TRACKING THE LANGUAGE OF COVID-19 FOR COMMUNICATION: AT A GLANCE…

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UiTM CAWANGAN NEGERI SEMBILAN, KAMPUS REMBAU

Word of the Year 2020:

Collins Dictionary has declared **lockdown** as the word of the year due to its sharp rise in usage during the COVID-19 pandemic (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/). Merriam-Webster's Word of the Year for 2020 is **pandemic** due to its extremely high numbers of looked up in online dictionary (https://www.merriam-webster.com/). The Oxford English Dictionary (OED), however, has been unable to name its traditional Word of the Year for 2020, instead exploring how far and how quickly the language of **COVID-19** has developed in its report titled, "Words of an Unprecedented Year" (https://edition.cnn.com/).

Corpus Analysis of the Language of COVID-19:

The Coronavirus Corpus (Mark Davis, 2020) highlights what people are actually saying in online newspapers and magazines in 20 different English-speaking countries. This includes words and phrases such as **social distancing, flatten the curve and pandemic** (https://www.english-corpora.org/). A comparison between regions shows, although the word **front liner** is used worldwide, it is particularly frequent in South East Asia, especially the Philippines and Malaysia. **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. Words occurring near **frontline** are "**frontline** nurse/medic/caregiver", "**frontline** healthcare/health-care workers", "**frontline** warrior/hero", "courageous/heroic **frontline** workers" and "essential **frontline** worker" (https://public.oed.com/).

The words **coronavirus** and **COVID-19** both dominate global discourse in the Oxford Corpus (2020). Words used with **coronavirus** are "**coronavirus** outbreak", "novel **coronavirus**", "spread of **coronavirus**" and "fight the **coronavirus**". Sets of terms like **social distancing/social distance** and **self-isolation/self-isolate** show the increase in frequency of use in the context of COVID-19 (https://public.oed.com/).

Pandemic-related terminology that existed long before the COVID-19 era:

Self-isolation was first recorded in 1834, **social distancing** was first used in 1957, **WFH (work from home)** was first used as a noun in 1994 and as a verb in 2001. **Elbow bump** was documented in 1981, **quarantine** tracks all the way back to the 14th century and lockdown was first used in 1973. **Personal protective equipment** dates back to 1934 while the **PPE** abbreviation was first used in 1977 (https://www.macleans.ca/). The term **COVID-19**, short for "coronavirus disease 2019," was only coined in February 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the official name of the virus.

Language of COVID-19 for Communication:
At a glance...

Word of the Year 2020

- Lockdown
- Pandemic

Corpus Analysis

- Social distancing
- Social distance
- Flatten the curve
- Front liner
- Frontline
- Self-quarantine
- Self-isolate
- Self-isolation
- Pandemic
- COVID-19
- Coronavirus

Terminology   Early Usage

- Self-isolation (1834)
- Social distancing (1957)
- Work From Home (1994)
- Elbow bump (1981)
- Quarantine (14th Century)
- Lock down (1973)
- Personal Protective Equipment (1934)
- PPE (1977)