

Sannies and Locktails: A Semantic Study of Coronavirus Slang

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Abstract

The world is facing an unprecedented global pandemic, affecting everything from our national economies to how we shop, work and socialize, and resulting in a staggering loss of life. The focus of this paper is a semantic study of the coronavirus slang that has arisen since the Covid-19 outbreak. The corpus on which this paper is based contains approximately 100 lexical items collected by linguists and word lovers across the English-speaking world, compiled mostly between March and June, 2020. The article focuses on two research questions: (1) What semantic fields are most represented in coronavirus slang? And (2) What are the creative processes involved in their formation? It was found that while truncation, suffixation, compounding and other processes all played a role in the creation of coronavirus slang, the most productive process was blending (*covidiot* 'covid' + 'idiot'; *locktail* 'lock [down]' + '[cock] tail'), which accounted for half of the corpus.

Keywords: slang, coronavirus, semantic fields, lexical processes

1. Introduction

Flatten the curve. Contact tracing. PPE. Air bridge. A whole lexicon of virus-related phrases has arisen to reflect our new reality as the world faces the Covid-19 pandemic. The coronavirus has impacted economies, health and behavior worldwide, influencing how we shop, work and socialize. Ironically, in spite of the isolation imposed by this invisible enemy, people are more connected than at any other time in human history through modern technology. With physical interaction difficult, the words we use with each other take on even greater meaning. The distinctions between *endemic*, *epidemic*, *pandemic* and *global pandemic* have assumed new significance. Ditto for *quarantine*, *lockdown*, *self-isolation* and *shelter in place*. Not so long ago, the word *masks* conjured images of Halloween and bank robbers, and *facial masks*,

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of afternoon beauty treatments. How things have changed.

The focus of this paper is a semantic study not of the technical words and phrases that describe Covid-19 and the official restrictions imposed on our behavior but rather, of the coronavirus slang that has arisen since the early spring of 2020. The examples in these pages are not apt to be found in government mandates on the wearing of masks or official reports on the status of the pandemic but rather, between regular people in informal communication.

Discussions of slang inevitably begin with what it is not, contrasting it with regional and ethnic dialects, swear words, the cant of the criminal underworld and more general colloquialisms. While the notion of slang eludes precise definition, linguists do agree on some defining features. Coleman (2014), Eble (1996, 2014), Tagliamonte (2016) and other sociolinguists are in accord that slang works at the level of the lexicon, while largely retaining the phonology and syntax of the grammar on which it is calqued. They stress its informal nature, and the fact that it is imbued with a nuance of trendiness. Furthermore, it is tied to the notion of a group, be it as small as group of students on a particular college campus or as large as a country—or much of the world, in the case at hand. The use of slang creates social bonding and strengthens notions of in-group connectedness. Eble offers the following definition: “Slang is an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend or fashion in society at large” (1995: 11). In their studies on the slangs of British, American and Canadian university students, Coleman, Eble and Tagliamonte attest to this group-identifying function, as does Yamane, in her studies of French slang (1994, 1995a).

The corpus of coronavirus slang on which this study is based contains approximately 100 lexical items from linguists, journalists and word lovers across the English-speaking world, including the U.K, U.S., Australia, Canada and Hong Kong, compiled mostly between March and June, 2020 (Burrige and Manns; Coleman; Dupont; Galloway; Ho; Lawson; Moldovan; and Thorne.) All of the data was retrieved online, although in time published works can be expected. The most prolific collection was compiled by Professor Tony Thorpe of the King’s College of London who is actively eliciting examples from various English-speaking countries and is said to have accumulated one thousand examples of new words affiliated with the coronavirus, including slang, with which “ordinary people are filling the gaps... describing their own private environments” (Galloway, 2020). Additional examples were later collected from newspapers and other sources, as indicated. The collection and analysis of coronavirus slang is clearly a work in progress, and the contents of the current paper should be regarded as a preliminary study.

This study focuses on two specific research questions: (1) What semantic fields are most represented in coronavirus slang? And (2) What are the creative processes involved in their formation? In seeking answers to these two questions, the coronavirus data is compared to other slang corpuses.

II. Semantic Fields

The first area of investigation involves the specific semantic domains that serve as the target terms for

coronavirus slang. The slang of a group centers around topics of importance to that group, often resulting in large numbers of synonyms. In her diachronic study of University of North Carolina student slang over a period of 20 years, Eble noted that in spite of rapid turnover, there was a strong consistency in the lexical areas most conducive to slang, including ‘judgments of approval and disapproval’, ‘socially inept person’, ‘drunk’, ‘attractive person’, and ‘to relax’ (1995: 147; 2014: 38). Coleman’s study of the slang of students at the University of Leicester largely concurred (2014: 56-57). Interestingly, it was the social aspects of college life that were found to be the focus of student slang rather than specifically academic concerns, like studying or classes. In her analysis of French slang, Yamane noted a propensity for culinary metaphors as a source of slang for everything from body parts and sexual activities to abstract notions like stupidity and foolishness (1994: 49-55).

The corpus for this study includes approximately 100 coronavirus slang items that were cited in multiple sources. A detailed examination revealed that they can be broadly categorized as follows: slang terms for the virus itself; the lockdown period and the resulting mental states; types of people; relationships; work-related terms; social activities; and lifestyle/ behavior. Definitions are provided but the processes behind their creation will be discussed in the next section.

The virus itself

The corpus contains 10 slang replacements for the name of the Covid-19 virus:

<i>Rona</i>	<i>the pandy</i>
<i>the rona</i>	<i>the pando</i>
<i>Miss Rona</i>	<i>Miley Cyrus</i>
<i>Aunt Rona</i>	<i>the miley</i>
<i>Lady Rona</i>	<i>boomer remover</i>

The five terms on the left are all variations of the shortened form *Rona*, also a female name, while *the pandy* and *the pando*, from ‘pandemic’, are originally from Australia. When Covid-19 first broke out, many young people believed that it would only affect the older generation, thus triggering the name *boomer remover* from the phrase ‘baby boomers’ with ‘remover’, a euphemistic reference to death. The latest information and resources about the virus are known as *coronabuzz*.

The pandemic period and resulting mental states

The next category of slang items is related to the new realities of the pandemic period, the prolonged lockdown and the mental anguish they trigger.

<i>ACV</i> ‘the period after the coronavirus’
<i>BCV</i> ‘the period before the coronavirus’
<i>clusterfuck</i> ‘mismanaged situation which results in a new cluster outbreak’
<i>coronallusional</i> ‘prone to disordered or confused thinking’
<i>coronapocalyse</i> ‘the terrifying new reality faced during the pandemic’

coronacoaster 'successive feelings of elation and despair experienced under conditions of confinement'

coronacoma 'the shutdown period'

coronacranky 'short-tempered as a result of enduring lockdown'

coronanoia 'paranoia induced by conditions experienced during the pandemic'

coronaphobia 'fear experienced at the prospect of having to return to work, send children back to school, use public transport, etc.'

coronaspiracy theories 'conspiracy theories circulating during the pandemic'

coronaverse 'the new reality faced during the pandemic'

covexit, unlockdown 'an exit strategy allowing the relaxing of confinement after coronavirus-related restrictions'

infodemic 'the excessive spread of information linked to a crisis, some of it not substantiated and contributing to anxiety'

iso 'self-isolation during the coronavirus'

The third item on this list, *clusterfuck*, is one of the newest, coined in late August by the editors of the school newspaper at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to describe the “complex and utterly disordered return to in-person classes”, which within a week resulted in a number of new clusters putting over 500 students in isolation or quarantine (Firozi, 2020). As students return to campus in large numbers, we can predict an increase in related slang terms.

Types of people

A number of lexical items were coined in reference to individuals who exhibit particular behavior during the pandemic. Most are neutral or negative in tone. Note that the data includes several pairs of synonyms.

apocoloptimist 'a person who feels hopeful about life after Covid-19'

corona moaner 'whiners; complainers'

corona troll 'a person who take advantage of heavy internet traffic to post malicious content'

coronial, coronababies 'the new generation of children conceived during the pandemic'

covidiot 'a person acting irresponsibly, such as refusing to wear a mask'

flu bro 'a male coronavirus denier' (“It’s just the flu, bro.”)

lockdowners 'individuals coping with life in conditions of isolation'

long hauler 'a recovered victim of the virus who suffers long-term aftereffects'

maskulinity 'a macho refusal to wear a face mask'

magpie 'a supermarket hoarder'

nightingales 'people singing from their balconies to raise morale during the pandemic'

productivity ninja 'a stress-free, high-achieving worker who goes about work quickly and quietly'
quaranqueen 'a woman who does excessive cleaning during the quarantine'
quaranteens 'the generation who will become teenagers in 2033-4'
zombies 'people exhausted or disoriented after spending too much time on Zoom'
zoom moms 'a demographic of moms constantly using Zoom for work, children's schooling, and socializing'

In addition to the groups of people labeled here, several new adjectives that have arisen to describe common mental states during the pandemic are listed above.

Relationships

Mandatory isolation has impacted relationships in significant ways. This is also reflected in coronavirus slang, as can be seen in this set of examples:

corona bae, quarantine bae 'someone you start dating virtually, but might not be attracted to ordinarily'
covidivorce 'couples breaking up during lockdown'
covid-19 antibuddies 'friends or family members who have gotten on each other's nerves while cooped up together in isolation'
quaranteam 'the small number of people you regularly see during the quarantine'
turbo relationship 'couples who decided to move in together because of the quarantine, thus upping their level of commitment'
zumping 'to end a relationship (get dumped) via Zoom'

Work

Lockdown has greatly changed the way people work and study. Here are some of the slang items that reflect that:

basement casual 'how one dresses up (or doesn't) for video calls'
coronawashing 'businesses or individuals taking advantage of the pandemic to promote their philanthropy and achievements'
hotdesking 'social distancing while at work'
isodesk 'the workplace you've improvised to look good on video during confinement'
upperwear 'clothing selected for display above the waist only'
WFH 'working from home'
workation 'teleworking from a luxury resort'
zoom room 'part of one's home kept clean for use as videoconferencing background'

Social activities

It isn't only work habits that have changed. Remaining connected can be challenging while sheltering in place, but as the following slang terms suggest, many people have found imaginative ways to relax and have fun with family and friends:

- coronacation* 'a holiday, due to cancellation of study/work because of the pandemic'
- coronita* 'a corona beer cocktail'
- coronarita* 'a margarita served with corona beer'
- covideoparties* 'video parties organized in response to the lockdown'
- drivecation* 'a short trip to a nearby destination in one's own car; also, camping in a trailer one's own yard'
- furlough merlot* 'red wine that helps you cope with lockdown and WFH'
- isobar* 'where liquor is stocked during a pandemic'
- locktail* 'a cocktail enjoyed during the lockdown'
- locktail hour* 'the time allotted to consumption of cocktails while isolating'
- quarantini* 'a homemade cocktail prepared while in home quarantine'
- safecation* 'a vacation following the necessary precautions, including wearing masks and avoiding public transportation'
- schoolcation* 'family vacation packages that allow children to study remotely'
- staycation* 'leisure time spent at home, rather than going away'
- virtual happy hour* 'an online drinking party, often with colleagues'
- zoom party* 'an online social event organized through Zoom'
- walktail* 'taking your *quarantini* or *coronita* outside for a walk'

Lifestyle / Behavior

The last group of slang words and phrases pertains to items and activities associated with the new circumstances faced during the pandemic. It includes clothing, new behaviors and ways to pass the time.

- coronacut, quarancut* 'haircuts done at home, especially if not successful'
- coronadodge* 'swerving to avoid passers-by to comply with distance restrictions'
- corona-fi* 'fiction or science-fiction produced during/inspired by the pandemic'
- coronalit* 'literature produced during/inspired by the pandemic'
- covid-15* 'typical weight gain during the lockdown'
- covidient* 'conscientious about following mask-wearing and social distancing rules'
- de-roning* 'attempting to remove traces of coronavirus by cleaning/ disinfecting items that have recently entered the home'
- doom-scrolling, doom surfing* 'obsessively accessing social media to read horrifying stories about life during the pandemic'
- elbump* 'elbow contact in place of handshaking or other physical greeting'

infits 'outfits worn during confinement'
isobaking 'home baking in confinement'
isofashion 'relaxed, comfortable clothing worn during isolation'
magpie (*verb*) 'hoarding popular supermarket items like toilet paper and pasta'
ronavation 'home renovation during lockdown'
quarandating 'using dating apps to meet people and go on virtual dates'
quaransheen 'a shiny nose or forehead visible while videoconferencing'
quaranstream 'binge-watching a TV series or movies during confinement'
quarantanning 'using tanning equipment during confinement'
quarantune 'music produced or enjoyed during lockdown'
quaranzine 'magazines produced during lockdown'
sanny, sannies 'hand sanitizer'
smizing 'smiling with the eyes (when wearing a mask)'
spendemic 'dramatic increase in online shopping during the confinement'
zombie 'exhausted or disoriented after spending too much time on Zoom'
zombombing 'uninvited intrusion into a video conference'
zoomitzvah 'a bar mitzvah celebrated via video app in confinement'

III. Creative Processes

Our second research question relates to how coronavirus slang is formed. Lexical change in general is the most common and most rapid type of linguistic change. It is also therefore the type of change of which we are most aware. The slang lexicon is built through the ordinary processes of word-building which transform the shape of standard lexical items, with each code showing a propensity for certain patterns over others. These etymological processes include truncation, suffixation, acronyms, derivation, compounding, blending, and personification, as well as metaphor.

Truncation

Simple truncation, a common morphological transformation in the production of slang, most typically consists of deletion of the final syllable(s) of the word. Yamane (1995b) found this to be the most common source of slang vocabulary in American English, and also highly productive in Australian and French slangs. Interesting, there is but a single example in this corpus: *iso*, which has been contextualized to refer specifically to 'self-isolation due to the coronavirus.' Deletion of the first syllable of a word is known as apheretic clipping. The sole example in our corpus is *rona*, a slang equivalent of 'corona virus', which has been extended to *the rona* as well as three forms of personification, to be discussed below.

Suffixation

Suffixation is an important word formation process in the creation of American slang, resulting in forms like *wino*, *weirdo* and *creepo* (Yamane, 1995b). While there are no examples in the coronavirus slang corpus of simple suffixation, truncation in combination with suffixation led to several interesting creations: *sanny/sannies* (from ‘hand sanitizers’), *pandy* and *the pando* (from ‘pandemic’). These examples originated in Australia, famous for its widely-used slang forms such as *barbie* (from ‘barbecue’), *rellies* (‘relatives’) and *sunnies* (‘sunglasses’) (Moore, 2014). Examples including prefixation are *unlockdown* and *de-roning*, which are both discussed below.

Acronyms

Although fairly common in American slang (*BYOB* for ‘bring your own bottle’ and *SNAFU* ‘situation normal, all fucked up’), the corpus of coronavirus slang has only three examples of acronyms: *BCV* (‘before corona virus’), *ACV* (‘after coronavirus’), and *WFH* (‘working from home’).

Derivation

This is the word formation process through which a new word is built from a stem, usually through the addition of an affix that changes the word class and/or basic meaning of the word. There are several interesting examples in the data. *Lockdowners* and *long-haulers* both involve the addition of the overt grammatical marker *-er*. The modified noun *hot desk*, a slang reference to the unique work conditions under the pandemic, is converted to the verb *hot desking* through the addition of the marker *-ing*. One final example is *de-roning* which is in fact the result of multiple processes: apheretic clipping, the affixation of *-ing* marking a shift of grammatical category resulting in *rona* used as a verb, plus the addition of the affix *de-*. In this case both word-initial and word-final syllables are deleted, leaving only the stem *-ron-*.

Compounding

Compounding, a common word-building process in the English language by which two separate words combine to form a new lexical entity, was also important in the production of coronavirus slang. Compounds differ from blends, discussed below, in that the phonological structure of each lexical item is retained, with no alterations or deletions. Although they are sometimes written as a single word, (*coronababy*, *coronacut*), some of the examples below they are written out as two separate words with a new meaning. Twelve of the examples in our data were based on *corona* in combination with another noun, adjective or verb.

coronababy ‘corona’ + ‘baby’

coronabae ‘corona’ + ‘bae’

coronabuzz ‘corona’ + ‘buzz’

coronacoma ‘corona’ + ‘coma’

coronacranky ‘corona’ + ‘cranky’

corona dodge ‘corona’ + ‘dodge’

corona-fi ‘corona’ + ‘fi’ [sci fi]

corona lit ‘corona’ + ‘lit’

coronaphobia ‘corona’ + ‘phobia’

corona trolls ‘corona’ + ‘trolls’

coronacut 'corona' + '[hair] cut'

coronawashing 'corona' + 'washing'

The next four examples combined *zoom* plus another word:

zoom bombing 'zoom' + 'bombing'

zoom party 'zoom' + 'party'

zoom moms 'zoom' + 'moms'

zoom room 'zoom' + 'room'

The following lexical items fall outside of the above categories:

basement casual 'basement' + 'casual'

doom surfing 'doom' + 'surfing'

clusterfuck 'cluster' + 'fuck [up]'

hot desking 'hot' + 'desking'

doom scrolling 'doom' + 'scrolling'

virtual happy hour 'virtual' + 'happy hour'

The next set of examples is particularly clever due to their use of rhyme. Part of the playfulness stems from the fact that while the spelling is different, the sounds form perfect or near perfect rhymes.

boomer remover '[baby] boomer' + 'remover'

corona moaner 'corona' + 'moaner'

furlough merlot 'furlough' + 'merlot'

The remaining compounds are built on common lexicon items in the English lexicon, 'underwear', 'buddies' and the college slang term 'freshman-15', referring to typical weight gain during the first year at university.

covid-15 'covid' (rather than 'freshman') + 'fifteen'

covid-19 antibuddies 'covid-19' + 'anti' + 'buddies'

upperwear 'upper' (rather than 'under') + 'wear'

Of the 28 examples above, the dominant pattern is [noun] + [noun]. *Doom surfing* and *zoom bombing* are two of several [noun] + [verb] compounds. In the examples *boomer remover* and *corona moaner*, the second element is a noun based on a verb, while *hot desking* involves a verbalized noun, rendering a dynamic tone to the new lexical entities. *Coronacranky* is an example of adjective formed by compounding.

Blending

The largest source of coronavirus slang in the corpus is blending, the process by which two words are combined with the loss of one or more syllables to form a new lexical item. This is the process behind such common words as *brunch* ('breakfast' + 'lunch') and *motel* ('motor' + 'hotel'). Blending occurs with the first, second or both elements clipped. The majority of blends in our corpus are formed with one of the following words as the first component: *corona*, *covid*, *isolation*, *quarantine* and *zoom*. It is no coincidence that these lexical items are perhaps the five most salient words associated with Covid-19. As seen here, it may appear in its full form or as a shortened version. The deleted syllables are shown in brackets. Notice

that phonological adjustment is made in cases of overlapping syllables. This is indicated by an underline of the repeated syllables. Once one of these highly recognizable forms is tapped in the creation of coronavirus-affiliated slang, it triggers the extension to other terms, potentially resulting in an explosion of easily-recognizable new vocabulary.

<i>coronacation</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[va] cation’	<i>coronapocalypse</i> ‘corona’ + ‘apocalypse’
<i>coronacoaster</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[roller] coaster’	<i>coronaspiracy</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[con] spiracy’
<i>coronageddon</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[arm] ageddon’	<i>coronaverse</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[uni] verse’
<i>coronallusional</i> ‘corona’ + ‘allusional’	<i>coronials</i> ‘coron [a]’ + ‘[mille] mials’
<i>coronanoia</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[para] noia’	<i>coronita; coronarita</i> ‘coron [a]’ + ‘[margar] ita’
<i>covexit</i> ‘cov [id]’ + ‘exit’	<i>covidivorce</i> ‘covid’ + ‘divorce’
<i>covidiot</i> ‘covid’ + ‘idiot’	<i>covidient</i> ‘covid’ + ‘[obi] dient’
<i>covideoparties</i> ‘covid’ + ‘video’ + ‘parties’	
<i>isobar</i> ‘iso [lation]’ + ‘bar’	<i>isodesk</i> ‘iso [lation]’ + ‘desk’
<i>isobaking</i> ‘iso [lation]’ + ‘baking’	<i>isofashion</i> ‘iso [lation]’ + ‘fashion’
<i>quarancut</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘cut’	<i>quarantanning</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘tanning’
<i>quarandating</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘dating’	<i>quaranteam</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘team’
<i>quaranqueen</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘queen’	<i>quaranteens</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘teens’
<i>quaranstream</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘stream’	<i>quarantunes</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘tunes’
<i>quaransheen</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘sheen’	<i>quaranzines</i> ‘quaran [tine]’ + ‘[maga] zines’
<i>zoommitzvah</i> ‘zoom’ + ‘[bar] mitzvah’	<i>zumping</i> ‘z [oom]’ + ‘[d] umping’
<i>zombie</i> ‘zoom’ + ‘[zom] bie’	

The data includes several blends formed with a clipped second element –cation (‘vacation’) :

* <i>coronacation</i> ‘corona’ + ‘[va] cation’	<i>schoolcation</i> ‘school’ + ‘[va] cation’
<i>drivecation</i> ‘drive’ + ‘[va] cation’	<i>staycation</i> ‘stay’ + ‘[va] cation’
<i>safecation</i> ‘safe’ + ‘[va] cation’	<i>workation</i> ‘work’ + ‘[va] cation’

As the teleworking/remote learning period extends into the early fall, new slang terms are coming into use. *Schoolcation* and *workation* are new types of vacation packages first reported in late August and early September (Brown, 2020; Hardington-Gill, 2020).

The following set includes blends for popular beverages during the lockdown, formed with recognizable combinations of *-tail*, *-ita* and *-tini*:

**coronarita* ‘corona’ + ‘[marguer] ita’ *quarantini* ‘quarantin [e]’ + ‘[mar] tini’
 **coronita* ‘corona’ + ‘[marguer] ita’ *walktail* ‘walk’ + ‘[cock] tail’
locktail ‘lock [down]’ + ‘[cock] tail’

The last set includes blends that do not fall into any of the categories above:

apocaloptimist ‘apocalyp [se]’ + ‘optimist’ *maskulinity* ‘mask’ + ‘[masc] ulinity’
elbump ‘el [bow]’ + ‘bump’ *ronavation* ‘[co] rona’ + ‘[reno] vation’
infits ‘in’ (rather than ‘out’) + ‘fits’ *smize* ‘smi [le]’ + ‘eyes’
infodemic ‘info [rmat^on]’ + ‘[epi] demic’ *spendemic* ‘spend’ + ‘[pan] demic’

Note: Words preceded by an asterisk were listed in two categories.

Personification

Seven of the slang terms for the coronavirus involve the process of personification, with five of them derived from the first example in this section, *Rona*. As explained above, this is an example of aphoretic clipping, where the resulting form is a female name. The other slang items in the set, *Aunt Rona*, *Miss Rona* and *Lady Rona* are also examples of personification and familiarization of the virus.

One further example, *Miley Cyrus*, involves rhyming slang. In this case, the name of the popular American singer-songwriter featuring prominently in the news during this time period is used as a slang substitute for coronavirus based on the rhyme of the final two syllables. Although rhyming slang has long been associated with London’s East End, *Miley Cyrus* and its derivative *the miley* have not, according to Thorpe, been confirmed as authentic working-class rhyming slang—and were in fact, more likely coined elsewhere (Moldovan, 2020).

Another interesting example is *flu bro* in reference to a male who refuses to admit that he is infected with coronavirus, instead insisting that “It’s the flu, bro”, where ‘bro’ is a truncated form of ‘brother’, used as a familiar form of address. *Flu bro* is then personified to indicate a particular type of macho male that has evolved in the current social climate.

Metaphor

The corpus contains just three examples of slang derived from metaphor. The first is *nightingales* as a slang reference to ‘the throngs of people who took to singing and cheering the medical care workers from their balconies in order to raise morale in the early months of the pandemic’. The second, *magpie*, is used both as a noun for ‘supermarket hoarders’ and a slang verb for ‘hoarding’, based on the similarity of those actions and the notorious thievery of the birds, known to collect shiny objects to adorn their nests as well as feeding on the eggs and baby chicks of other songbirds. A final example is *productivity ninja*, involving both compounding and metaphor, to mean ‘a stress-free, high-achieving worker who goes about work quickly and quietly’.

IV. Concluding Comments

We have seen in these pages that coronavirus slang arose quickly as people around the world collectively faced an unprecedented health crisis threatening human mortality and economic livelihoods. The corpus, collected over the first few months of the pandemic, was seen to reflect those topics of most concern during the lockdown situation: the virus; groups of people identifiable by their patterns of behavior; novel twists in relationships; work- and play-related matters; and lifestyle. Unlike the slang lexicons of American and British students which focused on more general social topics of importance to young adults ('judgments of approval and disapproval', 'socially inept person', 'attractive person') the coronavirus corpus focused exclusively on matters related to the virus and the resulting social protocols.

The study also found that by a large measure, blending was the most common process in the creation of the coronavirus slang lexicon, constituting nearly half of the corpus, with 48 examples. Specifically, blends based on a core stock of five words—'corona', 'covid', 'isolate', 'quarantine', 'zoom'—accounted for a large percentage of the items in this category. This contrasts with other slang corpuses in which simple truncation, truncation combined with suffixation and acronyms have been found to play a much larger role (Yamane, 1995b). In his classic study of neologisms between 1941 and 1991, Algeo (1993:14) found that blending accounted for only five percent of new words. While it may be true that blends have over the years become more common, this begs the question why this etymological process is so productive in the coronavirus slang corpus. If considered together with the second most productive process, compounding, the combined figure reaches to over 70% of the data.

One explanation is that blending and compounding result in the most easily identifiable new forms, increasing the likelihood that they will spread and trigger extensions. As we have seen, combinations of the five core lexical items plus another element result in new forms that are easily recognized and understood. Once these patterns begin to catch on, they quickly circulate through our modern social networking systems. As clever as they may be, lexical items such *ACV*, *the miley* and *de-roning* require a certain amount of explanation, making prolific extension less likely. We are now seeing an increase in the number of new slang blends incorporating *-cation* and can expect a rise in compounds based on *cluster*.

The ephemeral nature of slang renders it difficult to document, but the large number of items collected over such a short period of time attests to both the intense nature of the social upheaval triggered by the virus as well as the extraordinary need to communicate meaningfully, in spite of (or perhaps, because of) self-isolation. The physical and emotional turbulence caused by this invisible enemy, tinier than a grain of salt, was both swift and widespread. The process of generating a new vocabulary with which to talk about it and connect with others sharing the same experience was also swift and widespread. Slang reinforces feelings of group identity, and at a time when people cannot be in physical contact, a shared vocabulary of new slang fulfills an important role both linguistically and psychologically. What of the future of coronavirus slang? As with all slangs, some items are apt to be retained and might over time become part of

the standard English lexicon, but much of it will be forgotten when the virus is behind us. Hopefully that will happen soon.

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要 旨

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現在、私たちは前例のない世界規模のパンデミックに直面している。その結果、日常生活は一変してしまった。本研究では、新型コロナウイルス感染症の発生以降に出現した、コロナウイルスに関するスラングに焦点を当て、英語圏の言語学者などが収集した約 100 の語彙項目を含む、コロナウイルスに関するスラングのコーパス（主な編纂時期：2020年3月から6月）を用いる。本研究の目的は、(1) どのような意味領域にコロナウイルスに関するスラングが現れるのか、(2) コロナウイルスに関するスラングが生み出されるプロセスにはどのようなことが関わっているのか、を明らかにすることである。これら2つの分析を進めながら、本研究で用いたコーパスとスラングに関する他のコーパスとの比較検証も行う。コロナウイルスに関するスラングが作り出されるプロセスでは、切り取り、接尾辞添加、複合などが重要な役割を果たしているが、もっとも生産的なプロセスは、*covidiot* (*covid* + *idiot*) や *locktails* (*lockdown* + *cocktails*) といった混成である。

キーワード：スラング、コロナウイルス、意味領域、語彙形成