How the pandemic has been reflected in Slavic languages. Corona and COVID-neologisms in Slavic languages (based on Polish, Czech and Russian)

The experience of living in COVID19 pandemic on lockdown was reflected in new vocabulary. In every Slavic language, new words and expressions emerged. Some of these words are attested in mainstream newspapers and probably will be included soon in dictionaries. Other words are occasional in mems or social media.

The main negative figure of this story is coronavirus. Virus as a protein agent, is located on the border between living creature and inanimate substance. In the most Slavic languages the nouns virus and koronavirus are inanimate with the case ending homonymy accusative = nominative in singular. Only in Polish wirus is animate and has accusative = genitive: wirusa. The unique animate treating of wirus in Polish does makes it is easier to personify virus as an enemy in war rhetoric.

The English word corona continues Latin meaning of stellar corona (glowing outer atmosphere) whereas the name for king’s head adornment sound differently: crown. The difference between meanings ‘(stellar) corona’ and ‘crown’ has been preserved in some Slavic languages, the first meaning is expressed by the word korona, the second by different phonetically related words: Czech koruna, Serbian and Croatian kruna. In Polish, East Slavic languages and Bulgarian the word korona means ‘crown’ (Russian and Ukranian korona were borrowed from Polish). The homonymy between ‘crown’ and ‘corona’ in Polish makes it easier to build metaphor and personify of the disease.

Compounds containing korona or Covid in Slavic languages

Korona and kovid-compounds differ to their structure. In Polish the whole word korona is usually contained in a new word. In Czech the stem is often mutilated to koro- or create a morphologic node, as in koronositel ‘COVID hotbed’. In Russian the stem kovid seems to be a more popular base for neologisms than korona, in Czech both: korona and covid/kovid are popular, in Polish korona makes out the vast majority of neologisms.

The neologisms can be classified according to lexical field, to different aspects of life during the pandemic. Some of these fields are listed below:

Virus, disease, health service and fight with the pandemy

Polish: koronatest ‘test for CoViD’, koronabus – ‘a bus for COVID testing’, koronapanika ‘c. panic’


Social distancing, everyday life under lockdown, and its inconvenience


Using pandemy as an alleged reason for own profits in politics or economy

This aspect of pandemy can be represented by Polish word "koronawybory" ‘c. election’. The presidential election by mail was planned for May the 10th 2020 in Poland, but the project was withdrawn after social protests. Other words from the same lexical fiel are .


In Ukrainian even a compound "koronamajdan" has been created as an expression of rebellion against ineffectual administration.

Corona-vocabulary in Slavic languages express the feeling of tiredness and hope, common to the whole world. The brave new world following pandemic has often been called "the new normal": Pl. "nowa normalność" / Ru. "nova normalita" / Cz. "novaja normalnost".

Sources of our corona words survey were:
- For Polish: the monitor corpus frazeo.pl.
- For Russian: Facebook groups “Slovo goda” and “Neologism goda”.

The frequency of quoted words was partially screened in WebCorp (http://www.webcorp.org.uk).