

The COVID-19 pandemic in two Austrian media corpora: methods, analyses, and examples from a lexical and a morpho-pragmatic perspective

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The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's lives in multiple ways. One of the consequences was a noticeable surge in the development of digital tools and work environments, for various academic fields and disciplines. In linguistic and language related areas this is reflected in an increasing number of corpus and discourse linguistic studies on various aspects of COVID-19 all over the world (e.g., Essam et al. 2021, Schweinberger et al. 2021, Fanta-Jende et al. 2021, Bülow et al. 2022, Lenz 2022). This also offered a tremendous potential for collaboration within and across disciplines, and the increased use, application and integration of digital tools in linguistic realms.

One of the advantageous consequences of the pandemic is that it has led to a massive creation of new vocabulary in many languages, including German. This includes on the one hand the formation of new words such as neologisms, e.g., *Distanzbier*, the assignment of new meanings to existing words, e.g., *Omikron*, and the adoption of new loan words, for example, from English, e.g., *Containment*. However, not only new technical terms such as *Lockdown* were introduced but also new morphological forms were created (e.g., the expressive intensifying portmanteau word *Covidiot* 'COVID+Idiot', the expressive compound *Dreckspan-demie* 'dirt pandemic' or the mitigating diminutive *Covidll* which rhymes with *Powidl*, the Austrianism for plum jam, and which is used to trivialize the seriousness of the virus). In other cases, old forms were reused in new pragmatic contexts in media discourse

(e.g., *Babyelefant* 'baby elephant' for measuring the recommended physical distance of one meter between two persons from different households).

In this paper, we focus on German in Austria and analyse two Austrian corpora: the *Austrian Media Corpus - amc* (cf. Ransmayr et al. 2017) and a corpus of user forum postings of the Austrian online newspaper *derstandard.at*. Our research is a satellite initiative to the larger special research programme "German in Austria. Variation – Contact – Perception." (FWF F060) (Lenz 2018). Specifically in this study, we deal with digital-born plain text content in terms of text type, and written standard German in terms of register, although the forum postings corpus also contains colloquial elements. Our combined analysis of lexical and morpho-pragmatic aspects of COVID-19 specific words provides insights into variationist aspects of language behaviour and change, and also attitudes with a focus on Austrian German. As regards the methodology in our study, we look at aspects of areal (i.e., geographic) and temporal patterns and dynamics of variation in media texts by means of combined data analyses and interactive visualisations using different and combined Python packages, such as spaCy (Honnibal / Montani 2017) and spacy_transformers. The morphopragmatic analyses focus on evaluative-expressive morphological forms, namely diminutives used for the purpose of mitigation (e.g., Dressler / Merlini Barbaresi 1994) and expressive compounds used for the purpose of intensification (e.g., Meibauer 2013).

Preliminary results show significant correlations between COVID-19 case numbers, media discourse on public health measures and the emergence of new lexical and morphopragmatic forms. However, not all parts of speech are equally affected, but new vocabulary is mainly found in nouns, which also include novel expressive noun compounds and noun diminutives, such as *Deppenbubble* 'fools' bubble' or *MNS-Hangerl* 'mouth-nose-protection towel'. Pejorative morphopragmatic forms, e.g., *saublöd* 'sow stupid', generally outnumber meliorative and neutral ones, but they show certain frequency peaks in different COVID-19 waves which go hand in hand with the public health measures and their respective media discourses and which reflect the public sentiment throughout the different stages of the pandemic.

In conclusion, the findings from this study and linguistic research can be seen as exemplary for the increased potentials of digitisation and networked humanities. Therefore, our results not only provide novel local linguistic insights into phenomena of language variation and change regarding German in Austria, but also contribute to the comprehensive global discourse on COVID-19 related analyses.

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