011, section 3, para.3)¹⁵.

¹⁵ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273040824_Factors_Affecting_Language_Change

In the mid twentieth century:

- Words like “sure” /ʃʊə(r)/, “poor” /pjuə(r)/, “tour” /tʊə(r)/ started to sound identical to “shore” /ʃɔ:(r)/, “pour” /pɔ:(r)/, “tore” /pɔ:(r)/
- The weak vowels in words such as “visibility” and “carelessness” drifted away from the sound made in the word “kit” /kɪt/
- People started to insert a t-sound in words such as “prince” /prɪns/, making it sound like prints /prɪnt/
- A ch /tʃ/-sound became respectable in words such as “perpetual” /pə(r)'petʃʊəl/, and a j-/j/ sound in “graduate” /grædʒʊət/
- The glottal stop started to replace the traditional t /ti:-/sound in phrases such as “quite” /'kwaɪt/ “nice” /naɪs/, it seems (Mantiri, 2011. section 3. para.3.)¹⁶.

In the late twentieth century:

- The vowel sound at the end of words such as “happy” /'hæpi/, “coffee” /'kɒfi/, “valley” /'væli/ is growing tenser
- The OO-sounds of “goose” /gu:s/ and “foot” /fʊt/ are losing their lip-rounding and backness
- The glottal stop is used more often, becoming a signal of group membership, traditionally associated with male, working-class speakers and young speakers of “prestige British English” (Shariatmadari, 2015, para.4)¹⁷. Even Princess Diana was

¹⁶ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273040824_Factors_Affecting_Language_Change

¹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/30/why-have-we-got-it-in-for-glottal-stop>

accused of having succumbed to the glottalisation, but she promptly defended herself by saying: “There’s a loʔ of iʔ abouʔ” (Shariatmadari, 2015, para.3)

- the l-sound /l/ is progressively changing into a kind of w-sound /w/ (milk /mɪlk/, myself /maɪ'self/;
- the middle /'mɪd(ə)l/ ch- /tʃ/ and j-/j/ sounds are spreading to words such as Tuesday /'tʃu:zdeɪ/, reduce /rɪ'dju:s/, which begin to sound like chooseday or rejuice (Mantiri, 2011, section 3. para.3)¹⁸.

1.6 Spelling changes

English spelling is hard. The main difficulty is that many English words are not spelled in the same manner as they are spoken. For example “ough” can be pronounced in seven different ways: “through,” “thorough,” “although,” “plough,” “thought,” “cough,” and “rough” (Swain, 2015, para.1)¹⁹.

Through history, the Roman, Norman, and Scandinavian invasions, plus the fact that the English language started borrowing vocabulary from the languages of the invaders (such as French, Latin, and Old Norse) can be used to explain the spelling complexity of the English language (“Why is English spelling so difficult”, 2020 [video])²⁰. In Old English there was an almost perfect matching between the sounds and the letters. However, the Norman-French invasion brought many French words into English, which did not respect the spelling criteria of

¹⁸https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273040824_Factors_Affecting_Language_Change

¹⁹ <https://theconversation.com/trying-to-change-englishs-complex-spelling-is-a-waste-of-time-38027>

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=134EMstdwO4>

word-sound correspondence. For example, the sound /s/ was always spelled *s*, but in French it could also be spelled *c* as in “circle” (and the *c* could also be a /k/ sound in English origin words like “catch”)²¹.

The Great Vowel Shift was an important sound change affecting long vowels in the English language during the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Menzer, 2000)²². In particular, this linguistic phenomenon brought about long stressed vowels, which caused a definite change in how these vowels are transcribed orthographically. This can be seen in a word’s spelling: *i* /ɪ/ (as in “time” /*taim*/), *e* /i:/ (as in “meet” /*mi:t*/), *o* /u:/ (as in “noon” /*nu:n*/), *a* /eɪ/ (as in “name” /*neɪm*/). These letters are pronounced differently in English than they are in any other European language (“The linguistic structure of Modern English”, n.d. paras. 1-2)²³.

²¹ <https://benjamins.com/sites/z.156/exercise/c2q1>

²² <http://facweb.furman.edu/~mmenzer/gvs/what.htm>

²³ <https://benjamins.com/sites/z.156/exercise/c2q1>

Here are some examples of spelling having changed over time:

Table 1

Spelling Evolution Through Time

Spelling during the 16 th and 17 th century	Respelling
aventure	adventure
avice	advice
crume	crumb
descryve	describe
langage	language
nevew	nephew
samon	salmon

Another aspect to take into consideration is the different ways words are spelt in British English versus American English. British English tended to stick with the French way of spelling words, whereas American English prides itself on the match between the pronunciation and written form.

Here are some examples of the differences between British English and American English:

Table 2

British English Spelling and American English spelling

British -our vs. American -or difference

armour	armor
behaviour	behavior
colour	color
favourite	favorite
flavour	flavor
harbour	harbor
honour	honor
humour	humor
labour	labor
neighbour	neighbor
rumour	rumor
saviour	savior

British -re vs. American -er difference

amphitheatre	amphitheater
centimetre	centimeter
centre	center
fibre	fiber
kilometre	kilometer
litre	liter
lustre	luster
louvre	louver
manoeuvre	maneuver
metre	meter
spectre	specter
theatre	theater

British -ae/-oe/-oer vs. American -e/-o/-eu difference

archaeology	archeology
gynaecology	gynecology
leukaemia	leukemia
manoeuvre	maneuver
mediaeval	medieval
mementoes	mementos
oestrogen	estrogen
orthopaedic	orthopedic
paediatric	pediatric
palaeontology	paleontology
toxaemia	toxemia

Chapter 2: External Reasons For Linguistic Changes In English

Having previously seen what the linguistic changes are technically, now the focus will be placed upon the factors that are responsible for these language changes.

- **Politics:** related to the power of rulers or the type of governance in a country, important politicians, government policies (racism, feminism/gender-related matters), and even wars
- **Economics:** related to economic conditions, development, and government policies, from colonialism to import-export and international business
- **Social and cultural factors:** related to the migration phenomenon and social/cultural identities
- **Technology:** related to new inventions and communication development from the Industrial Revolution to the Technological Revolution, especially internet technology, better known as IT

2.1 Politics and language changes

The linguistic expert Heinichen (2010) sustained that political changes happen when “the rulers in a country lose power or the type of governance in the country changes”²⁴. For this reason, wars can be classified as political events that can in turn lead to linguistic changes, because most of the time military invasions also are invasions of a language²⁵.

²⁴ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/political-change-definition-lesson-quiz.html>

²⁵ <https://taskandpurpose.com/community/how-americas-wars-have-changed-the-english-language/>

In his 2007 book “Inventing English: a Portable History of the Language”, the author Seth Lerer discussed wars and language changes by saying that, “war always changes [a] language. It brings in new words, changes attitudes, and shifts dialects” (p.246). For example, during World War I, the word “lousy”, used to describe lice infestations, came to mean “weary”, and nowadays, the same word is used to describe something poor in quality. The name “trench coat” was used for the jacket soldiers wore in the trenches, and is now the à la mode jacket to wear on various non-military occasions nowadays. The brand “Jeep” came from the name of the specific model of car with the letters “GP” engraved on the back of every military vehicle during World War II (Sicard, 2015, para.3)²⁶.

In 2011, the linguistic expert Heinichen added that political events can happen both externally and internally. World Wars are an example of an external and internal political change, because they alter both the internal equilibrium of the countries involved, and the equilibrium of the entire world. There are internal political changes initiated from the inside, for example, by the citizens of a country (referendum, political elections, etc)²⁷.

The recent Brexit might be included in the category of internal political changes. Despite all the internal political, economic, social, and cultural repercussions that were present if the UK were to leave the European Union, the event turned out to have a certain impact on the English language as well.

²⁶ <https://taskandpurpose.com/community/how-americas-wars-have-changed-the-english-language/>

²⁷ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/political-change-definition-lesson-quiz.html>

The name “Brexit” is itself a portmanteau expression with a shift in meaning. In 2016 it was used by those who were campaigning in favour of the UK staying in the European Union, while now is used to describe the act of the UK leaving the European Union.

The Brexit phenomenon was responsible for the creation of numerous neologisms such as “Brexchosis” (a double portmanteau pointing at the attitude towards the exit), “Brexiety” (a state of anxiety about Brexit experienced by opponents of Brexit), “Brexodus” (a big number of people leaving and small number of newcomers in the UK), “Bregret” (an epitaph for a nation’s decline and possible fall), and “Bremain” (no risks are taken).

Brexit also included some borrowings, the most popular of which is “backstop”. The word “backstop” was originally used in sports to define a fence or a catcher used to prevent the ball from going out of place. During Brexit, “backstop” was used to define the possible agreement made between Ireland and Northern Ireland to avoid the hard border deal between the two countries (Buerki, 2020, para.5)²⁸. The event of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union brought new phraseological patterns into the English language. For example, the word “deal” started to be used in the expressions of “no deal,” “no deal is better than a bad deal,” and even “oven-ready deal”(Buerki, 2020, para.5.)²⁹.

Internal political changes can include the election of the President of a country, which can also cause linguistic changes. The presidency of Donald Trump has been an endless source of content for linguists, and even the authoritative Oxford English Dictionary took notice of the

²⁸ How Brexit changed the English language (theconversation.com)

²⁹ How Brexit changed the English language (theconversation.com)

linguistic “estro” of the President of United States (Letzer, 2016, paras 7-8-9)³⁰. For example, the way he used the word “bad” in his speeches caught the attention of linguists. According to the OED³¹, the word “bad” means “heavy,” “miserable”, and also “pathetic”, but for the former US President, the word “bad” is comparable to a “bah.” In that case, “bad” is more used as an interjection than a word, per se.

The former President of the United States also coined numerous new words. For example, in one of his most discussed Tweets (at least in a linguistic capacity), he wrote, “Despite the constant negative covfefe.” The speculation about “covfefe” went so viral among linguists as well as non-experts that it was immediately added into the popular online word game “Words with Friends”³²(“A bigly covfefe: 6 times Trump and team made us scramble for a dictionary”,2017, paras- 9-10-11)³³. The ex-President of the United States invented numerous other neologisms, such as “fake news”, “little rocket man,” “bad hombres”, “Crooked Hillary”, “extreme vetting”, and “phony”.

The policies that governments adopt are particularly influential towards languages. For example, the affirmation of feminism has brought about some important language changes, such as the gender neutralization of professional words; “spokesperson” instead of “spokesman

³⁰ <https://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-has-transformed-english-2016-2?IR=T>

³¹ Oxford English Dictionary--

³² Words with Friends lets expand your vocabulary, your wit and your spelling abilities together with your family and friends

³³ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/a-bigly-covfefe-6-times-trump-and-team-made-us-scramble-for-a-dictionary/story-ulbmyVix1OAMXZeyuuEi0H.html>

of spokeswoman,” “congressperson” instead of “congressman or congresswoman,” police officer, and the incorporation of gender-inclusive nouns which include words such as “humankind” instead of “mankind”.

2.2 Economics and language changes

The English language becomes progressively more influential as time goes on, as over 1.35 billion people worldwide (Lyons, 2021, para.7) speak the language^{34 35}. Ironically, the majority of those who speak English are not native speakers. The 2019 research conducted by the World Economic Forum^{36 37} estimated that people who speak English as a second language are in total over 1 billion, while the number of English native speakers is about 360 million people, fewer than Chinese and Spanish native speakers combined. The large number of English non-native speakers makes English the most studied language in the world. One of the reasons of the need to speak English can be linked to economic factors, as English is the *lingua franca* (adopted language) of business, entertainment, science, and IT (Lyons, 2021, para.20)³⁸.

Economics can influence languages and be the reason for their modifications. For this reason, the more developed the country, the more important the language spoken in that country becomes. One of the easiest examples of this theory in recent history is the United States. Because of the economical relevance that the USA and the other native English speaking countries have globally, having limited English skills would entail being left out from the

³⁴ <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/how-many-people-speak-english-and-where-is-it-spoken#:~:text=How%20Many%20People%20In%20The,English%20as%20their%20first%20language.>

³⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/>

³⁶ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/11/countries-that-speak-english-as-a-second-language/>

³⁷ The World Economic Forum engages the foremost political, business, cultural and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

³⁸ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-most-used-languages-on-the-internet/#:~:text=English%20is%20by%20far%20the,with%20over%201.13%20billion%20speakers.>

international scene (Collom, 2021, paras 2-3)³⁹. Consequently, if international leaders do not understand the crucial role of English in the business sector, entire nations will lose their competitive advantages. Therefore, considering English as an essential condition to do business today, and not just a bonus, can be a key factor to achieving success in business (McCormick, 2017)⁴⁰.

In a 2019 study, The World Forum Research showed a correlation between English language skills and the economic performance of a country. The better a nation collectively spoke English, the more income they made. McCormick (2017) states that there is a direct correlation between the English skills of a population and the economic performance of the country. In the countries with better level of English, indicators like gross national income (GNI) and GDP go up (paras 1-2)⁴¹. He goes on to say that furthermore, there is a correlation between “English proficiency and the Human Development Index [a measure of education, life expectancy, literacy, and standards of living] (paras.3-4). As you can see in the chart below, there is a cut off mark for that correlation. Low and very low proficiency countries display variable levels of development. However, no country of moderate or higher proficiency falls below “Very High Human Development” on the HDI”⁴².

³⁹ <https://www.languagetrainers.com/blog/2020/08/19/can-economic-development-affect-language/>

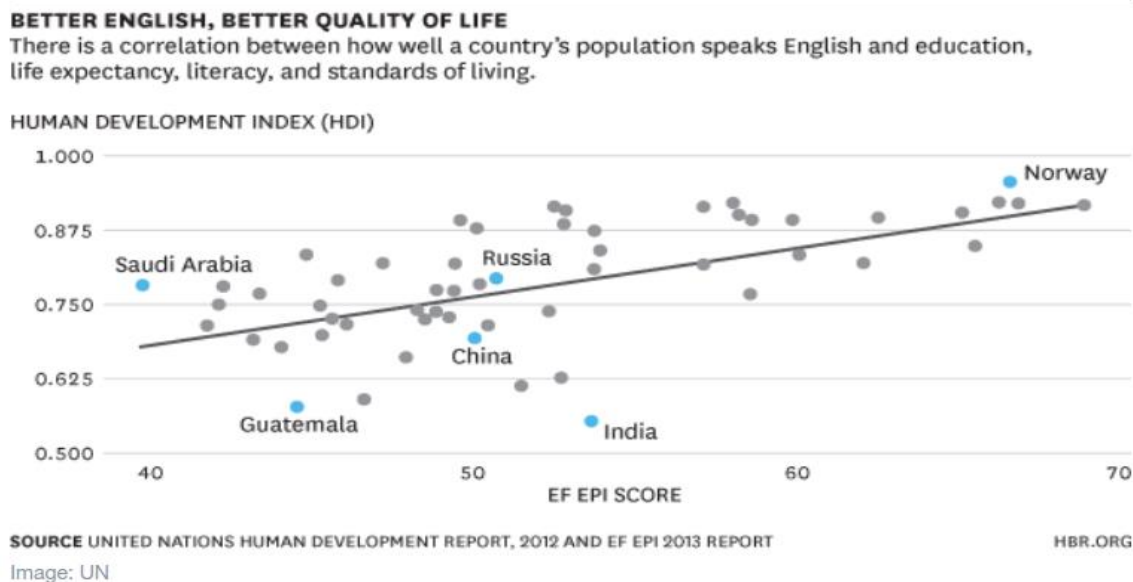
⁴⁰ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/the-link-between-english-and-economics#:~:text=Research%20shows%20a%20direct%20correlation,GNI>

⁴¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/the-link-between-english-and-economics#:~:text=Research%20shows%20a%20direct%20correlation,GNI>

⁴² <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/03/the-link-between-english-and-economics#:~:text=Research%20shows%20a%20direct%20correlation,GNI>

Figure 1.

Better English And Better Quality of Life



Note. Correlation between English proficiency and better standards of living

Thanks to the English language, there are more possibilities for interaction. In economic terms, the increase in interactions can be translated into more trade activities in the present, as well as in the past. When the British Empire was the major trading power, the English language and culture started to seep into the languages of the British Empire's trade rivals and partners. Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Indian, and English were influenced by these languages and cultures as well.

Beginning with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, explorations and piracy became the main sources for new English vocabulary. Borrowings taken from Spanish and Portuguese began to pop up, including “mango”, “pagoda”, “monsoon” (1580s), “mongoose” (1673), “teak”

(1698), or “**cuspidor**” (1779). From Caribbean and Native American languages, English adopted “tobacco” and “potato” (“The international swap trade in useful words”, 2014, para.2).⁴³ During the House of Stuart and House of Tudor explorations, new words were added into the English language. The following words were taken from Dutch: “**landscape**”, “**scone**”, “**booze**”, “**schooner**”, “**skipper**”, “**knapsack**”, “**easel**”, “**sketch**”, and many more (Haylock, 2019, paras. 11-12)⁴⁴.

Millions of people with different languages and cultures along with massive resources were united under the British Empire. However, new educational institutions were founded in the colonies to help the spread of English and Western culture instead of the local languages and cultures present in the countries of the Empire. As a result, former British colonies, such as Ghana and South Africa, still have English as their official language (Corradi, 2017, para.2),⁴⁵ and India is the second country in the world for most English speakers (“List of countries by English-speaking population”, 2003, para.2)⁴⁶. The following is testimony from an Indian person, taken from their blog, “If we didn’t speak English, none of us would ever be able to talk to anyone else. It’s not official, of course, but it’s essential”(Landsberg, 2013)⁴⁷.

⁴³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26137419>

⁴⁴ <https://www.historyextra.com/period/norman/how-english-language-evolved-inkhorn-controversy-shakespeare-phrases-in-use-today-who-invented-english/>

⁴⁵ <https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2017/04/linguistic-colonialism-english/>

⁴⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_English-speaking_population

⁴⁷ <https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/108171/is-english-considered-a-trade-language-lingua-franca>

One of the enduring legacies of British colonisation has been the export of the English language on a global scale. However, the wave of immigration in the middle of the 20th century brought about the formation of different forms of English, such as Chinglish (Chinese + English), Euro-English (European English), Hinglish (Hindi + English), and Singlish (English based creole language).

There have been multiple results of the British Empire dominating the world scene until the 19th century, much like the results of the economic growth of the United States in the modern era. Both of these instances have ensured the domination of English, especially in the business sector. However, the predominant role of the English language can also have downsides, as locales which are not economically dominant seem to have their languages doomed to extinction. For example, in Alaska, English won over “Upper Tanana,” one of the local languages (Collom, 2021, para.5)⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ <https://www.languagetrainers.com/blog/2020/08/19/can-economic-development-affect-language/>

2.3 Social and cultural aspects influence on language changes

Migration can be categorised as a political and economic event, but the social aspect of migration will be taken into consideration in this dissertation. The word “migration” has always signified movement. When people move, no matter what their reasons are, parts of their languages move with them. The immigrants and their language come in contact with the language of their new land, creating language interaction. The result of language interaction is called “multi ethnolects” (McWhorter, 2015)⁴⁹ , which refers to new versions of old languages.

When first brought to the United States, adult African slaves were not able to learn English fully. American slave owners used the English language (or a lack there of) to keep the slaves from revolting. Slaves were taught only the English words they needed for work. Linguistically similar African groups were separated by slave traders and owners, so that they would not revolt. Slaves picked up English from their masters (or slave bosses) gradually over time by immersion, as communication was not encouraged. Education was outlawed for slaves. Very rarely were slaves educated in free states where the law allowed it (“Education during the slave period in the United States”, n.d. paras.1-2-3)⁵⁰. Slave children became gradually more familiar with English than their parents were, but developed a unique way of speaking that retained some of the characteristics of how their parents had spoken (“When did slave in the USA learn English?”, 2012) ⁵¹.

⁴⁹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/language-immigrants-multiethnolect/420285/>

⁵⁰ https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Education_during_the_slave_period_in_the_United_States

⁵¹

https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/1zq1z5/when_did_slaves_in_the_usa_learn_english/

A modern African American Vernacular English sentence would be “Why she say he the only one?” instead of the standard “Why does she say he is the only one?” African American Vernacular English leaves out the words “does” and “is,” as these are the irregular verb forms adult learners of English tend to dislike, since they are hard to learn. Black American English speakers use all but some of the Standard American English lexicon and syntax, including irregular noun forms—no Black American says “mouses” instead of “mice.” In modern times, the African American English dialect lives on as a form of in-group social identity (McWhorter 2015, para.5)⁵².

In his book *Primitive Culture* (1871), the anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor wrote, “Culture is something that a man learns as a member of society (p.300)”. Tylor’s theory can be applied to any aspect of a person’s life, from their eating habits (for example people learn to eat certain food at a specific time of the day) to their languages and the way they are spoken. Food and the names of food can be a good example as they are usually borrowed, not just between cultures, but also between languages.

Some African words were preserved and have been loaned to American English. Linguistic scholars have been able to trace that the word “goober” — slang for peanut — is from a Bantu language, says Thomason, a linguist at the University of Michigan (2017). “Banjo” comes from the Bantu word “mbanza”, a stringed instrument played in some parts of

⁵² <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/language-immigrants-multiethnolect/420285/>

West Africa. The word “okra” comes from “nkruma”, which is from the West African language Akan (Devarajan, 2018, para.8)⁵³.

Peanuts (or goobers) became an important American crop, first grown and harvested by slaves for their masters (Devarajan, 2018,)⁵⁴, but Africans were the first to introduce peanuts to North America beginning in the 1700s (Devarajan, 2018)⁵⁵. “Okra” was brought to the United States via the transatlantic slave route at some point between the 16th and 19th centuries (Pomona University, 2019)⁵⁶. Because of its slimy nature, okra was first used by white slave owners in the South to thicken soups. Thus, Créole “gumbo”, which itself is another name for okra, developed in Louisiana (“Okra: How it Got to the United States, How to Grow it and How to Eat it”, 2019, paras. 2-3) ⁵⁷.

The influence of American culture on the English language and the way English is spoken has been particularly significant. American literature together with Hollywood movies, songs, music, dance, and the exposure to American TV and radio programs has become popular all over the world, giving great help to the spread of English. All these elements also contributed to the growth of Americanisms and peculiar expressions in the English language.

⁵³ <https://www.wbur.org/npr/606002607/ready-for-a-linguistic-controversy-say-mhmm>

⁵⁴ <https://wamu.org/story/18/09/12/ready-for-a-linguistic-controversy-say-mhmm/>

⁵⁵ <https://www.nationalpeanutboard.org/peanut-info/history-peanuts-peanut-butter.htm#:~:text=The%20peanut%20plant%20probably%20originated%20in%20Peru%20or%20Brazil%20in%20South%20America.&text=The%20explorers%20took%20peanuts%20back,America%20beginning%20in%20the%201700s.>

⁵⁶ <https://www.pomona.edu/farm/blog/posts/okra-how-it-got-united-states-how-grow-it-and-how-eat-it>

⁵⁷ <https://www.pomona.edu/farm/blog/posts/okra-how-it-got-united-states-how-grow-it-and-how-eat-it>

Here are some examples of typical American phrases: “an axe to grind”; “sitting on the fence”; “poker face”; “stake a claim”, and words such as “bedrock”, “smooch”, “raincoat”, “skyscraper”, “joyride”, “showdown”, “cocktail”, and “cookie” (Haylock, 2017, para.15)⁵⁸.

2.4 Technology and language changes

The Industrial Revolution contributed to making the English language richer by creating new words to describe inventions in each and every sector: engineering, technology, fashion, food, leisure, medicine, chemistry, and even psychology (Watts, 2000, paras 1-2)⁵⁹.

Some new words invented for engineering were: “train”, “engine”, “reservoir”, “combustion”, “piston”, “hydraulic”, “condenser”, “electricity”, “telephone”, “telegraph”, “lithograph”, and “camera”. Some other words acquired new meanings, especially in agriculture: “vacuum”, “cylinder”, “apparatus”, “pump”, “syphon”, “locomotive”, and “factory” Some even turned to be the fusion of existing words: “railway”, “horsepower”, “typewriter”, “cityscape”, “airplane” (Watts, 2000)⁶⁰.

Some new words in the fashion field were “crinoline”, “aniline”, “magenta”, and mackintosh. New words in the medical and chemistry fields were “acne”, “stethoscope”, “ambulance”, aspirin, “leukemia”, “palladium”, “thallium”, “benzene”, and “hydrate”. Yet

⁵⁸ <https://www.historyextra.com/period/norman/how-english-language-evolved-inkhorn-controversy-shakespeare-phrases-in-use-today-who-invented-english/>

⁵⁹ <https://victorianweb.org/history/language/courtney1.html>

⁶⁰ <https://victorianweb.org/history/language/courtney1.html>

others were created for food, which included “pasta”, “toffee”, “cereal”, “vermouth”, and “salami” (Watts, 2000, paras.1-2-3-4-6-7-8)⁶¹.

The Industrial Revolution generated an explosion of new ideas and inventions that brought the country toward an unprecedented industrialisation and urbanisation process. Since then, not only has the development never stopped, but it also burst forth into the Technological and Digital Revolution of the 21st century (Watts, 2000).

English is the language of technology, computers, and computer processing. Computer programs are created in English, and sometimes, they do not even respond to commands given in other languages (Vladislav, n.d.).⁶² For this reason, English provides a computer alphabetisation. Since everybody needs to learn the alphabet to learn how to speak, everybody needs to grasp a little bit of English to use a computer.

English is also the language of the internet, since it was an American invention. The Internet started spreading around 2000 and its diffusion has been unstoppable since then. The cultural and social changes caused by the internet were so radical that they influenced the language that people speak.

Because of the role of the internet, English also is the most commonly used language online, being used by **60.4%**, or about six million of the top 10 million websites. By contrast,

⁶¹ <https://victorianweb.org/history/language/courtney1.html>

⁶² Vladislav, H. *Role of the English Language in Information Technology: Importance of learning and practical use of language skills*. Vinnitsa National Technical University

Chinese is spoken by 14.3% of the global population – more than 1.11 billion people — but it’s only used in 1.4% of the top 10 million websites (Bhutada, 2021, para.5) ⁶³.

The English of the internet is particularly rich in its vocabulary, but new words can appear and disappear particularly fast. The first acronyms that were created for text messages in order to save space are now replaced by slang used on popular social media: “hashtag”, “catfish”, “selfie”, “tweet”, “vlogger”, “meme”, “apps”, to mention a few (“4 Ways the Internet Has Changed the English Language”, n.d. para.2)⁶⁴.

The influence of technology on languages is massive, especially in communication, but it is still too early to fully evaluate the impact that the language of technology has on the English language. In the article titled “How the Internet is Changing the Language,” the journalist Kleinman (2010) claimed, “The whole phenomenon is very recent and the technology people are referring to is only 20 years old”. The same cautious perspective was adopted by the Oxford English Dictionary which has not yet allowed the acronym “APP” or “app,” short for software application into the dictionary. For this reason, language changes can be divided into temporary linguistic changes and lasting linguistic changes⁶⁵ (Kleinman, 2010), and only time can allow us to understand which category they belong to.

The introduction was important to demonstrate what the linguistic changes are, and what the external causes may be for said linguistic changes. However, since one of the central

⁶³ <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-most-used-languages-on-the-internet/#:~:text=English%20is%20by%20far%20the,with%20over%201.13%20billion%20speakers.>

⁶⁴ <https://www.oxford-royale.com/articles/4-ways-internet-english-language/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-10971949>

topics of the dissertation is the relation between pandemics and the English language, the following sections will be dedicated to find a *fil rouge* between past pandemics and the traces they left of themselves in the English language. So the two main questions that will be answered are:

- What are significant examples of pandemics?
- What changes did pandemics bring about in the English language?

Chapter 3: Pandemics And Language Changes

Pandemics are medical and health emergencies, but they can also be political, economic, and social crises.

Here are some examples of past pandemics, in detail:

3.1 Pandemics of the Past and Their Effects on Society, Culture, and Language

3.1.1 *The Plague of Sheroe*

In the Middle East of the seventh century, the Persian-speaking Sasanian Empire experienced a regionally-focused but mightily destructive plague. This incident was called the Plague of Sheroe, and it killed the newly ascended king along with a quarter of the population of the capital. This naturally destabilised an already crumbling empire, and made way for an effortless domination by the Sasanian Empire and the early Islamic caliphs only a few years later. These early caliphs, in turn, instituted bureaucratic reforms that changed the language in the region of modern-day Iraq from Middle Persian to Arabic, along with the profound cultural changes that remain in place to this day such as the Islamic religion (Wodrick, 2020, para.2) ⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ <https://hekint.org/2020/07/06/plague-epidemics-and-the-evolution-of-language-in-england/>

3.1.2 *The Plague of Justinian*

The Plague of Justinian (540-750 AD) weakened English communities, mainly the indigenous Breton, Celtic, and Roman remnants. This made way for subsequent dominance by invading Germanic tribes with their Anglo and Saxon languages. The linguistic changes to England came from military, governmental, and inevitable social conquests forcing the extinction of existing native languages, except for within the most remote of places. Proof of this linguistic shift is evidenced by the lack of Celtic and Latin words in the new English, except for some names of places.

3.1.3 *The Black Death*

The Black Death in England (1348-49) decimated much of the French-speaking nobility and government rulers in England. The remaining majority were English-speaking commoners, and this allowed their vernaculars to flourish. Without the Black Death and the increasing demand for literature in the vernacular form that followed the newly ascended English-speaking nobility, it is highly unlikely that *The Canterbury Tales*, *Piers Plowman*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, considered the great works of Middle English, would have even been written, at least in their English form (Wodrick, 2020, para.6-7-8)⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ <https://hekint.org/2020/07/06/plague-epidemics-and-the-evolution-of-language-in-england/>

3.1.4 *The Spanish flu*

Next to the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the 1918 influenza pandemic, or the Spanish flu, was the most severe pandemic in modern history. Like the Covid-19 pandemic, there is no universal consensus regarding where the virus originated. Nonetheless, just like the Covid-19, it spread worldwide (1918-1919).

About 500 million people or one-third of the world population at that time became infected with this virus, and the number of deaths was estimated to be at least 50 million worldwide. Unlike Covid-19, mortality was high in young people; younger than 5 years old, 20-40 years old, and 65 years and older respectively. The high mortality in healthy people, including those in the 20-40 year age group, was a unique feature of the Spanish flu pandemic.

With no vaccine and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections that can be associated with influenza infections, control efforts worldwide were limited to non-pharmaceutical interventions such as isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, use of disinfectants, and limitations of public gatherings ⁶⁸ (“History of 1918 Flu Pandemic”, n.d.).

The 1918 pandemic is often referred to as the Spanish flu, but it is a complete false attribution. The 1918 pandemic certainly did not originate in Spain. While the exact origins may never be known, the first wave of the influenza or *la grippe*⁶⁹, hit soldiers on the battlefields of Europe and leaders on both sides of World War I censored any news about this new lethal illness to not admit weakness. The only exception was neutral Spain, where actually

⁶⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-commemoration/1918-pandemic-history.htm>

⁶⁹ French term to address the “Spanish flu”

the press reported on it. For this reason, the pandemic got its name from the assumption that it came from Spain (Gladstone, 2020)⁷⁰.

Eventually, the global devastation of the influenza could not be denied and public health measures were instituted in the US and Europe. In the US, these varied by region, and included closing schools and places of public amusement, enforcing “no-spitting” ordinances, encouraging people to use handkerchiefs or disposable tissues and requiring people to wear masks in public (Factual Entertainment Brand, n.d.)⁷¹. As mask-wearing ordinances popped up, most people complied with them. The U.S. and Europe were still fighting in World War I, and officials framed anti-flu measures as a way to protect the troops from the deadly outbreak.

In the UK and Europe, public health messages were confused and, just like today, fake news and conspiracy theories were abundantly spread worldwide⁷² (“When Mask-Wearing Rules in the 1918 Pandemic Faced Resistance”, n.d.). During the pandemic of 1918, one myth spread in the United States and the United Kingdom was that the pandemic was linked to the use of aspirin produced by the German pharmaceutical company Bayer. Germany was at war with those countries as well as European countries and suspicion of anything German was rampant. Ironically, later studies have suggested that aspirin may have actually worsened some symptoms of the flu responsible for the pandemic, but not due to tampering as was suspected (Cohut, 2020, para. 11)⁷³.

⁷⁰ <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/otm/segments/why-press-downplayed-1918-flu>

⁷¹ <https://www.history.com/news/1918-spanish-flu-mask-wearing-resistance>

⁷² <https://www.history.com/news/1918-spanish-flu-mask-wearing-resistance>

⁷³ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/the-flu-pandemic-of-1918-and-early-conspiracy-theories>

There was admittedly, an overall ignorance during this era of healthy living or lifestyle. In some factories in the U.K., no-smoking rules were relaxed in the belief that cigarettes would help prevent infection (Kraut, 2010). During a debate on the pandemic, Conservative MP Claude Lowther⁷⁴ asked, “Is it a fact that a sure preventative against influenza is cocoa taken three times a day?”(BBC NEWS, n.d.)⁷⁵. In November 1918, the News of the World⁷⁶ advised its readers to:

Wash inside the nose with soap and water each night and morning; force yourself to sneeze night and morning, then breathe deeply. Do not wear a muffler; take sharp walks regularly and walk home from work; eat plenty of porridge (para. 18)⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ Colonel Claude Willian Henry Lowther (1872- 16 June 1929) was an English Conservative politician

⁷⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-52564371>

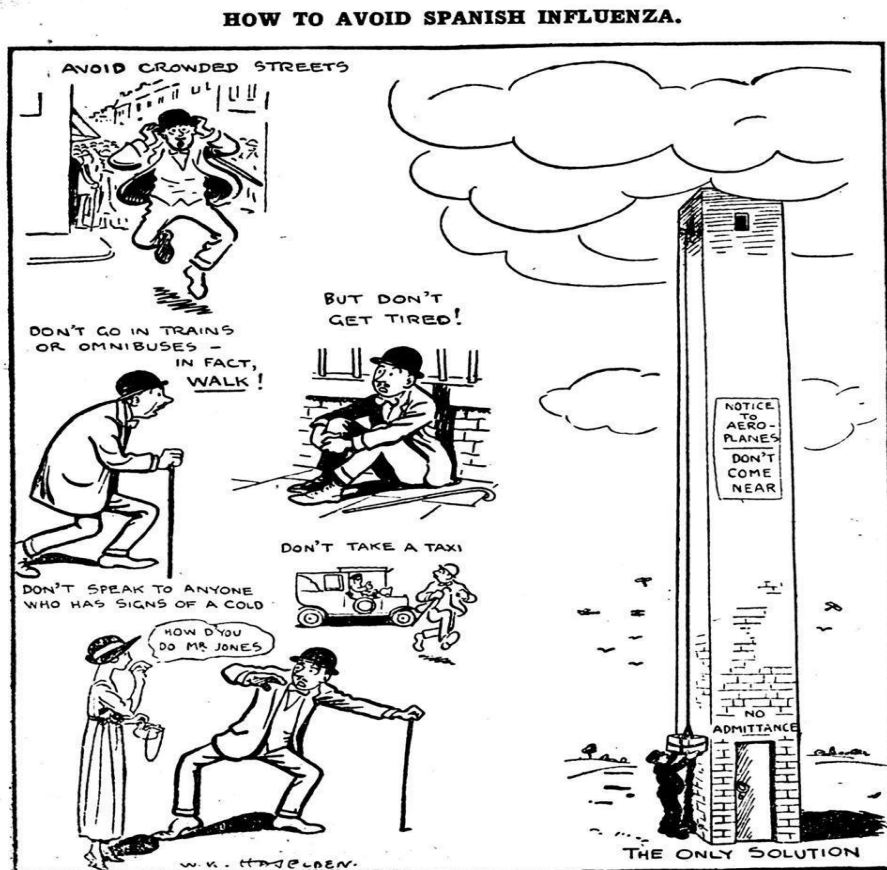
⁷⁶ World War I press

⁷⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-52564371>

Here is an example of a Daily Mail cartoon to explain the confusion people had regarding the Spanish flu:

Figure 2

Funny ways to avoid Spanish Influenza



The expert say in effect : " Don't talk to anyone, don't go near anyone, and you are safe ! " No doubt. But is not this a little difficult ;

Note. Cartoon for the countermeasures people were suggested to adopt against the Spanish flu

3.1.5 La Grippe and the Role of the Foreign Language Press in America in 1918-1919

Censorship was not the only attitude adopted by the different countries, because the United States tried to maintain an open attitude toward the pandemic. The American Public Health Department considered engaging a consistent number of people to help in the translation for European, Asian, and Mexican newcomers. The two biggest incoming communities were Southern Italians and Eastern European Jews. Doctors, representative people of the Italian and Jew community, religious groups, with the printed press all helped to disseminate public health information to their communities in a culturally sensitive way, using language the immigrants understood (Kraut 2010)⁷⁸.

The foreign newspapers being sold in America turned out to be a helpful way to spread awareness about the disease. For example, the Italian newspaper called “Il Progresso Italo Americano” warned its Italian immigrant readers in America to pay attention to their articles, as they were based on the directions given by the Commissioner Royal Copeland⁷⁹. The Italo-American newspapers described in detail the symptoms of the Spanish flu by writing:

The illness begins with a chill that is immediately followed by fever. The fever can oscillate between a minimum of 101 to a maximum of 103 [degrees], the eyes redden, and the patient is taken by violent and spasmodic fits of coughing. One must immediately go to bed and call the doctor (Kraut, 2010, paras 7-8)⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862341/>

⁷⁹ Royal Copeland was a homeopathic doctor who served as Health Commissioner of New York City from 1918 to 1923

⁸⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862341/>

Language and the media played different roles during the Spanish flu. In America, the press helped to divulge the news about the disease, and try to control the spread of it. In Europe, the language and the public press played a key role in both controlling the news, diminishing people awareness of the pandemic, and favouring the spread of the disease.

Chapter 4: Covid-19 and English Language Changes

4.1 Covid-19, and its different phases seen through language

The first known case of Covid-19 is dated 17th December 2019. As far as we know, there is yet not an end date for Covid-19, as the pandemic is still present today. Coronavirus disease 2019 or, commonly known as Covid-19 (COVID-19 in the American transcription) firstly appeared in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province and one of the biggest cities in central China.

The virus started spreading from China, and this turned out to be a linguistic problem. In order to solve what was a large language barrier, Chinese language experts organised a task force called the “Epidemic Language Corps” to translate Covid- 19 medical information into the main Chinese dialects (Dreisbach, 2020, para.4)⁸¹. At a later stage, when the problem escalated to having a global impact, the World Health Organisation⁸² became responsible for creating accessible health information about Covid-19. In this way, the medicalisation of everyday language characterised the first linguistic phase of Covid-19. According to the King’s College professor, Tony Thorne, at the beginning of the pandemic, people needed to understand medical terminology, such as “intubating”, “ventilating”, and many more, because these words became the centre of daily conversations (Thorne, 2020)⁸³.

⁸¹ <https://academic.oup.com/jpubhealth/advance-article/doi/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa178/5917390>

⁸² The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health

⁸³ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/spotlight-on-covid-pandemic-language-and-the-role-of-linguists-1>

The second phase of Covid language consisted in word shifting, neologisms, slang, and slogans. People started to fill the gaps in daily conversations by speaking of their own experience, and creating slang terminology such as “covidots” and “covid dodging”, both of which were entered into dictionaries and contributed in creating the Covid-19 language, made of both technical words as well as invented neologisms.

The third aspect of Covid language is related to the terminology used in politics. The pandemic jargon spoken by politicians and official personalities must be understood and publicly accepted, and political messages must be clear and delivered with a certain attitude. As shown in a recent American study (Miller et al., 2021), politicians are more likely to be listened to when they refer to Covid-19 rules and regulations as “protocols” rather than “directives” or “controls.” They should also avoid metaphors which compare Covid to wars, because fear does not work well during already difficult periods of time (Miller et al., 2021, para.3)⁸⁴.

Covid-19 is connected to the English language, and concrete proof of the linguistic changes caused by Covid-19 in the English language will be given.

⁸⁴ <https://jamanetwork.com/channels/health-forum/fullarticle/2776525>

4.2 “New” English words of Covid-19

Figure 3

Oxford English Dictionary Covid-19 updates

Corpus analysis for the Covid-19 updates

- **corpus** n.: “a collection of written or spoken material in machine-readable form, assembled for the purpose of studying linguistic structures, frequencies, etc.”
- Oxford **Monitor Corpus** of English: currently over **10 billion words** of web-based news content from 2017 to the present day; more data added each month
- Examples of questions that a lexicographer might ask of a corpus:
 - What are the most typical collocates of this word?
 - How is this word usually spelled?
 - What regional variety(-ies) is this word used in?
 - What words are used especially frequently in this region/subject area/period of time?

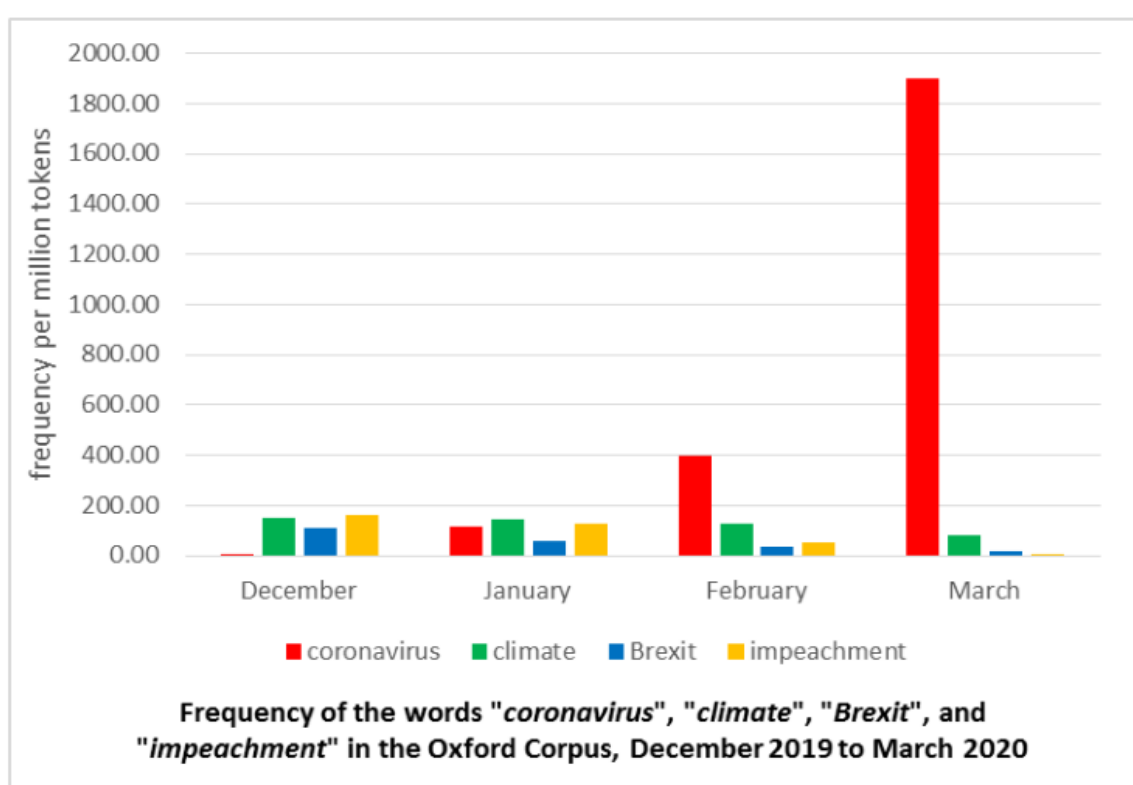
OED Oxford English Dictionary

Since the end of 2019, lexicographers have confronted the exponential rise of a single word usage in a short period of time, and it turned out to be a unique experience. The near-omnipresence of this word has allowed it to dominate global discourse since its appearance in 2020. The word I am referring to is Covid-19, or the short version of Corona (co) virus (vi) disease (d) 2019. According to the OED dictionary editors, Covid-19 first appeared as shorthand on the 11th Feb. World Health Organization situation report.

The chart below shows the extent to which the word “coronavirus” has spread and become so frequently used in a short time, comparing it to the most frequently used words related to popular news topics discussed at the same time: climate, Brexit, and impeachment.

Figure 4

Frequency of important words from December 2019 to March 2020



This exponential spread was happening, despite the fact that there had not yet been an agreement on the written version by which one must address the disease, likely due to the regional differences in use. The dictionary editors referred to it as COVID-19 for the American

public, and Covid-19 was commonly used in Europe. The informal reality, referring to the internet and the web communities, had also made contributions, creating new words for the disease: “corona” and “covid”, and their short forms “rone” and “rona”, used mainly on social media. The more technical and scientific names: *novel coronavirus – nCoV* and *2019-nCoV* – which peaked in February, have since become less common and are rarely seen nowadays.

For the previous 20 years, the OED has issued quarterly updates to announce new words and meanings selected to be added to the dictionary. These updates have typically been made available in March, June, September, and December⁸⁵. Considering the exceptional nature of these events, the OED editors were faced with an unprecedented situation. In April of 2020, and again in that July, the OED editors released special updates, citing, “a need to document the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the English language.”(Kreuz, 2020)⁸⁶. Clearly, the crisis was impacting communication and language in a new and somehow radical manner.

The term “COVID-19” appeared in Webster's dictionary in March 2020 after a record-breaking 34 days. Lexicographers at Webster’s previously allowed a word addition into the dictionary only after a long period of time, according to Merriam-Webster’s COVID-19-related podcast called “Word Matters.” In the past, the shortest amount of time it took a new word to be entered into Webster’s dictionary was when “AIDS” was added in 1984, *two years* after being coined⁸⁷. Ironically, both of these exceptions were made for global medical emergencies.

⁸⁵ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

⁸⁶ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

⁸⁷ <https://digital.nepr.net/podcasthub/word-matters/>

Both the OED and Webster's coronavirus-related updates can give us an idea as to how fast language can change when faced with an unprecedented global catastrophe like the Covid-19 pandemic or the AIDS crisis. This also shows the challenges that lexicologists have to face in keeping the language on track with high-speed societal changes, such as a pandemic. In such a reality, technology proves to be advantageous.

The corpora of the English language used by the OED for 2020 Covid-19 updates contains over 10 billion words formulated from web-based news sources (Wild, 2020) ⁸⁸. These sources are updated on a monthly basis (Wild, 2020) ⁸⁹. To help with the massive language search, the dictionary editors at OED use a computer database (corpora) to help track a number of statistical variables such as word form, word blends, regional labeling, frequency of use, and collocations. To search for potential pandemic-related words, these lexicographers examined changes in the entire collection, focusing on potential new words, word frequencies, word blends, regional variations, and collocations related *solely* to the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁸⁸ <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

⁸⁹ <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

Figure 5

Keywords in the Oxford English Dictionary from April to June 2020

April	May	June
PPE	reopen	defund
lockdown	lockdown	Juneteenth
pandemic	Covid-19	brutality
ventilator	pandemic	anti-racism
stay-at-home	Covid	racism
Covid-19	distancing	Covid
furlough	hydroxychloroquine	Confederate
distancing	covering	looting
coronavirus	furlough	covering
N95	stay-at-home	kneel
Zoom	SARS-CoV-2	chokehold
hydroxychloroquine	PPE	statue
quarantine	phased	reopen
asymptomatic	quarantine	two-metre
Covid	reopening	systemic
frontline	tracer	pandemic
virus	easing	looter
self-isolation	remdesivir	Covid-19
disinfectant	asymptomatic	distancing
shelter-in-place	mail-in	lockdown
mask	hornet	dexamethasone
SARS-CoV-2	coronavirus	racial
non-essential	antibody	injustice
ICU	mask	asymptomatic
corona	in-person	distanced

The OED lexicographers discovered that there was an overuse of vocabulary related to the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Words such as “lockdown”, “social, or physical distancing”, and, following the introduction of the UK Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme in late March, “furlough” were dramatically increasing in usage. As millions of people adapted to communicating remotely, references to the thing-noun *Zoom*, the video-

chat application, became widespread, including its use as a verb, “to Zoom”. The nouns “mask” and “covering” were also keywords in April, May, and June, when the discussions about masks mainly concerned when, how, where, and by whom face coverings should be worn (Kreuz, 2020) ⁹⁰.

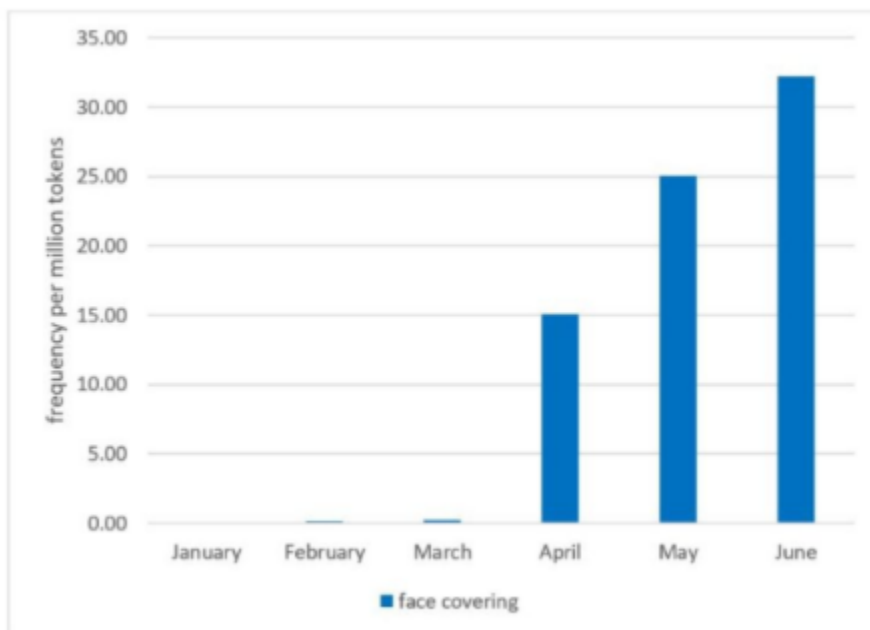
It has been shown in the chart below that the term “face coverings” has been consistently present during the entirety of the pandemic. “For any given term we can then search further into the data: for example, a quick analysis shows that the most common recent use of the noun “covering” is in “face covering” (“facial covering” is also used but much less frequently), and that this term has significantly increased in frequency since April 2020. In fact, the term has a long history – our new entry shows that it dates to a1732, in a general sense – but its current frequency and cultural significance make it an important addition to the dictionary now (Wild, 2020)”⁹¹.

⁹⁰ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

⁹¹ <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

Figure 6

Face-covering Trend from January to June 2020



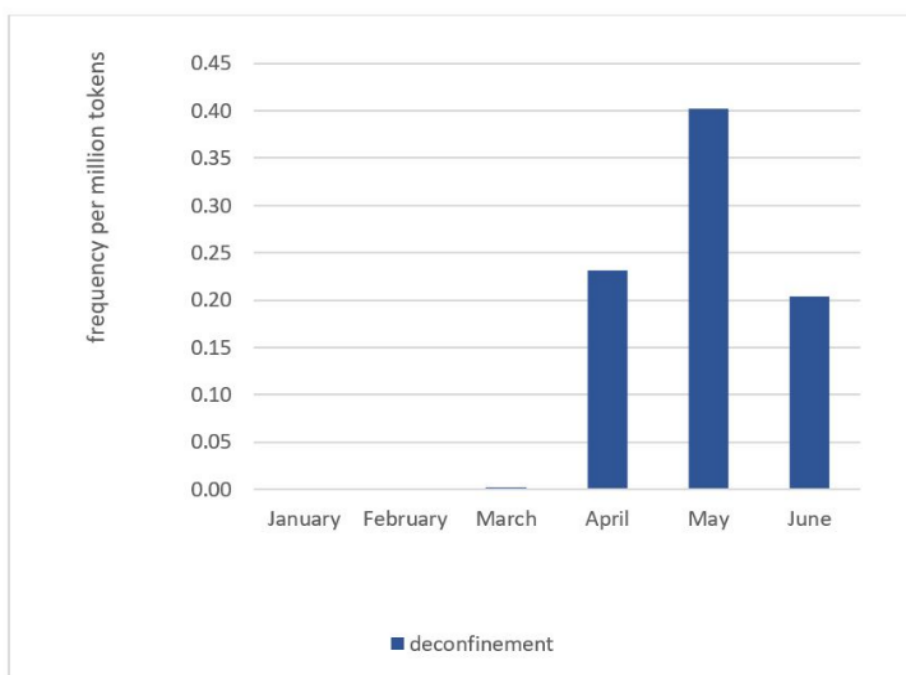
Certainly, one importance of corpora is in registering language shifts, but also in providing the most reliable word-form, which often coincides with the most used one. The term “face covering” is approximately 17 times more frequently used than the hyphenated face-covering, so the former is the form used by the OED.

Specific word usages were strictly related to stages of the pandemic development. For this reason, OED lexicographers decided to also conduct searches that can keep track of word trends. They aimed to highlight words that have shown a high level of popularity during a particular short period of time. For example, the (borrowed from French) term “déconfinement,” referring to the ending period of lockdown, was particularly used in French

speaking countries, but then, it spread more widely, especially in May. It coincided with countries starting loosening their lockdown conditions (See chart below).

Figure 7

“Deconfinement” Trend in the Oxford English Dictionary Corpus



Although the Oxford editors documented many coronavirus-related linguistic word usage shifts (Wild, 2020)⁹², their conclusion was perhaps a little surprising to those outside lexicography. In the end, they claimed that the pandemic had created only one truly new

⁹² <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

addition; SARS-CoV-2 or Covid-19 in the European transcription and COVID-19 in the American form (Kreuz, 2020) ⁹³. Covid-19 counts as a word for Europeans, and only as an acronym for Americans. Consequently, we can not even consider the creation of a new word for Americans.

General practice in the OED is to give the most common modern British form of a word as the headword or lemma, with additional spellings listed as variant forms. As with everything Covid-related, the process turned complex. There has been quite a lot of discussion online about whether Covid-19 should be spelled with a capital C or with full capitals, and different official linguistic authorities and news organizations follow different practices. As the charts below show, the pattern varies according to the variety of English. In the US, the preference is for COVID-19, although there has been a very slight shift toward Covid-19 in recent months. In British English, there is a clear preference for the form “Covid-19”. There may be fluctuations as time goes on, and this is something we can watch in the future with keen interest (Wild, 2020). ⁹⁴

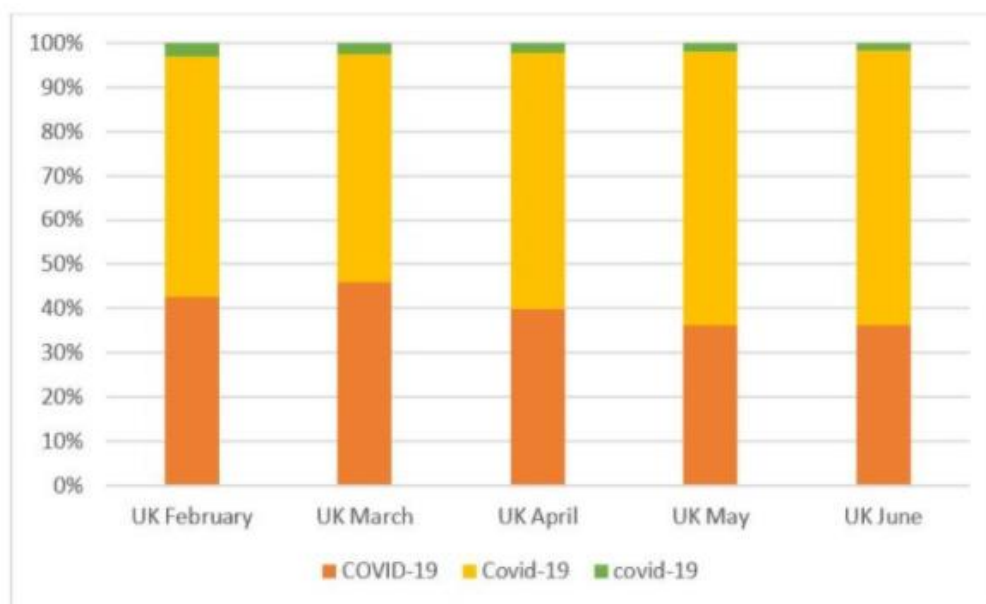
⁹³ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

⁹⁴ <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

Figure 8

COVID-19, Covid-19 and covid-19 in the UK and US sections of the Oxford English Dictionary Corpus, February 2020-June 2020

Dictionary Corpus, February 2020-June 2020



The lack of a completely new lexicon is perhaps surprising, considering the global tragedy and drama caused by the virus. However, Oxford's 2020 special coronavirus-related updates have created a window into understanding how quickly language can change in the face of rare or unprecedented event. For example, one of the changes brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic is the introduction of rarely used technical (in this case, medical-pharmaceutical) words to the forefront of everyday English speech. For example, "hydroxychloroquine", a malaria treatment from the 1950s, adopted by politicians such as Donald Trump and considered a curative treatment for COVID-19, was subsequently added to the Oxford English Dictionary

update in July (Kreuz, 2020).⁹⁵ Naturally, even a technical word, such as the one mentioned above, can become a commonly used word, if associated with important public personalities.

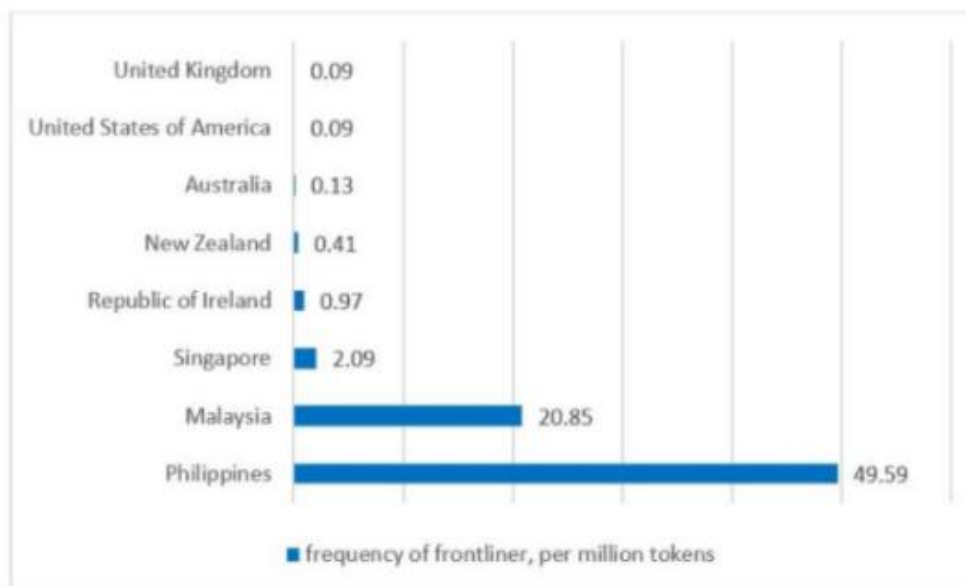
As before with Covid vs COVID, a corpora can provide a clear picture of a “word distribution” through the different varieties of English. For example, as the chart below shows, although “frontliner” is used worldwide, it is particularly frequent in Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines and Malaysia. However, in other countries the variant “frontline worker” is used. OED has labelled “frontliner” n. sense 2 as ‘now chiefly *South-East Asian*’ (Wild, 2020).⁹⁶

⁹⁵ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

⁹⁶ <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

Figure 9

“Frontliner” Frequency in the Oxford English Dictionary Corpus



Despite the large reliance on technology and the corpora to detect the new terminology, the human touch can not be taken away from language. The regional variances, registered by the regional corpora, are a confirmation of the different nuances people give to words, and “The editors working on self-isolate, self-quarantine, and related words have seen it proven” (Wild, 2020). Although there are technical and legal differences between the two terms, “self-isolate”, “self-quarantine”, they are often used interchangeably, as the main difference is only in the regional definition. To confirm this, it has been looked at various corpora, and the clearest

picture can be seen in the Coronavirus Corpus, a corpus of news articles relating only to Covid-19 on english-corpora.org (Wild, 2020)”⁹⁷.

More regional variations were suspected by the OED with quarantining verbs. For example, self-quarantine is more common in the US than in Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, where self-isolate and self-isolation are preferred. A note to this effect has been added to the OED updated entry for self-quarantine, “In recent use, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, self-isolate and self-quarantine have often been used interchangeably, with self-quarantine being more common in the United States” (Wild, 2020).

Corpora is also a precious source to highlight the context in which words are used, often indicating particular cultural significance as in emotions or “sense” of the meaning. Compare *frontline* (adjective) and *frontliner* (person, noun). The sense of the adjective as used in “frontline worker/employee/staff”, etc., was defined as, “Of a person: working at the forefront of an organization’s public activity, typically as the point of direct contact with customers, clients, users of the organization’s services, etc”(Wild, 2020). This was certainly an accurate description of a frontline worker when the entry was first revised a few years ago, but the context attached for a frontline worker had completely shifted during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Editors considered the most recent fitting words for “frontline”, meaning words occurring near the frontline with a statistically significant frequency. They compared 2020 “frontline” collocations to those of previous years. Some had remained unchanged, e.g.

⁹⁷ <https://public.oed.com/blog/using-corpora-to-track-the-language-of-covid-19-update-2/>

“frontline staff” has been a consistently common collocation. However, the following stood out as much more frequently used in 2020:

frontline **nurse/medic/caregiver**

frontline **healthcare/health-care** worker

frontline **warrior/hero**

courageous/heroic frontline workers

essential frontline worker

The positive sentiment associated with frontline workers - heroes who risk their lives, and the focus on such workers as carrying out essential roles - life saving, especially in health care, led OED to expand the definition as follows:

Of a person: working at the forefront of an organization’s public activity, typically as the point of direct contact with customers, clients, users of the organization’s services, etc., (now) esp. designating such an employee who provides a service regarded as vital within the community, such as a health-care worker, teacher, etc.; often in frontline workers (Wild, 2020).

The Oxford editors have also documented the creation of many new Covid word blends. A word blend is defined as a combination of two separate words with different meanings to form a new meaning. These word blends are often created to describe a new invention or phenomenon that combines the definitions or traits of two existing things. Starting in the 20th century, blended words began to emerge to describe new technologies or cultural phenomena

(Nordquist, 2020)⁹⁸. “Community transmission”, which dates to 1959, and “community spread”, which was first documented in print in 1903, are also included in the OED updates.⁹⁹ Word blends such as “self-isolate” (verb), “self-isolated” (adjective) and “shelter-in-place” (verb) all received new Oxford Dictionary citations based on their increased usage (Kreuz, 2020)¹⁰⁰.

Some terms have seen a shift in meaning. Shelter or sheltering-in-place, previously referred to as “seeking safety during a circumscribed event, such as a tornado or an active shooter attack” is now being used to refer to a prolonged period of social isolation.¹⁰¹ “Similarly, elbow bump has evolved from a gesture akin to a high-five, as documented in 1981, to its present form: a safe way to greet another person (Kreuz, 2020)”.¹⁰²

There apparently are emerging regional preferences for Covid-19 word blends and collocations as well as the development of many pandemic-related slang terms. This brings up another interesting challenge for lexicographers. In this time, with billions of social media users and “warp speed” online social trends, regional differences soon meld into a global fusion obscuring origins and preferences.

⁹⁸ <https://www.thoughtco.com/blend-words-1689171#:~:text=A%20word%20blend%20is%20formed,traits%20of%20two%20existing%20things.>

⁹⁹ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

¹⁰⁰ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

¹⁰¹ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

¹⁰² <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

Determining which word blends, collocations, and slang have the durability to merit addition to the Oxford update requires monitoring over time. For example, only time will tell which of the following terms will be added to the “definitive record of the English language:

- maskne - an acne outbreak caused by facial coverings
- zoombombing - which is when strangers intrude on video conferences
- quarantini - a cocktail consumed in isolation.
- doomscrolling - constantly searching the web for dire pandemic statistics and events
- covidiot - a person who does not comply with COVID restrictions such as social distancing and/or wearing a mask
- superspreader - a person or event that has the potential to or has caused mass spread of the COVID-19 virus
- curbside pick-up - picking an order up at the curb outside a store to avoid person-to-person contact
- lockdown - legally imposed quarantine, self-isolation, shelter-in-place, or curfew to reduce disease spread or violence

New abbreviations have also taken their place in everyday speech, and now appear in the latest Oxford online dictionary. “**WFH**” (working from home) dates from 1995, but was known to only a very few people before it became a way of life for so many of us. “**PPE**” is now almost universally recognized as “**personal protective (or protection) equipment**”; a technical abbreviation dating from 1977 but formerly restricted to healthcare and emergency

professionals. The full phrase, “**personal protective equipment**”, dates from as far back as 1934 (Paton, 2020)”¹⁰³.

¹⁰³ <https://public.oed.com/blog/the-language-of-covid-19/>

Chapter 5: Sources of English words

5.1 Corpora

In the previous section, Covid-19 was classified as the type of event that leads to linguistic changes. However, having seen the lexical changes and reported the sources where these language modifications are contained (for example, the Oxford English Dictionary), it is now worth referring to the criteria and methodology that these linguistic sources have used to introduce this new lexicon in more detail. As Gazib (2009) wrote:

In linguistics, a corpus (plural form corpora) is defined as a collection of written or spoken material in machine-readable form, usually processed and stored electronically into a database assembled for the purpose of studying linguistic collocations, frequencies, and definitions (para. 2) ¹⁰⁴.

The written resources are usually taken from magazines, books, diaries, newspapers, movie scripts, plays, poetry, lyrics to songs, product labels, etc. For spoken language, recorded conversations, such as telephone calls, broadcasts, podcasts, radio, or recorded dialogues, etc. are used (Gazib, 2020 para.4) ¹⁰⁵.

The result of the combination of the texts of the corpus and the data obtained by their analysis is called corpus linguistics. To specify, the corpus linguistics is composed of two softwares: the corpus in which is the body of data is to be investigated, and a concordancer,

¹⁰⁴ ELECTRONIC CORPORA: AS POWERFUL TOOLS IN COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSES. Mohamed Grazib

¹⁰⁵ ELECTRONIC CORPORA: AS POWERFUL TOOLS IN COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSES. Mohamed Grazib

which is a tool for searching the corpus¹⁰⁶. Gazib (2009) stated: “Corpus linguistics makes it possible to identify the meanings of words by looking at their occurrences in natural contexts, rather than relying on intuitions about how a word is used or on incomplete citation collections. (para.2)”¹⁰⁷.

The result of our reliance upon technology has seen a specialisation of the corpora. Nowadays, it is possible to have different corpora which serve different purposes: reference corpora and monitor corpora. The first category has a fixed size (British National Corpus) and the latter is expandable (the Bank of English). The following are the most popular corpora ordered by decreasing word size:

- The Oxford English Corpus (OEC): nearly 2.1 billion words
- British National Corpus (BNC): 100 million words
- COBUILD/Birmingham Corpus: More than 200 million words
- Longman Lancaster corpus: 30 million words
- American National Corpus (ANC): 11.5 million words
- Brown corpus: 1 million words
- Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) corpus: 1 million words
- Northern Ireland Transcribed Corpus: 400,000 words
- Corpus of Spoken American English (CSAE): 200,000 words

¹⁰⁶ ELECTRONIC CORPORA: AS POWERFUL TOOLS IN COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSES. Mohamed Grazib

¹⁰⁷ ELECTRONIC CORPORA: AS POWERFUL TOOLS IN COMPUTATIONAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSES. Mohamed Grazib

Thanks to corpora software, language is investigated from a computational perspective, which leads to the extrapolation of different aspects of new words. In fact, these programs are able to process the data in the corpus, showing the meaning of the words, the concordance, the collocations, and the frequency.

Concordance is the display of a chosen word photographed in different contexts. In the photograph, it is possible to see a collection of occurrences of the word “computer” taken from the software Web Concordancer LOB.txt.

Figure 10

Example of Occurrences for the word “Computer”

1 *etition between the analogue **computer** and the digital computer. To a*
 2 *g made on a Ferranti Mercury **Computer** at Meteorological Office, Duns*
 3 *unnecessary devices that the **computer** can be made an economic propos*
 4 *ouch with manufacturers about **computer** developments of special signi*
 5 *he {OPIW} are compiled by the **computer** from data sheets (dictionary*
 6 *seen that the problem of the **computer** is in no way related to the p*
 7 *racy is required the digital **computer** is the only one to use and ele*

Collocations is a statistical investigation of words that usually fit together. It is particularly useful for the analysis of English used as a second language. The following photograph shows the words (verbs, nouns and adjectives) that usually collocate with “time.” The source is view.byu.edu.

Table 3

Collocations Of The Word “Time”

	Nouns		Verbs		Adjectives	
	WORD	# TIMES NEARBY	WORD	# TIMES NEARBY	WORD	# TIMES NEARBY
1	YEARS	1933	WAS	17846	LONG	4850
2	YEAR	1703	IS	12614	GOOD	1587
3	PERIOD	1360	HAD	8128	SHORT	1522
4	PEOPLE	1334	BE	8023	OTHER	1202
5	DAY	1139	WERE	4298	RIGHT	1111

Frequency is an investigation into how often words are used. Rank is the inverse proportion to the frequency of use. Before computers, linguists discovered that it is possible to use Zipf's law in order to create a classification from the most used to the least used word in every language. *Zipf's law is an empirical law formulated using mathematical statistics that refers to the fact that for many types of data studied in the physical and social sciences, the rank-frequency distribution is an inverse relation*¹⁰⁸. In modern times, software does this work.

Having considered these criteria and methods, they are the reasons why not all the new neologisms and coinages are included in dictionaries. Lexicographers want to add new words or new meanings to the words based on solid criteria, and not only because of temporary trends¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁸ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legge_di_Zipf

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/corpus.html>

5.2 Dictionaries

As there are many different corpora, there are many different English language dictionaries. Each of the most authoritative English language dictionaries uses different methodologies for language updates.

Three dictionaries were selected for examination:

- The Oxford English Dictionary (the definitive source for English lexicon, usage, and word history)
- The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (American English)
- Urban Dictionary. The reason space is allotted to the Urban Dictionary (which is the informal dictionary of crowdsourced definitions and terms with high speed of coinage) is that, in short, it is the right product for the internet era.

These three dictionaries use different methodologies to introduce new words into their collective. Specifically, the matter of interest is how the three dictionaries welcomed Covid-19 language changes and how they approached them. To determine which of English language dictionaries is the most up-to-date, accurate, and therefore, the best for our task, it may be entirely dependent upon which side of “the pond” we are speaking from and to what our purpose is. While all English dictionaries aim to have the most extensive and current understanding of English words, meanings, and usages as used by native speakers of English, they are compiled by variety or dialect- either British English or American English.

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) aspires to be the “most extensive and complete record of the language and its history” with over 600,000 entries.¹¹⁰ The OED is generally considered a British dictionary but the Oxford University Press (OEP) does publish an American version. The American counterpart, The Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (Webster’s), modestly claims to be “America’s most trusted dictionary” with over 470,000 entries (“How many words are there in English?”, n.d. para.5)¹¹¹. Regarding dictionaries, although Webster’s publishes many versions, it does not publish a British version.

To maintain its status as “the definitive record of the English language”, (Kreuz, 2020)¹¹² the OED typically updates the volume quarterly in March, June, September, and December of each year using a “diachronic” philosophy in adding new words. In other words, the OED concentrates on the development and evolution of the language through history. On the other hand, Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary uses a “synchronic” method, meaning it concentrates on current, active vocabulary. It is evident that the OED’s process is longer, slower, and perhaps more thorough than Merriam-Webster’s. Additionally, the idea of English as a basis for all the varieties of English, originated in England. For these reasons, the OED was chosen for this thesis as the most authoritative of the three dictionaries but all three will be investigated.

¹¹⁰ <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

¹¹¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/help/faq-how-many-english-words#:~:text=Webster's%20Third%20New%20International%20Dictionary%2C%20Unabridged%2C%20together%20with%20its%201993,Section%2C%20includes%20some%20470%2C000%20entries.>

¹¹² <https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-english-language-146171>

This section of the dissertation relies particularly on the podcasts, blogs, and updates published by the OED from spring 2020. Through online media, the OED clearly demonstrates how an unprecedented global crisis is reflected on a language and how this phenomenon can be researched and recorded. Language is a measure of culture but in many ways, language can also be a measure of time. Certainly, the OED documented a method and a process during the Covid pandemic that will be studied by students for all future time. This method is a record of the first modern, global pandemic of the internet age and its impact on the English language. The OED is in it for the long haul, as it is made to remain for a long time. The other two, Webster and Urban, are more for the language of the moment. All three dictionaries in their own way give their contribution to the corpora of the Englishes.

Since about 1857, the OED has used a reading program to find proper quotations for each word in the dictionary. They also rely on a professionally trained staff. OED lexicographers are able to go through every type of online source, looking for new lexical forms. Books, newspapers, TV and stage scripts, song lyrics, magazine, and even product labels (Webster's) are all included in the list of analysed documents.

Technology determined the use of an online corpus for the OED and the Webster's. The OED relies on the Oxford English Corpus to create and update entries in the Oxford English Dictionary and other dictionaries. As for the Merriam-Webster's, everything started in the 1880s with their citation files, and then, they also moved to an online corpus which now includes more than 70 million words taken from a variety of sources. In addition, both OED and Merriam's provide online and updated versions of their dictionaries. The OED launched its

online website in 2000 and Merriam-Webster launched its Merriam-Webster's Online in 1996 (The Oxford English Corpus, n.d.)¹¹³.

In this way, both the OED and the Merriam-Webster show their openness to the technological world. It is not hard to believe a word can get into the dictionary, especially in the OED, only after rigid searches and lexicographers' approval. The OED methodology and their process of analysing new terms have been proven particularly selective: widespread usage, sustained usage for a considerable amount of time, and meaningful usage. In 1928, the OED press claimed:

The dictionary (OED) is the supreme authority, and without a rival. What makes the Dictionary unique is its historical method; it is a Dictionary not of our English, but of all English: the English of Chaucer, of the Bible, and of Shakespeare (p.313)¹¹⁴.

Recent times, especially since the advent of the internet, have determined a change of events for the OED. In this way, the Urban Dictionary can be brought in as an example. It is a crowdsourced online dictionary of slang words and phrases that was founded in 1999 as a parody, that decided to allow normal people to be in charge (Urban Dictionary, 2021)¹¹⁵. Words or phrases in the Urban Dictionary may have multiple definitions and usage examples. Lexicographers also started using the Urban Dictionary to take the pulse of the language

¹¹³ <https://www.sketchengine.eu/oxford-english-corpus/>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/517278?seq=1>

¹¹⁵

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_Dictionary#:~:text=Urban%20Dictionary%20is%20a%20crowdsourced,in%201999%20by%20Aaron%20Peckham.&text=Words%20or%20phrases%20on%20Urban,%2C%20usage%20examples%2C%20and%20tags.

situation, as the Urban Dictionary captures new words and their variations quickly, and even relies on a voting system, used to register admiration or disdain of users towards words, indirectly revealing a word's popularity¹¹⁶. The result has been that the Urban Dictionary has influence on the more authoritative sources. For example, in 2010, Carl Franzen, a journalist for AOL News, pointed out that OED started adding a conspicuously large number of new, slangy words, usually found in the Urban Dictionary, such as “bromance”, “hater”, “carbon credit” and their given definitions are not that different than those present in the popular dictionary counterpart (“The Anatomy of the Urban Dictionary”, 2018)¹¹⁷.

Here is an example to compare:

Bromance

Oxford: n. informal, a close but nonsexual relationship between two men. – ORIGIN early 21st cent.: blend of brother and romance.

Urban: Describes the complicated love and affection shared by two straight males.

In the age of artificial intelligence, computational linguistics, advanced data science, and natural language generation, professional lexicographers and social media bloggers are not the only people who research the English language and how it should be used. Persado¹¹⁸, a global marketing consulting company, has built the biggest language database of “enterprise

¹¹⁶ <https://www.technologyreview.com/2018/01/03/146467/the-anatomy-of-the-urban-dictionary/>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2010/09/is-the-oxford-dictionary-becoming-the-urban-dictionary/340044/>

¹¹⁸ Persado is platform that delivers higher-performing content

language,” also known as “the appropriate choice of words for marketing communication.” With Covid-19 impacting consumer emotions and incomes, the right words have never been more of an essential ingredient for effective marketing than now. We cannot help but wonder how such a database is used and how the language of marketing may be shifting as a result of COVID-19”(Talbot, n.d.) ¹¹⁹.

Persado which is a software designed to provide online content , describes itself as “the Artificial Intelligence platform of reference for the choice of words that “perform well” during hard economic times. Company President Jason Heller is keeping an eye on how specific words “perform.” The “high-performing” words and emotions of 2019 are the least effective for generating a customer response in 2021 (Li, 2021)¹²⁰. “Out” are all-caps, exclamation points, and superlatives. Words that generate fear and anxiety are non-performers, especially the word “unprecedented.”(Talbot, n.d.)¹²¹ Words that suggest normalcy and positivity are the new vocabulary of the marketing lexicon for the pandemic. In December 2019, gratitude and intimacy were low on the high performing list while attention was at the top of the list. By April 2020, “gratitude” and “intimacy” rose to the top two positions. Safety was the third top word. The winning emotion is “trust”. See the chart below (Li, 2021) ¹²².

¹¹⁹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultalbot/2020/05/21/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-language-of-marketing/?sh=609f0432386c>

¹²⁰ <https://www.persado.com/articles/stop-pause-go-language-guidelines-for-communicating-during-a-crisis/>

¹²¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paultalbot/2020/05/21/how-covid-19-is-changing-the-language-of-marketing/?sh=609f0432386>

¹²² <https://www.persado.com/articles/language-thats-working-now-how-covid-19-changed-the-way-we-communicate/>

Figure 11

Feelings, Pandemics, and Communication



Note. Feelings that influenced the communication during the pandemic

This is an example of how lexicographers and even authoritative sources want to keep up with the times and the changes, especially from a language perspective. Consequently, the results are more effective, if they occur whilst events are happening. In 2020, they had this chance with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic¹²³.

End of part 1

¹²³ <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/multi-2020-0133/html>

In the first part of the dissertation, English served as an example of a language changing over time, and the general factors that cause the changes in a language have been the main topics. We have also seen how pandemics throughout the course of history have contributed to English language modifications through social, economic, political, and cultural changes that occur with a massive catastrophe.

The investigation into the sources of English - corpora and dictionaries - and how technology is being used to discover the true usages and meanings of English lexicon throughout the world, including slang invented during the Covid-19 pandemic has been the focus. In particular, all of these topics have been looked at, considering the relevance of English globally and the relevance that the event of Covid-19 had on people's lives, specifically the language aspect.

Some might disagree with defining English as the world's most important language. However, they cannot disagree on the fact that it is the most prevalently spoken language worldwide. As reported in the UKEssays (2018)¹²⁴:

In 2021, there were around 1.35 billion people worldwide who spoke English either natively or as a second language, slightly more than the 1.12 billion Mandarin Chinese speakers at the time of survey. Hindi and Spanish accounted for the third and fourth most widespread languages that year...

¹²⁴ <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/linguistics/why-is-english-considered-a-global.php>

In addition, English is the official language of international air traffic control, world publishing, science, and technology (Szmigiera, 2021) ¹²⁵.

In the second part of the dissertation, the focus will be English-Italian and Covid-19. In particular, the presence of the English pandemic language into Italian on the online news as well as on the printed press, and the results of a survey about pandemic anglicisms will be analysed. In conclusion, the main question which will be answered is how the English language has affected the Italian language during Covid-19, and if the Italian understanding of Covid-19 has been affected by the presence of the English words in Italian media.

¹²⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266808/the-most-spoken-languages-worldwide/#:~:text=The%20most%20spoken%20languages%20worldwide%202021&text=In%202021%2C%20there%20were%20around,at%20the%20time%20of%20surveys://www.ukessays.com/essays/linguistics/why-is-english-considered-a-global.php>

Chapter 6: Covid-19 Language In Other Languages: Italian

6.1 Italian-English and Covid-19

Every year, the most important authorities and institutions in charge of guarding the Italian language admit their worries about the exponential presence of English terminology in Italian. Whilst rapidly researching some data, the Italian language experts seemed to have a point as the Italian research data showed that the number of anglicisms entered into Italian dictionaries (Zanichelli¹²⁶, Devoto-Oli, Sabatini Coletti¹²⁷) have increased dramatically since 1990. The amount of English words were roughly 1,700 in the 90s, and they are 4,000 (cfr. Devoto Oli¹²⁸) now (Zoppetti, 2020). The English words were only 3% and 6% of the all new words counted in 1940, and in 1960 respectively, while in the 2000s, the number of English words became 50% of the total new words (Zoppetti, 2020).

English words are highly present in the Italian language, and a possible explanation is the role played by the English language in the different fields. English is the language of mass media, science, and technology, and consequently, English words are present in the same fields in Italian.

Italian doctors and important political figures choose English to explain what is new and technical, and Covid-19 was no exception. The Covid-19 virus was described as a virus with a crown shape with spikes (spuntoni), and all the spikes presented proteins on them, called spike-

¹²⁶ Italian dictionary edited by Nicola Zanichelli for the first time in 1856

¹²⁷ Sabatini Coletti, Italian dictionary edited by Francesco Sabatini, and Vittorio Coletti

¹²⁸ Devoto Oli, Italian dictionary edited by Giacomo Devoto, Gian Carlo Oli, Luca Serianni, and Maurizio Trifone

proteins, “spinula” in Italian. The term “spinula” is snubbed most of the time in favor of the English term. The immunological doctor Maria Luisa Villa (2020), the one who has been working on the scientific translation of the term, said, “the point is, when we are asked to confront a new word, the *à la mode* solution is using the English word, without even considering it a problem”. If this is the only strategy, we are confronting a threat to the Italian language, [as now] fewer new Italian words are created and/or used. The lexicon is stopping its development, and seems to endogenously include the English words to define what is new. As a result, more than half of the neologisms of the new millennium are English” (Zoppetti, 2020).

The importance of the English language in Italian is a sign of changes in the Italian language, and a sign of the new way Italians use their language, preferring the English term when there is the alternative. In the independent newspaper dedicated to the Italian language “Italics Magazines,” the journalist Michele Paolo (2021) wrote, “Languages are an archive of social change, and idioms serve the critical function of encapsulating new concepts and ideas”¹²⁹. In this manner, people can rely on an efficient and updated language that allows them to understand external changes, because not having the right words means they are unable to express or to articulate their thoughts about certain topics.

The words of the journalist Paolo can be easily applied to 2020, the main year of Covid-19. From February 2020 to today, profound changes have been generated socially, economically, politically, and culturally. The Italian language as well as the English language, shows signs of these changes.

¹²⁹<https://italicsmag.com/2021/01/19/how-covid-19-has-changed-the-italian-language/>

The Covid-19 pandemic has dominated topics of discussion on the news, TV programs, radio, and daily debates. For this reason, giving official recognition to the Covid-19 vocabulary has been so important that the Italian dictionaries run to update. “Devoto Oli” for example, realised a 600 new-word update, where relevance primarily has been given to Covid-related terminology (Capuano, 2020, para.1).

Devoto-Oli editors affirmed that lockdown was the life-or-death update of 2020 based on the number of searches through Google Trends (see below), and the universal meaning of the word lockdown, as in 2020 lockdown represented a universal experience that everybody knew the meaning of.

In the Italian dictionaries, the word “lockdown” is present without being translated, unlike French and Spanish dictionaries which provide their own version of the word. This is not the first time an English word is inserted into Italian dictionaries, as nobody has ever suggested an Italian variant to “babysitter” or “babysitting”, whereas in Spain they refer to a “baby-sitter” by using the word kangaroo, metaphorically explaining the function of a “baby-sitter” job (Zoppetti 2020, para.2.). The fact nobody had ever considered an alternative for babysitter does not mean that “lockdown” does not have an equivalent form in Italian, but Italians are more likely to use the English form, as evidenced by the words of a famous Italian journalist Enrico Mentana. While conducting the TV news, after pronouncing the word “lockdown”, he paused for a moment and said, “As now we say (referring to the word “lockdown”). But, it has not always been this way. When the coronavirus started spreading and Covid cases were concentrated mainly in China and Italy, the Italian news used multiple alternatives: “chiusura,” “zona rossa,” “Paese blindato,” “isolamento,” “confinamento,” all of which replaced “lockdown.” The turn of events happened thanks to the English news. Since the anglophone

press identified all the Italian terms with the word “lockdown”, specifically “Italy’s lockdown,” the term entered into Italian language, replacing the previously used form.

Figure 12

Italian newspapers headlines

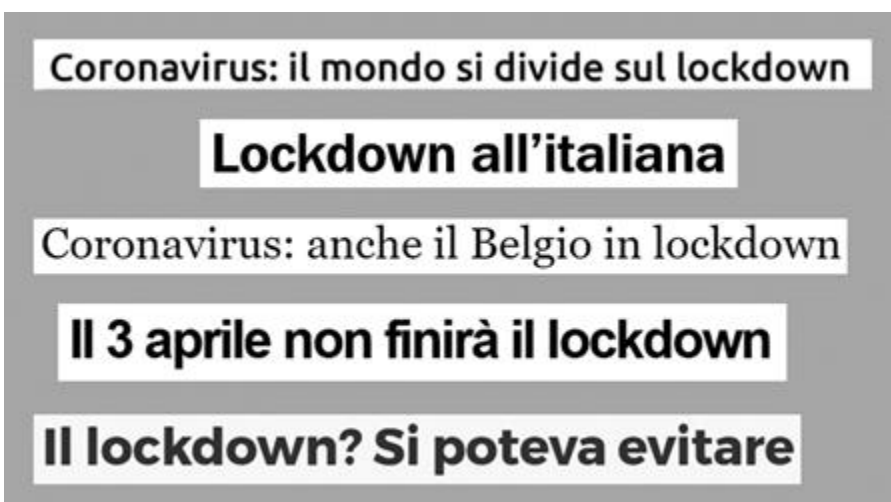
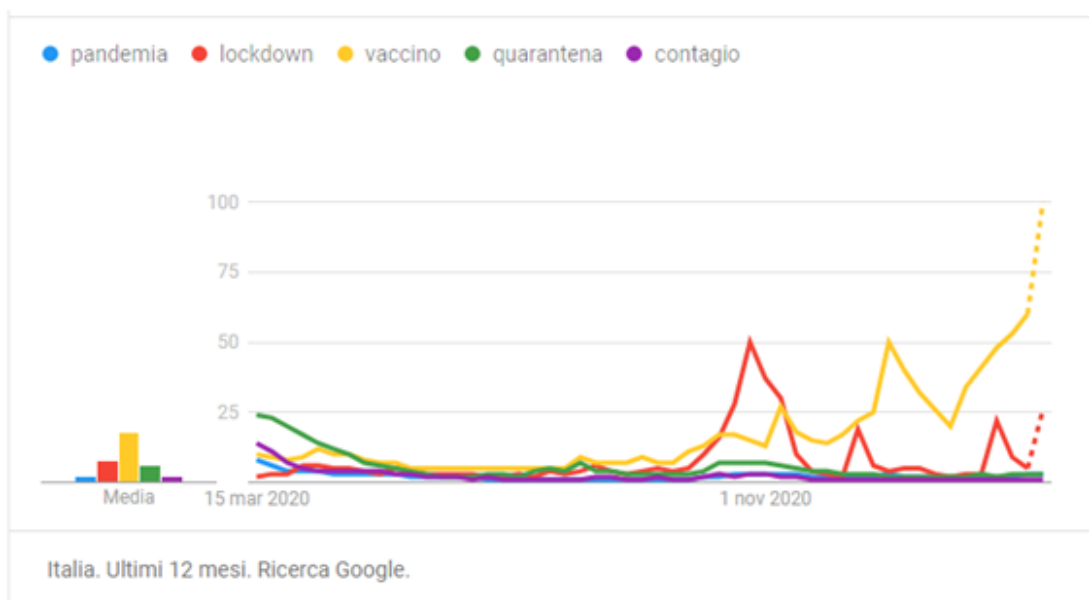


Figure 13

Most searched Italian words related to the Pandemic during Covid-19 on Google trends



There are other so-called “anglicismi crudi”, meaning English words which are used in Italian through the English form. Some of them are “screening”, “smart working”, which is the Italian form for working from home, “test”, “corona bond”, “covid hospital”, “covid pass”, “contact tracking”, “task force”, “kit”, “voucher”, “covid free”, and “covid stress test”. There is also the word “coronavirus” included in the list, which happens to be one of the most representative words of the pandemic. Saying that “coronavirus” is an English word can be strange, because if we break down the word in two, the result is “corona”, the Italian word for crown, and “virus” from Latin. Corona and virus are two names, and two names that form another name would follow the virus-corona order in Italian, with the name virus modifying the word corona, and not the other way around. The same goes for swordfish, which has the Italian translation of fish-sword (lett. spada-pesce) The form which prevailed is the English one, so the word coronavirus is not an Italian one (D’Alessandro, 2020).

Other pandemic English words have been provided with translations. The words “droplet” and “spillover” entered Devoto-Oli Dictionary as “salto di specie” and “droplets,” respectively (Capuano, 2020). Some of the Devoto-Oli lexicographers even dare to admit that the English version of these two words is far more appealing, and their reason is: “Sometimes, in translating an English word into Italian, the result is that new nuances and meanings are attributed to the Italian term, which the original English term does not have”. These sort of Italian terms are called “pseudo-anglicisms,” carrying a macaronic effect (Zoppetti, 2020).

Other Italian Covid-19 words have been created on the calque of the English Covid-19 words. The word “covidota” is a calque of the corresponding English word “covidiot,” but Italians attributed a new meaning to it. English speakers use “covidiot,” referring to people

ignoring public health restrictions or overdoing Covid restrictions, while Italians use “covidiota” to refer to a person who denies the emergency of the pandemic. Recent studies on Italian Facebook posts proved that the word “covidiota” is used by those people in denial of the Covid-19 situation to address those who make catastrophic future predictions (D’Alessandro, 2020). In English, the closest translation would be “doomsday conspiracy theorists”.

Words associated with the pandemic in Italian have also been recuperated from the past with a sense of nostalgia which comes from looking back at the past, instead of to the modernity represented by English. One of these old terms is plague spreader: “untore”, which was invented to identify a person who was responsible for passing on the infection during the plague of Milan. During Covid-19, the term still carries the same accusational shade being used during the plague of Milan. There has also been a reuse of the “plague spreader syndrome”, also known as “untore syndrome,” which consists of fearing to be infectious for others or knowing to have contracted Covid (or the plague in the past).

Covid terminology includes words ranging from technical and medical jargon to online slang. In this sense, English newspapers, magazines, social media, and dictionaries, have attempted to create informative documents to help people untangle themselves in the word salad of Covid-19 terms. The same has been done for the Italian Covid-related language.

The Italian encyclopedia “Treccani” in collaboration with the “Istituto Superiore di Sanità” created a list of 20 words to help Italians understand the circulation of the virus: “batterio” (bacterium), “contagio” (contagion), “paziente zero” (patient zero), “epidemia” (epidemic), “letalità” (lethality), “pandemia”(pandemic), “quarantena”(quarantine), “infodema”

(infodemic), “stress, virus”¹³⁰, “sorveglianza”(monitoring), “digitale”(digital), “sicurezza” (safety), “tampone” (Covid test), “distanziamento sociale” (social distancing), “esame sierologico” (serologic test), “mascherina” (mask), “molecola killer” (killer cell), “curva epidemica”(epidemic curve), “Fase 2” (phase two), and “droplet” (gocciolina).¹³¹ The list contains only two anglicisms, and the reason is that the two institutions wanted this list to be fully understandable if not mostly understandable by all Italians.

One of the primary aspects for a language to be spoken is that it must be understood. For the elder part of the Italian population, fully grasping the picture of the Covid situation might be hard to accomplish due to the fairly large portion of English words that belong to the pandemic jargon as the linguistic expert of the Accademia della Crusca, Biffi (2020) said:

The important influence of English on Italian has registered consequences also on a social scale. In this sense, the “Accademia” has intervened multiple times. Thinking about elderly people, their difficulties in understanding the Covid-19 debate can be easily understood. The topic of Covid-19 contains a high number of English borrowings, that the elders even face problems understanding in Italian (Carratù, 2020, para.2)¹³².

¹³⁰ https://www.treccani.it/magazine/parolevalgono/Le_parole_del_Coronavirus/index.html

¹³¹ https://www.treccani.it/magazine/parolevalgono/Le_parole_del_Coronavirus/index.html

¹³²

https://firenze.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/06/06/news/l_accademia_della_crusca_nei_giorni_del_covid_troppe_parole_inglesi_-258545003/

The presence of the English language in the Italian language as well as in other languages is a reflection of the linguistic globalisation process. In this sense, the research conducted by a group of American linguistic experts who analysed the most posted words on Twitter in 2020-2021 in 24 different languages during Covid-19 proved that the words “coronavirus”, “mask”, “quarantine”, “pandemic”, and “positive” are present in 24 languages, from Tagalog to Portuguese, from Korean to Arabic¹³³. This result seems to describe the desire of having one international language around the world, which is the same perspective seen also in the words of the Le Monnier-Mondadori Education lexicographer Bianca Gismondi (2020) who said:

This pandemic emergency highlighted how fundamental a language is, as well as the common sharing. In this period, we have become one big, large community. We have seen and listened to many experts on TV , as well as on the radio. Everybody has been pushed to express themselves and speak in the most clear way possible (para.3)¹³⁴.

To conclude, the presence of English words in the Italian pandemic language can be approached by two different perspectives; the need for creating an international language to share the global experience of the pandemic, or the weakness of the Italian language in including English words instead of creating new ones. Italian linguistic experts have different opinions on the matter. The most conservative perspective is given by the President of the

¹³³ https://www.huffingtonpost.it/entry/travolti-da-neologismi-e-acronimi-nellanno-del-covid_it_5fecbd9cc5b6ec8ae0b0fb62

¹³⁴ https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/libri/altre_proposte/2020/10/09/devoto-oli-le-parole-della-pandemia-entrano-nel-vocabolario_c166aece-d9a0-4a61-b22e-f3928873326c.html

Accademia della Crusca, Antonelli, who heavily attacked the usage of English in the Italian pandemic language, claiming it was an act of undermining the national identity of the country, and the clarity of the communication (2020), “ Words can save people's lives. It is the language of radio, TV, and news which falsely give away the image of an Italian language saturated with angloamerican expressions and words”¹³⁵. There are other linguists such as Bianca Gismondi (quoted above) who had a more open approach, and believed that the presence of English is a sign of internationalization.

In the following paragraphs, data related to the anglicisms of the Italian pandemic language will be shown, each of which will be helpful in creating a clearer picture.

6.2 How English related to the Covid pandemic is used when it is borrowed into Italian - Proof from the Italian media

The *fil rouge* of this dissertation is how Covid has changed the English language, and everyone can agree upon the fact that English is the language used globally when it comes to technology and scientific matters. It is easy to say that English terminology dominates the international Covid pandemic lexicon. However, when this pandemic English lexicon is borrowed into another language, in this case Italian, different linguistic phenomena can take shape, such as changes in meanings, wrong or changed usages, and invented words. To prove the presence of English borrowings into the Italian language during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the possible changes to the English words (the way they are correctly, mistakenly, or otherwise used), and their claimed (by Accademia della Crusca) invasion into Italian, examples

¹³⁵ <https://diciamoloinitaliano.wordpress.com/2020/06/22/langlicizzazione-dellitaliano-durante-il-coronavirus/>

taken from the printed press (and the online newspapers websites) were examined.¹³⁶ The reason for considering the printed press as part of this large space in this thesis when attention has already been given to online news, is that the printed press still has strong credibility among Italians. The OED methodology was used to determine how the Covid pandemic has changed the English OED's method of using corpora based on web-based news sources (Zoppetti, 2020).

According to the communication agency Lewis PR¹³⁷, despite the small, limited number of readers of the printed press, 9.2% of whom are elders, Italians are still convinced that print sources are the most trustworthy. The study called "Information on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Daily Newspapers Front Pages: Case Study of Spain and Italy" claims that half of the number of people they surveyed, both in Italy and Spain, believe that printed papers have "good intentions," while 66% consider that online web pages are the ones with the "worst intentions"(Tejador et al, 2020).

For people who can access the Internet, free information websites that cannot be connected to a reliable source are taken suspiciously. On the other hand, the online versions of newspapers are highly appreciated (Bonin, 2011)¹³⁸. The two reasons for this are their manageable format and the contained costs for the online versions of newspapers (Bonin, 2011)¹³⁹. Ironically, the format and cost were more important than the credibility of the content

¹³⁶ Research by Francesca Schiavon for Master's Thesis

¹³⁷ Lewis Pr, public relation agency, and digital marketing services

¹³⁹ <https://www.censis.it/comunicazione/come-ci-si-informa-oggi-tra-vecchi-media-e-dispositivi-digitali>

(Bonin, 2011)¹⁴⁰. Italians affirmed that printed newspapers are too big to be easily read and they do not accept their high prices, especially when they have the option to access, for a much lower price, the same if not richer contents on the newspaper's website (Tejador et al, 2020).

Twenty printed issues from March 2020 through April 2021 of the most read Italian newspapers “Corriere della Sera,” “La Repubblica,” “La Stampa,” and “Il Messaggero” were examined for this thesis. The method used was the search-by-hand technique looking for Covid-related anglicisms being used in Italian newspapers during the pandemic. The list of words comes partially from the article: “Con la pandemia, una nuvola di anglicismi nel nostro linguaggio¹⁴¹” and includes “lockdown”, “smart working”, “droplet”, “Covid hospital”, “Covid pass”, “recovery fund”, “corona bond”, “trend”, “screening”, “task force”, “hub”, and “cluster”. A few other words, included in the paragraph below, have been added to this list, considering the relevance they had between the time when the articles were written and the time this dissertation was written. In the following paragraphs, the results of the anglicisms present in the most sold Italian newspapers were reported.

In the issues of “ Il Corriere della Sera” (7) , “La Repubblica” (6), “Il Messaggero” (4), and “La Stampa” (3) from 2020 to 2021, the words that have been found are: “coronavirus”, “covid-test”, “covid-free”, “stress test”, “test”, “trend”, “task force”, “voucher”, “lockdown”, “cluster”, “droplet”, “smart working”, “reskilling”, “corona bond”, “recovery bond”, “covid

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.censis.it/comunicazione/come-ci-si-informa-oggi-tra-vecchi-media-e-dispositivi-digitali>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.grey-panthers.it/ideas/letture/la-panspermia-del-virus-anglicus/>

social bond”, “recovery”, “recovery found”, “covid test”, “covid free”, “no vax”, “contact-tracing”, “smart schooling”, and “screening”.

Secondly, considering the phases of the pandemic that have been happening between 2020 and 2021, the question is whether or not the evolution of the pandemic has caused changes in the anglicisms. The answer is undeniably yes. The timeframe from March 2020 to May 2020 coincided with the beginning of the pandemic, and consequently, the anglicisms that populated the Italian written papers were related to the first stages of the disease: “coronavirus”, “droplets”, “cluster”, “screening”, “test”, “trend”, “lockdown”, “contact tracing”, “task force”, “smart working”, and “smart schooling”. These were the English words that popped out most frequently, with coronavirus unsurprisingly topping all the others. The word “coronavirus” appeared 91 times in only one issue published in March 2020 (*Il Messaggero*, 2020, March 6th).

The second phase of Covid-19 coincided with the attempt to find a solution to the pandemic, relying on vaccines. As the word “vaccino” (vaccine) started dominating the Italian language around the end of 2020, English words, such as “no covid, covid free”, and “no vax” started to be used, too.

With the vaccination campaign, the pandemic resolution appeared to be closer, but there were still critical situations. For example, Italy is still facing periods of lockdowns in March 2021, while this dissertation is being written. And for these reasons, the words “coronavirus”, “lockdown”, “test”, “smart working” and “smart schooling” have been kept, as they are still representative of the current moment. In addition to the pandemic situation, economic worries are also an important matter, and so the terms “covid-bond”, “recovery fund”, and “recovery” have recently found their way into the Italian language. Once again, the language, and even the borrowings from other languages change simultaneously with the events.

Once the presence of the anglicisms was established, the aim was to check for proper use of said anglicisms. So the question became; are the English words in the Italian newspapers being used properly? The English words that have been acquired into the Italian language receive “special” treatment only if their original meaning has been changed. This means the original form of the word can be changed, and there might be invented words which are passed for English words. The local newspaper of Settimo Torinese, close to Turin, kept referring to jogging with the word “footing.” “Footing” means a secure grip with one’s feet, while “jogging” means running at a steady, gentle pace. English speakers might find it difficult to understand that people are allowed to do “footing” during the coronavirus!¹⁴²(Claudio@V, 2012).

There has also been somebody even more creative. The very same day, precisely the 17th of March, when the lockdown started to appear on the news, TV presenter Giovanni Floris, during his TV show “Dimartedì” decided to give his contribution to the English-Italian lexicon by introducing the word lockout, as a variant of lockdown. Despite the low rate of frequency, the word started to circulate online as well as on the printed press. This generated a certain confusion, considering how it has been used in the title of one of the national newspapers: “Cercano eventuali trasgressori del lockout e trovano spacciatori di droga” (They look for lockout transgressors, and they find drug dealers) (La Stampa 2020).¹⁴³ For the author of the

¹⁴² Jogging, dogging, leotard, picky: le parole inglesi che reinventiamo (viaggiareleggeri.com)

¹⁴³ <https://www.lastampa.it/novara/2020/03/30/news/emergenza-coronavirus-durante-i-controlli-sulle-strade-i-carabinieri-smascherano-alcuni-spacciatori-1.38657127>

article: “Aggiornamenti sul contagio lessicale del virus a corona”, this is a clear example of the necessity of using English at any cost, even with the possibility of making mistakes¹⁴⁴ (Zoppetti 2020).

During Covid-19, the need for being linguistically alternative started to grow, especially in the world of news. On 17th April 2020, an Italian journalist Corrado Formigli used the term “covid pass” for the first time, commenting on the news on TV. The week before, only the Italian term “patente di immunità” was used¹⁴⁵(Zoppetti, 2020). The following day, the Veneto County Governorator Zaia, being interviewed in a talk show, explained the necessity of “screenare” (fusion between screen, and the suffix of the Italian infinitive verb form) the entire population, using serological kits. He was echoed by the interviewer, who referred to “the APP per il contact tracing.”

The two most used examples of invented English words are “smart working”, as mentioned above, and the recently coined “smart schooling” or its more Italian sounding variant, “smart didattica.” In the article of “Il Messaggero” (2021, March 20th), the journalist wrote, “Lo smart working sembra aver lavorato contro quello che è stato fatto sul posto di lavoro, perché ci fossero tutti gli elementi per non danneggiare i muscoli articolazioni e vista (Working from home is against the previous office regulations to prevent muscles and joints

¹⁴⁴ <https://diciamoloinitaliano.wordpress.com/2020/04/20/aggiornamenti-sul-contagio-lessicale-del-virus-a-corona/>

¹⁴⁵ <https://diciamoloinitaliano.wordpress.com/2020/04/20/aggiornamenti-sul-contagio-lessicale-del-virus-a-corona/>

stress)”. From his words, we can possibly deduce that what the journalist is referring to is the English equivalent of working from home.

In English, the term “smart working” is used to refer to more than one way of working: a specific way of working, which uses technology to simplify the working process, or to find a way that achieves the same results but with the same or better quality and takes less time and/or effort and/or materials. Consequently, working from home or telecommuting is not always the equivalent of smart working. If the English word “smart working” is used improperly in Italian, its Italian translations seem to not have grasped the difference. “Smart working” is translated with: “lavoro da casa”, “lavoro da remoto”, and “telelavoro”. They all translate to working from home, and not smart working. In this sense, the fact that “smart working” is used more than its corresponding terms in Italian is a pity. In the 20 newspapers reviewed between 2020 and 2021, the word “smart working” always topped its Italian variants. It appeared 8 times in the newspapers of 2020, and 17 times in the newspapers of 2021, whereas “telelavoro” appeared 3 times both in 2020 and 2021 newspapers, and “lavoro da casa” was never used. The same is true for smart schooling, which has also its variant into “smart learning”, “smart school”, or “smart didattica”. The latter was even used in Italian academic reality. Perugia University, famous for its Italian teaching programs, happily announced, “Studenti tutti pronti e reattivi alle nuove modalità di smart-didattica. Buon lavoro!”¹⁴⁶ And, again, the term is referring to the English terms of “online learning”, “online schooling”, or “hybrid learning” (if it is a

¹⁴⁶ <https://diciamoloinitaliano.wordpress.com/2020/04/20/aggiornamenti-sul-contagio-lessicale-del-virus-a-corona/>

combination of online and in-class instruction). The Italian equivalent of “didattica a distanza”, or the acronym DAD exists, and it has the same meaning as its English equivalent.

Thirdly, it is important to consider if Covid-related English words are a permanent change to the Italian language or just in the context of the current crisis. To measure that, word use frequency can be considered a good criteria.

In the article “Panspermia del virus anglicus” (2020) published on the Enciclopedia Treccani website, the journalist Zoppetti firmly supports the theory of a high presence of English pandemic borrowings into Italian. Bringing examples, he writes that the word “droplets,” which describes moisture exhaled from human airways and is the primary way of the virus spreading, is introduced at the beginning of March in *La Stampa* (2020, March 3rd), which reports “Cosa vuol dire droplet e perché c’entra con la distanza che dobbiamo tenere con le persone infette (What does droplet mean, and why is droplet linked with the distance that we have to keep from people infected)”¹⁴⁷. In the same issue, the word “droplet” appears 3 times in total and the word “gocciolina” appears only once. *Corriere della Sera*, (2020, March 2nd) reported, “Coronavirus e droplet: ecco la distanza di sicurezza (Coronavirus and droplet: this is the safety distance)”. In this article, the word “droplet” is mentioned once in the title, where catchy words are needed, and only once in the body, whereas the Italian equivalent of “goccioline” is used three times, including its variant: “goccioline di saliva”¹⁴⁸. In the recent

¹⁴⁷ Cosa vuol dire “droplet” e perché c’entra con la distanza che dobbiamo tenere dalle persone infette - *La Stampa*

¹⁴⁸ https://www.corriere.it/cronache/20_marzo_02/coronavirus-droplet-ecco-distanza-sicurezza-anti-contagio-05926824-5c52-11ea-9c1d-20936483b2e0.shtml

reading of 20 newspapers, the word “droplets” pops out only twice in just one newspaper “Corriere della Sera” issued in March 2020, and completely disappeared in later issues of 2021. So once people have been informed about the virus transmission, the word lost its frequency and usage on the news. This is true for both “droplets” and “goccioline”. This appears to be only a language trend and not a real threat to the language.

The research shows that the English variant for “focolaio” (cluster) pops up twice in the newspapers of March 2020 (Corriere della Sera n.2, La Repubblica n.1, and La Stampa n.1), and completely disappears in the 10 issues of 2021. However, its Italian equivalent “focolaio” persisted and was used both in 2020 and 2021. Specifically, in 2020, the word “focolaio” is found 7 times (3 issues of Corriere della Sera, 2 issues of Il Messaggero, 3 issues of La Repubblica, and 2 issues of la Stampa) and 4 times in 2021 (3 issues of Corriere della Sera, 2 issues of il Messaggero, 3 issues of La Repubblica, and 2 issues of la Stampa). Contrary to the destiny of the word “droplets”, it seems that the usage of the word “cluster” has survived and the Italian variant is preferred to the English one.

In the list of found anglicisms, the only one which can be considered to have a certain linguistic relevance and undisputed meaning is coronavirus. It was mentioned more than 200 times in 10 newspaper issues from March to May 2020. However, due to the specificity of the term, it is probable that the end of the pandemic will coincide with the end of the words usage in common contexts.

Zoppetti (2020) admitted in his article¹⁴⁹ that anglicisms play an irrelevant role if the criteria of frequency is considered and they all have a high rate of dispersion after the topic they are related to become a matter of less interest or even no interest. His words are proven to be right,¹⁵⁰ considering the results of the research conducted for this dissertation. The presence of English words is particularly low. At the highest rate of frequency we found the word “lockdown”, which was found 14 times in a whole newspaper issue of *Messaggero*, (2020, March 15th) The only other word with a higher frequency was coronavirus¹⁵¹.

The other appointed problem was the preferability of English words over the Italian ones. Again, this worry has been proven wrong, since the Italian version of pandemic words is preferred in almost all cases, apart from “smart working”¹⁵².

The Italian linguist Antonio Zoppetti (2020) still complains that the real problem in terms of anglicisms is the quantity of them. In this sense, the two elements that determine true linguistic change are frequency and rank in the corpora as well as time and speakers. It is time that allows new meanings and new words to be welcomed, and at the same time, speakers have the final word in using them. Due to peaks in case numbers of the virus, lockdown might be an exception because it seems to have endured in the Italian language. Some anglicisms have already disappeared, because they are not *à la mode* anymore.

¹⁴⁹ https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/articoli/parole/virus_anglicus.html

¹⁵⁰ https://www.treccani.it/magazine/lingua_italiana/articoli/parole/virus_anglicus.html

¹⁵¹ Independent research conducted by Francesca Schiavon for the Master’s Thesis

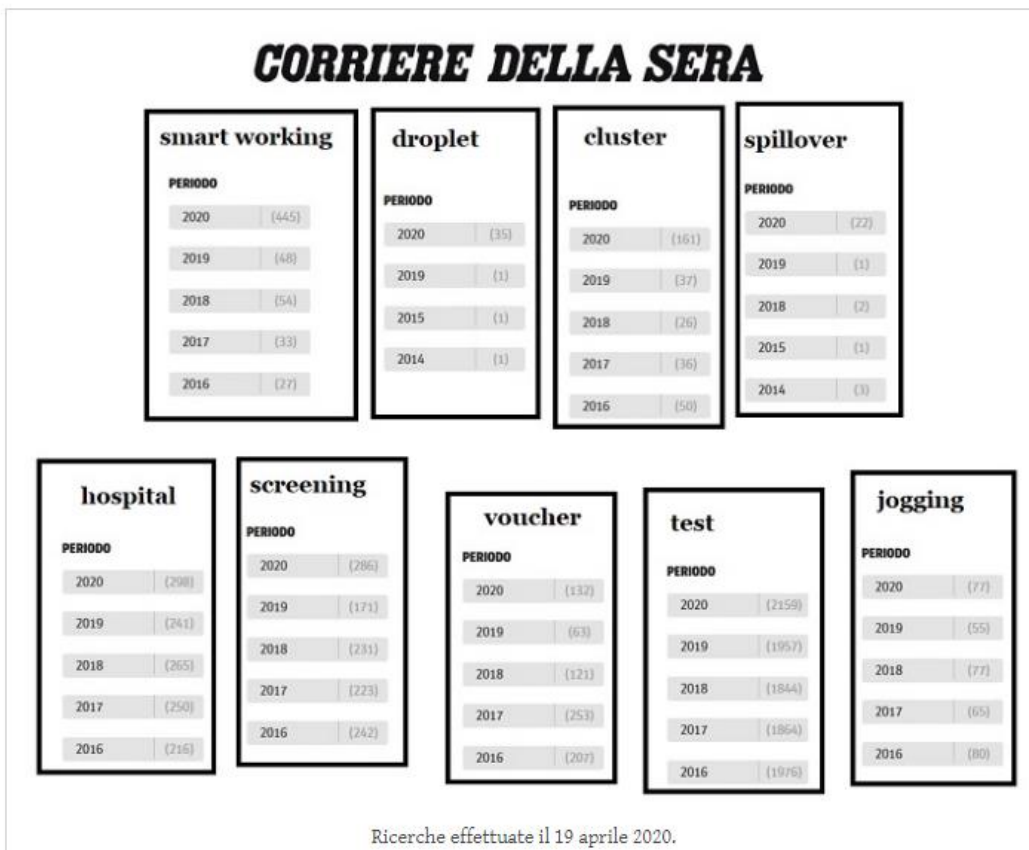
¹⁵² Independent research conducted by Francesca Schiavon for the Master’s Thesis

A short reflection can be made upon the sources. Only a few anglicisms used in the Italian pandemic language are included in the OED Covid-19 updates and its corpora, based on online sources. This can reflect some differences between the language used in online documents and the language used in written documents.

Checking the website Corriere.it, which contains not only the articles of the printed press, but also extra content, the results report that the number of pandemic anglicisms increased in comparison to last year. In the first three months of 2020, the word “screening” is used twice as often than it was in the entirety of 2019 in online sources. In the online articles, the words “smart working”, “droplet” “test”, “hospital”, “jogging”, “screening”, and “voucher” have gone viral, as can be seen in the chart below (Zoppetti, 2020).

Figure 14

Italian Newspapers and Anglicisms



Note. Search of anglicisms on the online version of the newspaper “Corriere della Sera” 19th April 2020

Searching for the same words on the same website in 2021, during the same time frame (from January 2021 to March 2021), the presence of all those anglicisms decreased, once more being aligned with the numbers of 2019. For example, “smart working” presents itself in 445 articles in 2020, appearing in 226 articles in the following year. The word “droplet”, which is considered one of the most representative anglicisms, drops from 35 articles to only 13.

“Cluster”, included in 161 articles in 2020, is mentioned only in 72 articles in 2021. The word “spillover” completely disappears from the printed press in 2021. The term “hospitals” is counted 55 times in 2021 against 258 times in 2020. In 2020, the word “screening” appears in 187 articles, while in 2021 the same word is down to 132 articles. “Voucher” drops to 24 articles from the 112 articles in 2020. The word “test” is dominant in 2020, as it is mentioned in 2,159 articles, twice more than in 2021. The word “jogging” makes no exception, as it is used only in 26 articles in 2021, half of the amount in 2020¹⁵³ (Corriere della Sera 2020)

To conclude, the Italian language does not seem threatened by the English presence. However, in borrowing English terms, it is important to use some criteria, and the “Accademia della Crusca”¹⁵⁴ wrote a general guideline to clarify what these criteria should be:

1. Do you really master the meaning of that word?
2. Are you able to pronounce that word correctly?
3. If you use that word, will the other person understand you?

If only one answer to the previous questions is no

1. You are making a bad impression
2. You are using that term because you are lazy
3. You do not respect the person you are speaking with or writing to

¹⁵³ <https://www.corriere.it>

¹⁵⁴ [anglicismi-criteri-di-condotta-1.png \(495×227\)](#) (terminologiaetc.it)

Chapter 7: Theoretical Background to the Survey

In this chapter I will review the theoretical bases underlying the survey “Quanto bene conosci il linguaggio del Covid-19,” examining each question individually.

7.1 Purposes of the survey :

The central idea of the survey was to understand how familiar Italians were with the language of Covid-19, taking into consideration different research questions:

RQ 1 Does the age and the level of education of Italians influence the knowledge of Covid-19 language?

RQ 2 Do the different media used by Italians influence their knowledge of Covid-19, and consequently of the Covid-19 language?

RQ 3 Does the presence of English words related to the pandemic influence the knowledge of Italians about Covid-19?

7.2 Theories behind the survey

Each of the above aspects addressed in the survey arose after reflecting on specific theories and references.

7.3 Age and Education

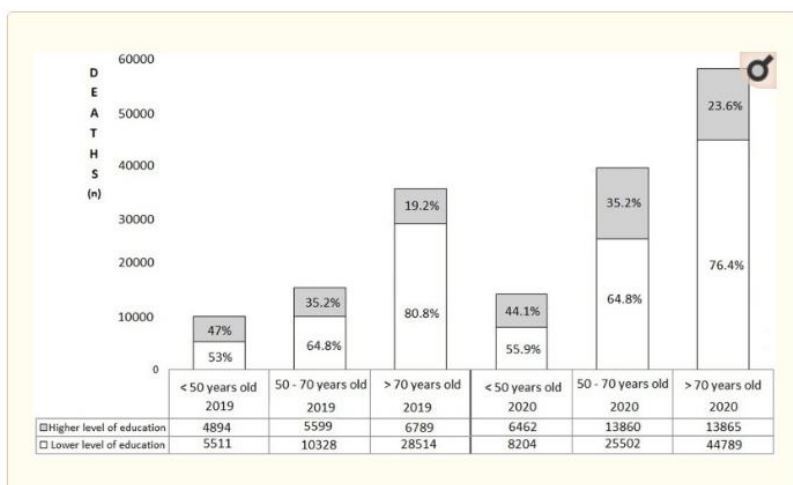
The decision to ask about age and education in the survey was linked to a study conducted by the Peruvian National Death System ¹⁵⁵(SINADEF). The research supports the hypothesis that age and lack of education can be responsible for the increase in the number of

¹⁵⁵ The Peruvian National Death System is digital register which permits to tracks the deaths and the births of Peruvians

deaths during the pandemic. Concepción-Zavaleta et al (2020)¹⁵⁶ showed that Peruvians with a lower level of education, which, most of the time, coincides with precarious living conditions, registered a higher death rate from the pandemic in every age range (see the chart below).

Figure 15

Peruvians and Their Level of Education in relation to Covid-19



The speculation is if the Peruvian situation can be compared to the Italian situation. Have older Italians with a lower level of education been affected in understanding information about the disease? And has the educational disadvantage increased the death rate among the elderly?

¹⁵⁶ Does level of education influence mortality of SARS-CoV-2 in a developing country? | International Journal of Epidemiology | Oxford Academic (oup.com)

ISTAT¹⁵⁷ (2011-2021) showed that older Italians are unsurprisingly those who have received a lower level of education. In the 1950s and 1960s, studying at university was a privilege reserved for very few. In the 2000s, universities became more accessible to the masses. In the 1950s-1960s, only 4 students out of every 100 went on to study at university. In the 2000s, university education became a popular choice, and the number of enrolled students in higher education went up to 68.9% (2001-2002).

7.4 The relationship between Italians and the media

The media turned out to be the main vehicle for receiving information about the pandemic. Consequently, Covid-19 information has been influenced by the variety of media people use daily: TV and radio news, social media, and the printed press. Considering the variety of information channels, Sakya et al (2021) decided to investigate the relationship between the most trusted media among Americans and their Covid-19 knowledge. An online survey was sent to a sample from a list of adults on a Central Pennsylvania Health System Marketing Database between 25–31 March 2020. The total of 5,948 respondents were grouped based upon their trusted news sources, and then, comparisons were made.

The results of the survey highlighted that those who preferred to rely on government health websites as the most trusted source were more likely to answer the questions about Covid-19 correctly, than those who preferred to rely on other internet websites or TV news. People who preferred Facebook as the main channel of information were less likely to answer the questions about Covid-19 correctly.

¹⁵⁷ Istituto Nazionali di Statistica (The Italian National Institute of Statistics)

Covid-19 knowledge correlates with trusted sources of information. For this reason, sources that provide health information about Covid-19 have to monitor or correct misinformation about the pandemic, and also provide content review.

The results of a survey conducted by Vincos blog¹⁵⁸ (2020) titled, “Come si informano gli italiani?” showed that 29% of Italians said to trust the Italian news media, while only 19% trusted news from social media. However, online sources are the most consulted, 27% of Italians use social media, the most popular being Facebook with a percentage of 56% usage. 37% of Italians use the most popular search engines (Google and Yahoo) to look up the news they want to read. Only 18% say they check the news directly from the website of newspapers.

The conclusion from this is that the sources of information most used by Italians are: TV news (59.1%), Facebook (31.4%), popular search engines (Google and Yahoo) (20.7%), TV talk shows (19.6%), and printed newspapers (17.5%).

The data showed how the printed press had a limited relevance in the spreading of news, considering the limited number of Italians who read said papers. However, Tejedor et al (2017) suggest that printed newspapers, even though they avoid massive use of data and statistics, are appreciated by the public for their interpretive pieces. These pieces still play a crucial role in shaping public opinion by offering more interpretative content.

Printed sources seem still to be trusted. For this reason, Tejedor et al (2017) decided to analyse a total of 72 front pages of the main daily newspapers in Spain and Italy (36 each).

Their research considers the daily newspaper front page as a fundamental element that

¹⁵⁸ Italian blog about technology, social media and marketing

synthesises and prioritises the content that the particular printed media treats as the most important. At the same time, the front page maintains a direct relationship with the digital version. In other words, the front page serves as a privileged space for “public identity construction.” The Covid-19 crisis has created new challenges for journalism. The printed press plays a fundamental role in framing a crisis, as well as providing accurate information from a credible source. These are essential qualities to this type of pandemic where lives and livelihoods are at stake.

The survey examines how well-informed, especially from a linguistic point of view, Italians are about Covid-19, considering the fact that the most used media among Italians were the least trustworthy in terms of pandemic knowledge, as shown in the Vincos survey.

7.5 Other aspects of the relationship between Italians and the news

The topic of the relationship between Italians and the news includes other aspects such as the frequency with which Italians read the news, and the languages they use to read them. Reading the news frequently usually means being more informed. In the case of Covid-19, the rapid evolution of the situation required that people often check the news, as the countermeasures adopted by governments nationally, and internationally, such as wearing PPE, very often were spread through the news.

The particular words used to deliver the news also are a matter of interest in the survey. The number of anglicisms related to Covid-19 started increasing in the Italian language, and consequently, the question became how the presence of English words (formal and informal words, medical and technical terms) related to the pandemic has affected both the understanding of Covid-19 among Italians, and the usage of Italian.

An increasing presence of English words in Italian would require a good command of the English language. However, a study conducted by the British Council (2018) in collaboration with the independent research agency “Trajectory”¹⁵⁹ about English language learning perspectives in seven different countries highlighted that the situation in Italy is the following:

- **2008.** Many Italians still believe that the knowledge of the English language is a non-essential key factor in the working reality
- **2011.** 79.3% of English teachers believe that Italians are motivated to learn English, but they still believe English is not fundamental in the working reality
- **2012.** One Italian in three can speak basic English
- **2015.** 98% of Italian students study English at school, but 40% of the population is over 50 years old
- **2016.** Adults who carry on studying English are 8.3%
- **2017.** Italians who speak English understandably are fewer than in other countries

The complex relationship between Italians and the English language is influenced by the power of the English language over the Italian language. English borrowings have been consistently included in the Italian language, and constantly increase in number. For this reason, the presence of anglicisms in the Italian language has acquired a certain relevance that even the Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, reflected on the linguistic phenomenon during one of his

¹⁵⁹ Trajectory is an independent research agency specialised in strategic trend analysis and forecasting

public speeches: “Chissà perchè dobbiamo sempre usare tutte queste parole inglesi (Who knows why we have to use so many English words)” (Draghi, 2021). This personal reflection was made after referring to “smart working” and “babysitting”:

Per chi svolge attività che non consentono lo smart working, sarà riconosciuto l'accesso ai congedi parentali straordinari o al contributo babysitting (For those who are employed in activities that can not reconcile with the possibility of smart working, parental leave or the babysitting bonus will be recognized. (para.1)

The President of Accademia della Crusca, Marazzini intervened on the episode:

Sono molto contento che il presidente Draghi, in questo momento difficile per il Paese, abbia toccato questo argomento con leggerezza e con una battuta, ma si capiva la sua intenzione (I am happy that the Prime Minister Draghi mentioned this topic with humour, but his perspective on the matter is clear). (para.2)

He explained:

Normalmente - aggiunge Marazzini - quando si critica l'uso eccessivo dei termini inglesi scatta l'accusa di provincialismo. Nel caso di Draghi è difficile farla scattare, dato che lui per anni ha fatto discorsi in inglese, ma quando parla in italiano si pone il problema di usare i termini appropriati nella nostra lingua (When somebody usually criticises the excessive use of anglicisms, he is accused of provincialism. In the case of the Prime Minister, who has given large

proof of his English skills, it is hard to move the same accusation against him)
(para.2)¹⁶⁰.

The answers of the interviewed will help to clarify the position of Italians towards pandemic anglicisms, especially if they support the more conservative position of the Accademia della Crusca, which advises to use languages consciously, to speak one language at a time, and use the Italian alternative instead of the English version, if there is one. Alternatively, there is the possibility to embrace a more open idea involving the fusion of the two languages.

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.canale190.it/draghi-chissa-perche-tutte-queste-parole-inglesi-la-crusca-ringrazia/>

7.6 English medical words used in Italian during Covid-19

English is the lingua franca for the medical and health sectors. As reported in the article “Language Barriers to Health” (Shamsi, 2020), “98% of the scientific research is published in English, and good quality medical information is difficult to publish in any language other than English. Ironically, what turns out to be a language barrier to health on a global scale is that 80% (6 billion people) of the world population cannot understand English,” resulting in a language barrier to health information on a global scale.

According to “Medicina Narrativa.eu” (Chesi, 2017), Italian health personnel were invited to a workshop at the Australian National University in Canberra called “Minimal English and Natural Semantic Metalanguage”. The purpose of this congress was to share and analyse the systemic utilisation and the use and overuse of English medical terminology between doctor and patient, between caregivers, and between managers within organizations.

Analysing the medical doctors’ patient summaries, the number of anglicisms has increased, for example “check up”, “follow up”, “output terapeutici”, “transitional care”, “screening”, “device”, “bypass”, “stroller”, “puffer”, “stent”, and “heart risk score”. And there are entire hospital departments named in English: “day hospital”, “day surgery”, “trauma centre”, “breast unit”, and “hospice”. In some specialties, technical terms and anglicisms merge. “In stories of preservation of female fertility, for example, we talk about “embryo transfer”, “cryo transfer”, and “pick up”. In cardiology stories, we talk about “push”, “bypass”, “stroller”, “puffer”, “stent, and “heart risk score””. (Chesi, 2017).

The English words are also considerably more present in technical conversations among experts: “paper”, “abstract”, “submission”, “impact factor”, “survival”, “biomarkers”, “range”,

“survey”, “clinical trial”, “case study”, “proceeding”, “burn out”, “border line”, “compliance”, “target therapy”, “aging”, and “burden of disease” (Chesi, 2017).

The organisation of health care structures contemplates a large presence of English words: “data manager”, “risk manager”, “management”, “decision maker”, “turnover”, “briefing”, “budget”, “fee”, “business plan”, “performance”, “spending review”, “vision”, “mission”, “timeline”, “clinical governance”, “standard”, “FAQ” (Frequently Asked Questions), “stakeholder”, “call center”, “feedback”, “customer satisfaction”, “privacy”, “ticket”, “patient journey”, “check list”, “flow chart”, “empowerment”, “e-health”...

During the meeting, researchers showed that anglicisms are present not only in the language spoken by doctors, technicians, and nurses, but also by patients and their relatives who tend to adopt the way of speaking used by the people who treat them. However, both patients and relatives want to understand the meaning of the technical words before using them, which is not always possible. This usage of foreign words with unknown meaning can put a barrier between the patient (under pressure) and the doctor (Chesi, 2017).

In addition, the overuse of English words in the medical sector can cause damage in other languages, especially during a pandemic when people have a special need to understand the medical language. For example, the American Covid-19 Census showed how the Spanish speaking community in America, a large part of which does not speak English, constituted over 40% of all Covid-19 patients. In Australia, the government decided to approach the spread of the news about Covid-19 only in English, missing out 4% of the Australian population (800,000 people) who do not speak English, and the 14% of Australians, whether they are native speakers or were born overseas who have low level reading and writing skills may be not able to read a text more complex than an elementary level one (Evans, 2020).

These are clear examples of how language barriers represent disadvantages, especially in the time of a crisis. In the medical sector, there are several possible solutions, which are nevertheless varying in complexity:

1. Use plain language (repetition, visual language)
2. Use reliable translation services
3. Use interpreters
4. Use Minimal English

Translators, or interpreters combined with technology are the most frequently adopted solutions to reduce the language barriers (Chesi, 2017). For example, Wikipedia. in collaboration with Translators Without Borders has translated health pages into multiple languages. In addition to that, specific language translation apps focusing on healthcare terminology have been invented with the purpose of creating libraries of medical phrases in different languages. Among these already experimented solutions, Minimal English is the newest one, born from the studies of Professor Wierzbicka and Professor Goddard, who teach at Canberra University and Brisbane University, respectively. Minimal English – like a coding language in computing – is a universal, synthetic, and simplified form of English to be used by those who are not native English speakers. Specifically, *Minimal English is based on semantic primes and universal semantic molecules, plus other near-universal words, i.e. simple, cross-translatable words. But at the same time, it can be adapted to suit particular contexts, by adding limited numbers of more culture-specific words, e.g. government, plastic, mosquitoes. Minimal English aims to be “minimally English.” It ought to correspond closely with other*

minimal languages, such as Minimal Chinese, Minimal Spanish, etc. (Goddard & Wierzbicka, in press)¹⁶¹.

In conclusion, having considered the important role played by English, and its relevance in the medical health communication in other languages, the section of the survey dedicated to English medical terminology used in Italian will try to show if the English medical terms are understood by Italians, and if English medical terminology has turned out to be a language barrier in Italy, as happened in America and Australia.

¹⁶¹ <https://intranet.secure.griffith.edu.au/schools-departments/natural-semantic-metalanguage/minimal-english/what-is-minimal-english>

Chapter 8:”Quanto bene conosci le parole del Covid-19?”- Survey question

analysis

8.1 Survey

Section 1: Survey overview

In the following sections, the content and the structure of the survey will be presented in detail: questions, people interviewed, tools and procedures used, survey question analysis, and the conclusion.

Questions

The survey includes 18 close-ended questions (multiple choice) and 1 open-ended question, organised into seven sections:

“General information about you” “You and the news”, “You and the language of Covid”, “How well do you know Covid-19 technical words in English”, “Covid 19 slang”, “Covid-19: which word(s) do you prefer?”, “The destiny of Covid-19 language” .

The questions asked are the following:

1. La tua età (What is your age range?)
2. Sesso (Gender)
3. Il tuo livello di istruzione (What is your level of education?)
4. Dove leggi le notizie? (Where do you check the news?)
5. Quanto spesso controlli le notizie al giorno? (How often do you check the news per day?)
6. In quale lingua leggi le notizie? (What language(s) do you usually read the news in?)

7. Quanto ritieni di conoscere le nuove parole inglesi relative alla pandemia del Covid-19? (How familiar do you feel with new English words which have appeared in Italian since the beginning of the pandemic?)
8. Ritieni che il Covid-19 abbia aumentato il numero di parole inglesi usate in italiano? (Do you think Covid-19 has increased the number of English words in Italian?)
9. Comprendi il significato delle seguenti parole? (“Coronavirus”, “lockdown”, “cluster”, “droplets”, “smart working”, “Corona bond”) (Do you understand these English words?)
10. Quanto bene conosci i tecnicismi del Covid-19 in inglese? (How well do you know Covid-19 technical words in English?) (“Antibodies”, “Asymptomatic”, “Plasma treatment”, “Herd Immunity”, “Antigen test”, “Serology test”, “Incubation period”, “Hydroxychloroquine”)
11. Comprendi queste parole legate allo slang del Covid-19? (“Quarantini”, “Corona Babies”, “Covidioti”, “maskne”, “Rona”, “doom scrolling”) (Do you understand the following English slang terms related to Covid-19?)
12. Quale parola preferisci usare? (Covid-19: which word(s) do you prefer to use?) (“lockdown”-“confinamento”; “droplets”-“goccioline”; “smart working”-“lavoro da casa”; “smart schooling”-“didattica a distanza”; “cluster”-“focolaio”; “screening”-“monitorare”; “Covid-test”-“tampone”)
13. Ritieni che il linguaggio del Covid-19 sopravviverà? (Do you think Covid language will survive?)

14. Potresti motivare brevemente la risposta precedente? (Can you briefly explain the reason behind your answer?)

People interviewed

The sample of people interviewed were Italian native speakers with an age range from less than 18 years old to over 50 years old. People who answered the survey were reached through:

1. Venice University groups of students on Facebook (linguistic and humanistic departments).
2. Open groups of people over 30 years old on Whatsapp and Wechat (tourist groups, Italian teaching groups).

In total, the number of people who responded to the survey was 192, divided into 109 people who answered through Whatsapp and Wechat, and 83 people who participated in the survey through Facebook.

Tools and methods

The 19 questions included in the questionnaire were elaborated using the program Google Forms. The questions were originally written in English, and then translated into Italian, considering the first language and the English knowledge of the respondents. All of the questions and answers will be analysed in the following sections. In addition, the data of the answers collected over a week-long period, from 14th April 2021 to 21st April 2021, have been organised into graphs, showing the percentages for each answer.

Survey question analysis

8.2 Section 2: Basic information about the respondents

Questions 1 and 2: Sesso ed età (Gender and Age)

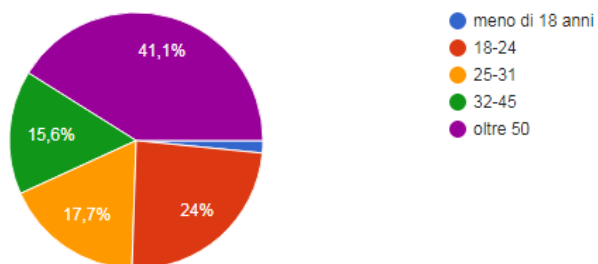
The second section is dedicated to general information. The first two questions are for gender and age. The total number of respondents is 192, 128 women and 63 men. Regarding the age range, 79 people who are over 50 years old, are the majority. The other group is between 18-24 years old, with 46 people in total. There are 34 people between 25-31 years old, and in the last group, there are 30 people between 32-45 years old.

Figure 16

Your Age

1) La tua età:

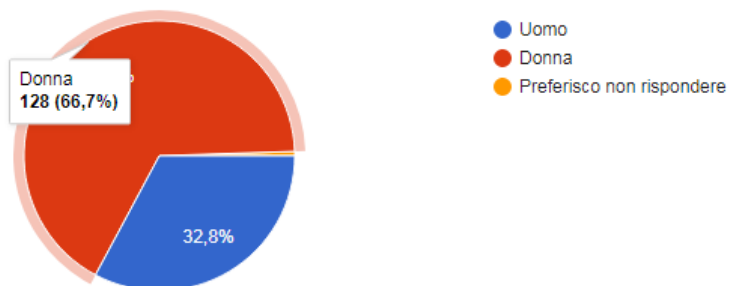
192 risposte

**Figure 17**

Gender

2) Sesso

192 risposte



Question 3: Livello di istruzione (Education)

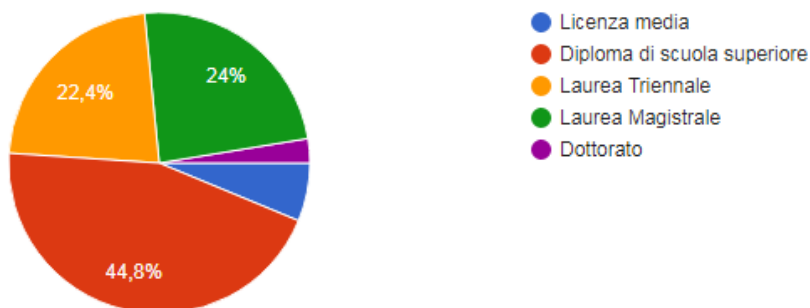
44.8% of the respondents hold a high school diploma. This result is not surprising considering that the majority of the respondents are over 50, and the highest level of education between the 1950s-1960s was the high school diploma, as shown before by the ISTAT research. More importantly, people who are in the age-range group “over 50,” are the most high-risk group for Covid-19, so comprehension of the language is even more vital for them. People who hold a Master’s degree are 24%, and Bachelor’s degree holders are 22.4%. 6.3% are people with a secondary school education, and 2.6% are the respondents with a doctorate.

Figure 18

Level of Education

3) Il tuo livello d'istruzione:

192 risposte



8.3 Section 3: Relationship with the news

The third section of the survey is dedicated to the relationship between Italians and the news.

Question 4: Tu e i mezzi di informazione (You and the news)

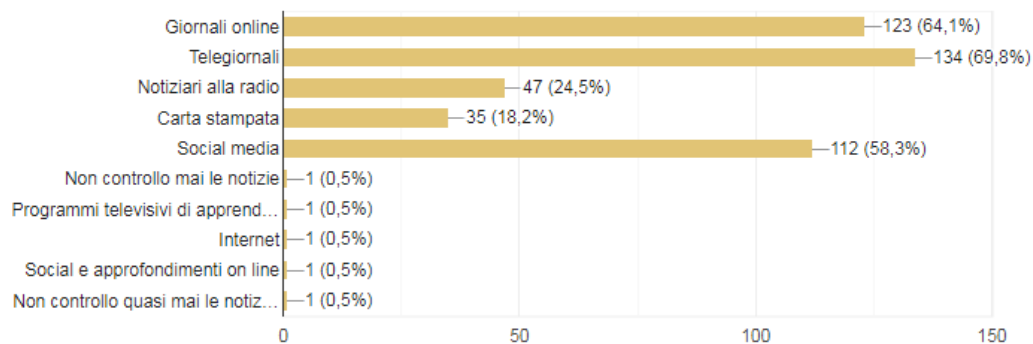
Considering the results of the survey conducted for this study, the media which have been highly preferred seem to match partially with the results of the article published by Vincos (2020) in “Come si informano gli italiani?” In the survey, as in the article, 69.8% of people, who are the majority, chose TV news as the best channel of information. People who read online newspapers are slightly less than 65%. People who chose social media wholth 58.3% and only a limited group of people like to read the news from the printed press – 18.2%. The printed press appeared to be even less appealing than the radio news, which was chosen by 24.5% of people. Only two people admitted to never checking the news and to almost never checking the news. In the survey, the other information channels suggested by some of the participants are: Internet, social media, online research, and TV documentaries (see the Figure 1.20 below). However, all these options have a limited relevance, considering they reached a percentage of 0.5%.

Figure 19

You and the news

4) Dove leggi le notizie?

192 risposte

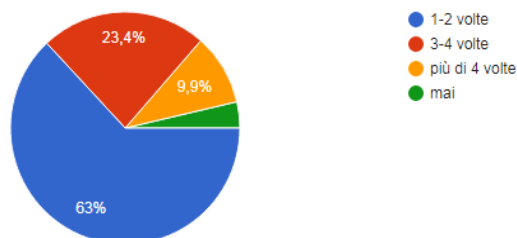
**Question 5: Quanto spesso leggi le notizie (How often do you read the news?)**

People were questioned on how often they read the news. 63% of respondents continue to check the news 1-2 times per day, while participants who check the news 3-4 times a day reach 23.4%. A limited percentage of readers keep themselves well updated, reading the news more than 4 times daily, holds the smallest portion, only 3.6%.

Figure 20**How Often Do You Read The News Per Day?**

5) Quanto spesso controlli le notizie al giorno?

192 risposte

**Question 6: In quale lingua leggi le notizie (What language do you read the news in?)**

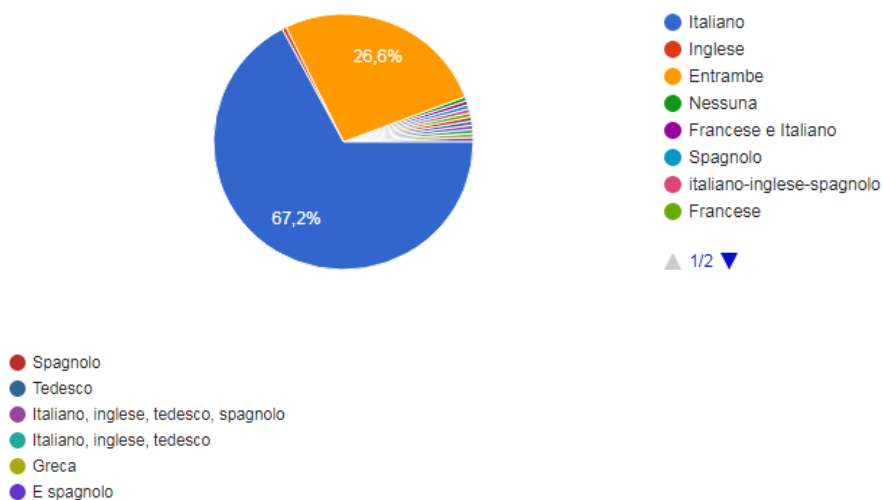
It is not surprising that 129 of the 192 people in the study read the news only in Italian, and the percentage of people who read the news both in English and Italian is 26.6%. This number might be higher than it actually is, considering the fact that the survey was shared among university students of languages. Despite the fact that the second large group of respondents was language students, a low percentage of interviewed said they use other languages to read the news: Spanish, French, German, and Greek. Specifically, these people can use only foreign languages to keep themselves informed, or they can alternatively use both Italian and foreign languages.

Figure 21

Which language(s) do you use to read the news?

6) In quale lingua leggi le notizie?

192 risposte



8.4 Section 4: Relationship with Covid-19 language

Question 7: Quanto ritieni di conoscere le nuove parole inglesi relative alla pandemia del Covid-19? (How familiar do you feel with new English words which have appeared in Italian since the beginning of the pandemic?)

More than one year after the first Chinese Covid case in December 2019, the participants were questioned about their knowledge on the language of the pandemic. Almost half of the people interviewed (see Figure 1.23 below), 43.2%, declared they know the language of Covid-19. 37% of the respondents considered that their linguistic knowledge about the pandemic was limited, fewer than the previously mentioned group. Respondents who admitted their lack of knowledge about the linguistic phenomenon created by Covid-19 is an important

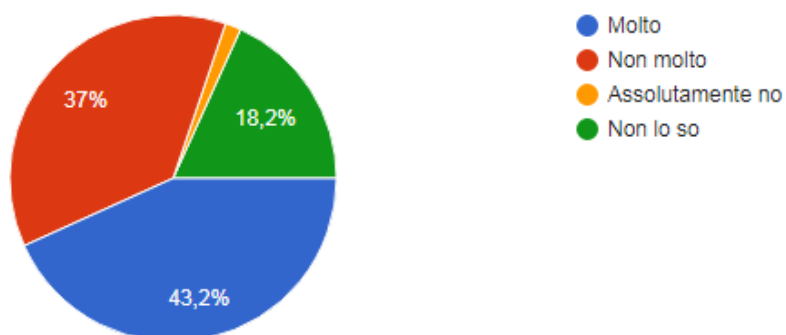
percentage. Consequently, the majority of 55.2% is the sum of the two groups who do not know much about Covid-19 language: “*Non molto*,” and “*Non lo so*.” After more than one year of linguistic exposure to the pandemic language, it seems that the information about the illness is still received with a certain level of uncertainty and confusion.

Figure 22

How Familiar Do You Feel With The New English Words Which Have Appeared In Italian since the beginning of the pandemic?

7) Quanto ritieni di conoscere la nuove parole inglesi relative alla pandemia Covid-19?

192 risposte



Question 8: Ritieni che il Covid-19 abbia aumentato il numero di parole inglesi utilizzate in italiano? (Do you think Covid-19 has increased the number of English words in Italian?)

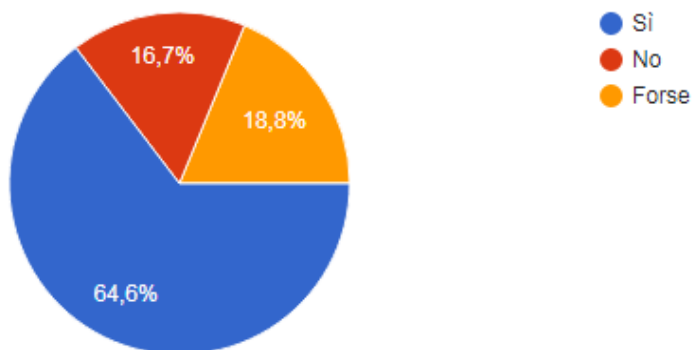
Having considered the relevance of reading the news to Italians, and the importance given to the Covid-19 topic on the news, participants were questioned specifically about the Covid-19 anglicisms in Italian. They confirmed that anglicisms have been increasing during the pandemic period. More than half of the people interviewed, 64.6%, supported the thesis that Covid-19 has favoured the use of English words in Italian. As previously seen, the same idea was supported by the Italian linguists and the President of “Accademia della Crusca,” Marazzini. On the other hand, more than 30% of the people interviewed seemed to either be uncertain or in denial of the presence of the Covid-19 anglicisms in the Italian language. Specifically, 18.8% of the interviewed sample was unsure about the growth of pandemic anglicisms in the Italian tongue. The percentage of those who denied an increasing presence of Covid-19 anglicisms in Italian is 16.7%.

Figure 23

Do You Think Covid-19 Has Increased The Number Of English Words In Italian?

8) Ritieni che il Covid-19 abbia aumentato il numero di parole inglesi utilizzate in italiano?

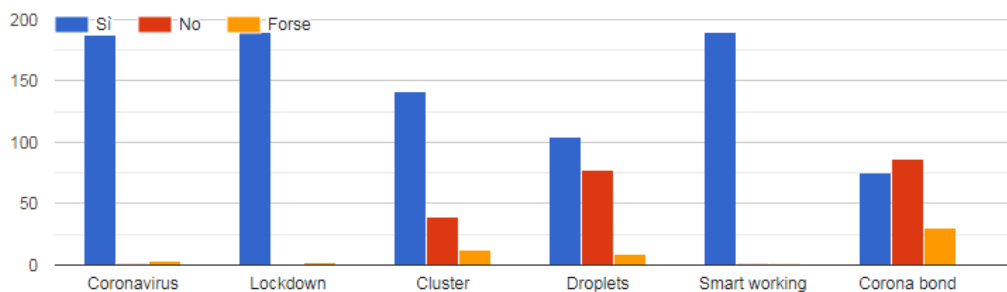
192 risposte

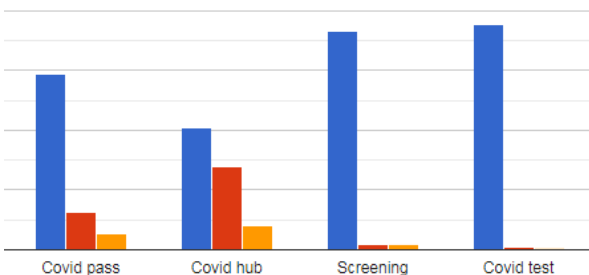


Question 9: Comprendi il significato delle seguenti parole inglesi? (Do you understand these English words?)

Figure 24

Do You Understand These English Words?





Respondents who took part in the survey were questioned about their knowledge of the popular anglicisms of the pandemic. Specifically, the words were selected from the list of the article: “Con la pandemia, una nuvola di anglicismi nel nostro linguaggio”, (Grey Panthers, 2020) (already mentioned in chapter 6, section 6.2).

The words in question are: “coronavirus”, “lockdown”, “cluster”, “droplets”, “smart working”, “corona bond”, “Covid pass”, “covid hub”, “screening”, and “Covid test”. A general overview of the results shows that the percentage of respondents knowing these words turns out to be higher than respondents not knowing the words.

The group of the most familiar terms includes: “Coronavirus”, “lockdown”, “smart working”, and “Covid test”. For the word “Coronavirus”, 188 people admitted to knowing the term, against 3 people who believed not to know the word. “Lockdown” and “smart working” (the English term is used in the wrong way, because it used with the meaning of “working from home”) were recognised by 190 people, as well as “Covid test” with 189 people who knew the term. From the results, the words that describe the pandemic as a universal experience, such as “lockdown” and “smart working”, are the most known.

In the group of the fairly known words, the following can be included: “cluster”, “droplets”, “Covid pass”, and “Covid hub”. The number of people who do not know these words is higher than in the previous group of words (“coronavirus”, “lockdown”, “smart working”, and “Covid test”). For example, 141 respondents know the word “cluster”, but 39 people still do not know what this English term means. Considering “droplet”, the meaning of this English word is still obscure to 78 of the interviewed. For “Covid hub”, 102 people know the Covid anglicism, but 70 people admitted to not knowing the term.

The group of the unknown words includes only “Corona bond” - *the social bond label or non-labelled thematic bond, with proceeds earmarked for fighting the effects of Covid-19*. 87 of the interviewed admitted to not know the term, 30 people admitted to be uncertain about its meaning, and 75 people admitted to knowing the word. The technical meaning attributed to this term may be a possible explanation for the people answer. Consequently, the more specific the anglicism is, the less it is known.

To conclude, despite Italians having limited command of the English language, as reported in the previously mentioned British Council annual document (2018), the sample of the interviewed seemed not to be affected by this language limitation. They all showed a general good knowledge of the anglicisms of the pandemic.

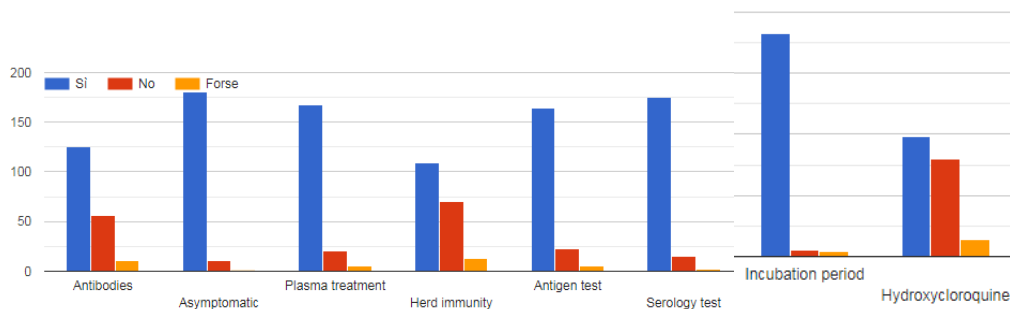
Question 10: Quanto bene conosci i tecnicismi del Covid-19 in inglese (How well do you know Covid-19 technical words in English?)

The overwhelming number of survey respondents understand the (following) medical-technical words of Covid-19: “antibodies”, “asymptomatic”, “plasma treatment”, “herd immunity”, “antigen test”, “serology test”, “incubation period”, and “hydroxychloroquine”. For each word the percentage of respondents knowing the words is always higher than the percentage of respondents not knowing the words or being uncertain about the meaning of the words. For example, 125 out of 192 people admitted to understanding the word “antibodies”. Considering the word “asymptomatic”, 180 of the total number of the interviewed acknowledged the meaning of the word. More than three-quarters of the people interviewed stated they understood the word “plasma treatment”. The word “serology test” turned out to be a familiar term for 175 interviewed people. “Incubation period” reached the highest number in the category of “knowing the word,” 183 of the interviewed admitted to having knowledge of the term.

This result is not surprising as the number of respondents are well-educated and medical terms in English are largely derived from Latin, as are Italian terms. Nonetheless, “Hydroxychloroquine”, “herd immunity”, and “antibodies” rank higher than the previous words for “no” - “not known.” In particular, people who know the word “hydroxychloroquine” are 98, and people who do not know the same term are 80. “Herd immunity” resulted in being a familiar term to 109 people, and an unknown word to 70 people. A possible reason for this may be the technical and specific use of these words.

Figure 25

How Well Do You Know Covid-19 Technical Words In English



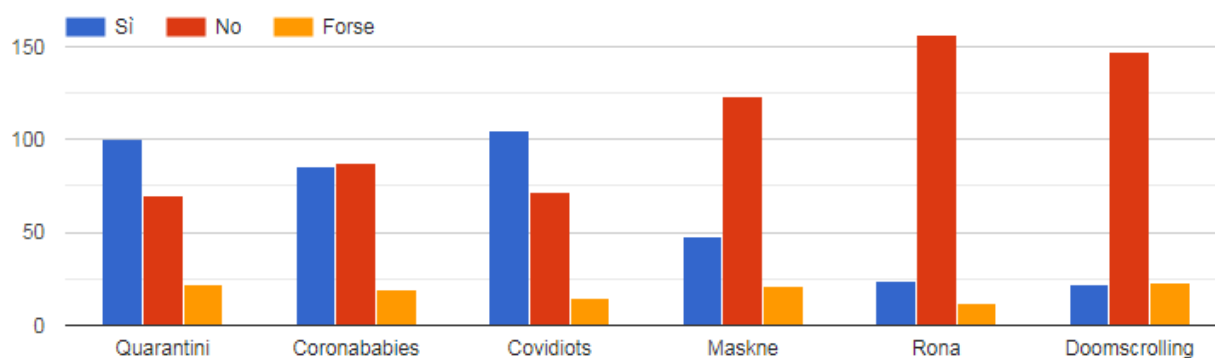
8.5 Section 5: Covid-19 slang

Question 11: Comprendi le seguenti parole legate allo slang del Covid-19 (Covid-19 slang?)

Figure 1.24.

Covid Slang

11) Comprendi le seguenti parole legate allo slang del Covid-19?



The sample of Italians who took part in the survey were questioned about the English slang words born during Covid-19: “quarantini” (cocktails shared at a distance during the pandemic) (Alindahao, 2020), “corona babies” (the generation of babies conceived during the pandemic) (Bhopal, 2021), “covidots” (people who do not take the risk of Covid-19 seriously) (Richard Warmica, 2020), “maskne” (acne caused by wearing masks) (Nunez, 2020), “rona” (informal way to refer to Covid-19) (Davis, 2020), and “doom scrolling” (mindlessly scrolling through negative articles, social media posts or other online contents) (Watercutter, 2020).

Looking at the results, people appeared to be more familiar with those words which are close to Italian, such as “quarantine”, “covidots”, and “corona babies”. Analysing the results, the word “quarantine” is known by 100 people. However, summing up the “don’t know” answers, and the “maybe known” answers of respondents, the total is 99 people, almost equal to the 100 people in the “known” group. For “corona babies”, respondents who do not know the term and who may know the term are more than those who know the word : 116 people exceeds the number of the group “known,” who were 86 people.

The informal words that are almost unknown to the sample of the interviewed are: “maske”, “rona”, and “doom scrolling”. 143 people considered the word “maskne”, completely unknown, and only 48 people are familiar with the term. The term “rona” is even less known than the word “maskne”. Respondents who admitted to being unfamiliar with “rona” are 156. Then, there is the verb “doom scrolling” which is slightly less unknown than the word “rona” with 147 people admitting to be unfamiliar with the word.

In conclusion, the relevance of the terms on the news and the similarity to the Italian words seem to determine the familiarity with the English slang of the pandemic among Italians.

8.6 Section 6: Words preference

Quale parola preferisci usare? (Covid-19: which word(s) do you prefer to use?)

In the sixth section, the linguistic habits of the sample of the interviewed Italians were investigated through 6 questions. In particular, people were asked to choose between an Italian word and its English correspondent in order to prove the popularity of Covid-19 anglicisms in real use. The terms selected belong to the anglicisms that have been included in the Italian language after Covid-19.

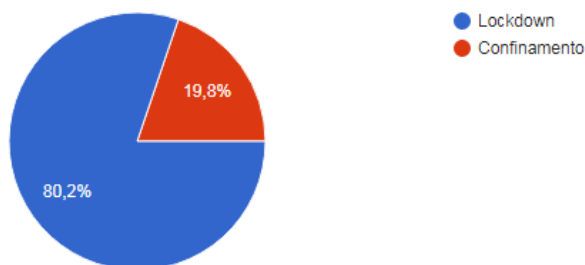
Question 12: “lockdown” or “confinamento”

Figure 26

“lockdown” or “confinamento”

11)

192 risposte



People have been asked to reflect about their word choice during Covid-19. Being asked to express their preference between “lockdown” and “confinamento”, Italians do not seem to have doubts about their answer. 80.2% of respondents prefer the word “lockdown” over the

word “confinamento,” chosen only by 19.2 % of people. The popularity of the word has been already confirmed in question number 9 where 190 of Italian respondents out of 192 stated they know the word.

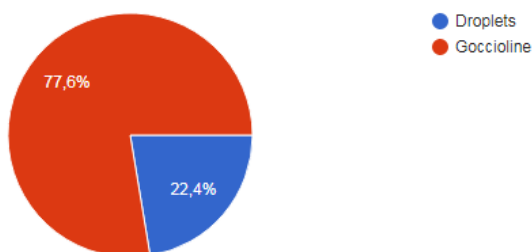
Question 13: “droplets” or “goccioline”

Figure 27

“droplets” or “goccioline”

12)

192 risposte



Respondents expressed their preference for the word “goccioline” over the word “droplets”. In this case, the Italian word was preferred over its equivalent English word. 77.6% of participants use “goccioline”, whereas 22.4% use “droplets”. The word “droplets” is less popular than the word “lockdown” as it was seen previously in question 9 where 105 people admitted to knowing the word, but 78 admitted to having doubts about the meaning of the word.

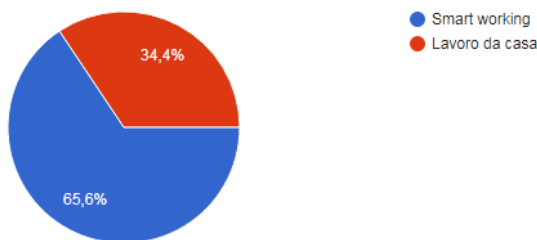
Question 14: “smart working” or “lavoro da casa”

Figure 28

“smart working” or “lavoro da casa”

13)

192 risposte



Respondents admitted to prefer the word “smart working” rather than “lavoro da casa”. The percentage of people preferring the word “smart working” is 65.6%, against 34.4% who chose the equivalent Italian term “lavoro da casa.” The anglicism “smart working” (it was previously seen that the English term “smart working” is used with the meaning of working from home in Italian) seemed to be particularly popular as demonstrated in question 9, where all the people interviewed confirmed to know this word. Understandably, the better the word is known, the more likely people tend to use it.

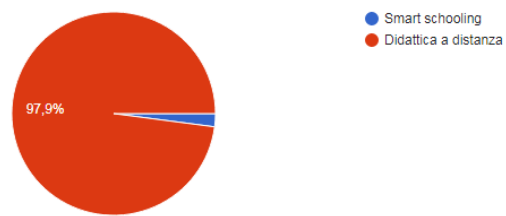
Question 15: “smart schooling” or “didattica a distanza”

Figure 29

“smart schooling” or “didattica a distanza”

14)

192 risposte



The phenomenon of learning from school during the pandemic was promptly addressed with the Italian term: “didattica a distanza” or the acronym *DAD*. Over 97.7%, which is an overwhelming majority, showed a preference for “didattica a distanza”, instead of the English term: “smart schooling”.

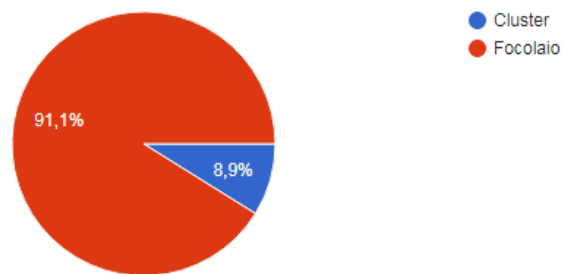
Question 16: “cluster” or “focolaio”

Figure 30

“cluster “or “focolaio”

15)

192 risposte



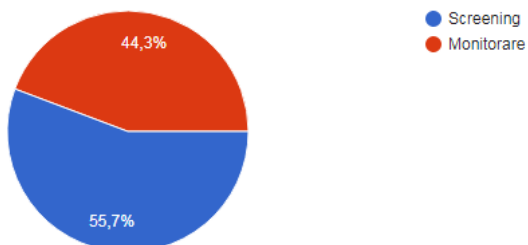
In the pandemic the word “cluster” carries a certain level of anxiety, because it describes the way people get infected. In the previous question, respondents stated they knew the meaning of the English word “cluster”. However, 91.1% of the respondents preferred the Italian version of “cluster” – focolaio. Only 8.9% expressed a preference for “cluster”.

Question 17: “screening” or “monitorare”**Figure 31**

“screening” or “monitorare”

16)

192 risposte



1

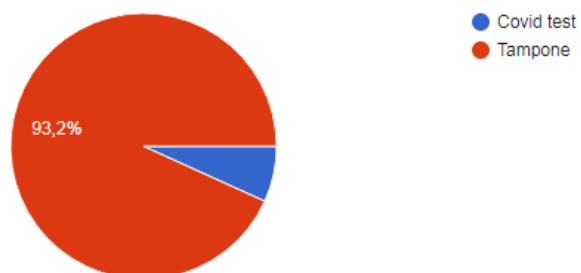
The word “screening” entered medical jargon, and then it became part of daily conversations in Italian long before Covid-19. Consequently, the word “screening” has had a longer time to root in the Italian language. However, only 11.4% of the respondents preferred the word “screening” over the equivalent Italian word “monitorare”. Probably, a longer but contained exposure to a word is less effective than a short, but high exposure for word acquisition.

Question 18: “Covid test” or “tamponne”**Figure 32**

“Covid test” or “ tamponne”

17)

192 risposte



When participants were asked to choose between “Covid test” and “tamponne”, the majority, 93.2% of the interviewed, picked the Italian version of the word – “tamponne.” These are surprising data, considering that Covid-19 imposes other more specific tests: serological test and molecular test, and both of these two medical examinations include the word “test” in their Italian name: “test serologico” and “test molecolare”.

8.7 Section 7: The destiny of Covid language

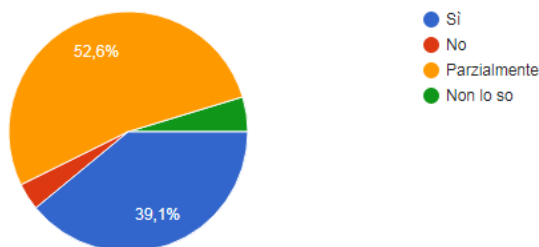
Question 19: Ritieni che il linguaggio del Covid-19 sopravviverà (Do you think Covid language will survive?)

Figure 33

“Do you think Covid Language Will Survive?”

18) Ritieni che il linguaggio del Covid-19 sopravviverà?

192 risposte



Part of the survey was dedicated to the future survival of the Covid-19 terminology. 52.6% of the interviewed sample predicted a partial survival of the language. 39.1% of the respondents sustained a complete survival of Covid-19 language, whereas only 3.6% of the interviewed considered that Covid-19 terminology will completely disappear. Lastly, 4.7% of the participants affirmed that it was difficult to make predictions on the destiny of Covid-19 language.

Considering that the majority of the interviewed sample foresaw the possibility of a partial or even complete survival of the terminology of the pandemic, as Covid-19 might

survive, and become part of our life. The language related to a specific phenomenon has more chance to survive if the phenomenon itself survives.

Question 20: Potresti motivare brevemente la ragione della risposta precedente (Can you briefly explain the reason behind your answer?)

After being asked for a general prediction on the future of Covid-19 language, the respondents gave their reasons to sustain the three hypotheses made on Covid-19 language: complete survival of the pandemic language, partial survival of the pandemic language, complete disappearance of the pandemic language.

Complete survival

The two main reasons that brought the sample of interviewed to predict the future survival of the Covid-19 language are: time and media. About the role that media played during the pandemic, one of the interviewed reported, “Dopo 14 mesi di bombardamento mediatico con questo linguaggio sarà impossibile rimuoverlo (After 14 months of information bombardment, it will be impossible to forget the language of Covid-19).” Another one wrote, “Perché credo che alcuni termini (es: Lockdown) vengano utilizzati in modo quasi esclusivo anche dai media, quindi restano più facilmente impressi e vengono memorizzati automaticamente dagli utenti. Penso che difficilmente utilizzerò parole sostitutive in un futuro, mi verrà sempre automatico utilizzare termini inglesi per definire questa pandemia perché ormai li ho assimilati (Because I believe that some terms such as lockdown are the terms primarily used also by the media, and consequently, more likely to be remembered. I believe I won't replace the English terminology about the Covid-19 pandemic, because it has already become part of my vocabulary). Recently, Covid-19 has become almost a constant presence in people's lives, and linguistically speaking, this means a long exposure to the Covid-19

terminology, which can only bring benefits in terms of language acquisition and consolidation. The more you are in contact with a language, the more likely you are to absorb the language.

Partial survival

Some of the interviewed believed that the language related to the pandemic, including its anglicisms, would survive only partially. One of the respondents wrote, “A mio parere alcuni termini molto specifici non verranno più usati in altri contesti e quindi andranno in disuso (From my point of view, some of the most specific terms won't be used, and they will be forgotten).” Another interviewed person sustained that the language of Covid which will be remembered, is the language that describes the people lifestyles modifications caused by the pandemic, “Ad accezione delle modifiche allo stile di vita che perdureranno come smart working per la maggioranza andranno perdute perché i media conieranno nuove parole più fresche ed atrtuali a dispetto di queste che saranno vecchie per il linguaggio mediatico (The only words which are going to survive are those related to the people lifestyle modifications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as smart working. Many of the terms introduced because of Covid-19 will disappear, because the media will invent more new words, which will be more representative of the time).”

Complete disappearance

There is a group of respondents who believe that the end of the Covid-19 pandemic will determine the disappearance of the Covid-19 terminology, considering that Covid-19 can become a topic forgotten on the news, and not being part of people's lives anymore. A testimony of one of the respondents who hopes for a rapid end of the pandemic, commented philosophically, “ Tutto si crea e tutto si distrugge (Everything is created, and everything is destroyed), revisiting in a pessimistic perspective the words of the Greek philosopher, Eraclitus:

“Nothing is created, nothing is destroyed, everything is changing.” Another one wrote,
“Tutto passa e tutti vogliono dimenticare” (Everything goes by, and everybody wants to forget).

8.8 Reflections on the survey results

In this section the aim is to compare the theories used to design the survey and the results obtained in the survey.

The first theory used to build the research of the dissertation supported the idea of how an older age and a lower level of education might influence comprehension of the pandemic, leading to a greater exposure to the disease. The results of the survey do not seem to support the theory. The 79 respondents out of 192 people in total, who were over 50 years old and hold a high school diploma, showed to have a fair good knowledge of both the general and the medical-technical words, including the English words that describe Covid-19. The sum of the respondents who answered “*non lo so*” and “*non molto*” to the question “Quanto conosci il linguaggio del Covid” reaching 55.2%, seems declare little information about Covid-19. However, looking at the direct questions which specifically ask for the knowledge of Covid-19 words, the group of “knowing” the words of Covid-19 is always in majority, in comparison to the group of “not knowing” the words of Covid-19.

The second theory explored the relationship between the knowledge of Covid-19 and the sources of information. Specifically, the American research conducted by the University of Pennsylvania highlighted how the sample of the people interviewed who checked the news using social media, had a more limited knowledge about Covid-19 than those people who used reliable sources of information to find news about Covid-19. As far as the sample of the Italians interviewed is concerned, the most used media they declared to rely on were: online newspapers, TV news, and social media. The preferences of the media shown in the survey do

not seem to have had any influence on the Covid-19 knowledge of the sample interviewed, as they showed to generally know the Covid-19 topic and its terminology.

Another aspect that helped to build the survey was the role of the English language in the Italian terminology of Covid-19. The high presence of anglicisms in the Italian language related to Covid-19 was supposed to be an obstacle for the comprehension of the terminology Covid-19 pandemic, especially having considered the study conducted by the British Council in 2018, which reported a not particularly high level of English among Italians. However, the data of the survey showed that the high number of anglicisms did not turn out to be a barrier for the comprehension of Covid-19 terminology, as the respondents showed to have a general knowledge of the generic and specific anglicisms related to Covid-19.

The last aspect explored in the survey was the specific role of anglicisms in the medical field, given the importance of the medical aspect during Covid-19. Despite the fact the article: “Gli anglicismi nella comunicazione sanitaria: usi e “abusi” (Chesi, 2017) reported an exponential increment of English word usage in the medical sector, which supposes to favour the phenomenon of language barrier, the data gathered from the survey did not highlight any signs of the language barrier phenomenon. Specifically, the large presence of English words in the medical terminology did not seem to influence the comprehension of Covid-19, and its medical implications, as the majority of the respondents admitted to be able to understand the English medical terms related to Covid-19.

In this chapter, I have analysed the results of the survey, closing with some initial reflections on the results obtained.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The starting question for this thesis was - How Covid-19 has influenced the English language? The answer appears to be it can be. The political, economic, and social/cultural implications of pandemics can undoubtedly contribute to language changes. The examples of the past epidemics and the effects they left on the English language are confirmation of the relationship between pandemics and languages.

During the period of Covid, new words, or rather old words with new meanings, have started to dominate in the news as well as in daily conversations. This phenomenon led the main English language dictionaries, such as the Oxford English Dictionary (British English), and the Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (American English) to turn their attention to this new terminology. In this way, linguists could spot the close connection between the formation of the various linguistic corpora, and the media. The important role of the written sources, but particularly the strong influence of the online ones, as language corpora are based almost exclusively on online sources, can manipulate the information people receive.

The web monopoly of certain search engines such as Google or social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, their connection with the formation of language corpora, and the circulation of new words are additional reasons for the manipulation of the information and its language. For this reason, they can be areas for future research.

The English terminology of Covid-19 has become so common that it has been adopted in other languages, although its usage may be short-lived. The presence of English words in Italian newspapers and online sources can be considered a direct consequence of the important role of the English language, as well as of the global nature of the pandemic. From 2020,

Covid-19 terminology has become so important as to permeate every aspect of people's existence around the world: from medical language to social dynamics.

In the survey, respondents showed a general good knowledge of anglicisms, and a generally positive attitude towards the English language. In particular, the data collected turned out to be striking because 79 out of 192 respondents who were over 50 years old had a good grasp of the pandemic related anglicisms, in contrast with the initial expectations. According to the 2018 survey carried out by the British Council, Italians were supposed to have a poor knowledge of the English words, as they were reported to have a lower level of English than the rest of Europe in 2017. Moreover, English as a school subject was introduced in Italian schools only in the 70s as an experimental education project. Only in 2003, studying English became compulsory since the first grade of primary school thanks to the “Moratti Education Law Reform”¹⁶². Before 2003, the English language was taught from third grade of primary school (Buschi, 2021)¹⁶³.

The positive results obtained among the more mature part of the Italians interviewed can be interpreted as a good sign. One positive aspect is the openness of all respondents, not just the younger ones, towards the English language, while another feature is the contribution of the news media and technology in the spread of the English language.

¹⁶² Letizia Moratti was Minister of Education, University and Research (2001-2006). Her education reform project was so called “the three i-s” in Italian, because it focused on the English subject (Inglese), the IT subject (Informatica) and enterprises for the privatization of the education (impresa).

¹⁶³ <https://traccedistudio.it/5663/riforme-della-scuola.html#:~:text=Nel%202003%20la%20Riforma%20Berlinguer%20viene%20abrogata%20dal,solo%20certi%20studenti%2C%20favorendo%20un%E2%80%99istruzione%20privata%20anzich%C3%A9%20pubblica.>

The respondents over 50 years old also showed good knowledge of technical medical words related to Covid-19, contradicting the conservative position of the “Accademia della Crusca.” The good knowledge of the respondents confirmed the possibility of the use of Minimal English. As English is already the “lingua franca” of the medical sector with the majority of the research published in English, the urgent matter now is to have one international and simplified language, Minimal English, to break down language barriers. It can be hypothesised that speaking one “health” language could have saved lives as well as reduced loneliness and depression in periods when isolations, and social distancing were required.

The future is also a concern of this dissertation. Italians were asked about the survival of Covid-19 anglicisms in the Italian language. The respondents believed that the most used Covid-19 English words were those destined to survive after Covid-19. The opinion of the respondents agreed with the words of the Italian linguists as well as of the journalists and online writers who said: “The usage and the frequency is what guarantees the future survival of words- if you do not use words, we lose them” (Hanson, 2018). The same conclusion can be applied to the whole linguistic phenomenon caused by Covid-19.

Covid-19 words can go out of fashion particularly fast, especially if terms are used to describe a transitory phase of the medical crises. The words that appeared of primary relevance in the news of 2020 and used to write the dissertation, have already become old and replaced by new ones in 2021. In 2020 the world was dealing with “lockdowns”, “face-covering”, “quarantines”, and “Covid tests”, while in 2021 the vaccination campaigns in the different countries have become the centre of attention. Consequently, the old words “lockdown”, “mask”, “quarantine”, and “isolation” went out of fashion and were replaced by words related to vaccines and economics.

Nobody knows what the future holds. However, based on the predictions of the professor of medicine at Berkeley University, Dr. Lee Riley (2021), four different scenarios can be imagined: variants may cause Covid-19 to continue; Covid-19 virus may turn into a seasonal epidemic; like the flu, Covid-19 virus may lose strength, and become no more serious than a cold, or Covid-19 virus like the SARS virus of 2003 may suddenly disappear (the most optimistic possibility).

It can be concluded that the language of Covid, as well as Covid-19 anglicisms are mainly a linguistic trend-words change, as they can disappear based on the stage of Covid-19. So it is likely that only the most representative words of Covid-19 are destined to survive and be reused in case of necessity. In this way, if similar pandemic outbreaks occur regularly in the future, people will be already prepared to fight, having a pandemic language they can use.

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