



## Just as The Coronavirus Entered the World-German Vocabulary Related to Covid-19

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### ABSTRACT

No other event in recent decades has had as profound an impact on our lives as the spread of the coronavirus. In the field of lexicology, a multitude of new lexical structures have emerged to describe the pandemic and its effects across a wide range of areas. This article aims to highlight the most significant German lexical structures related to the coronavirus pandemic, categorizing them according to lexicological, semantic, and phraseological criteria. Finally, it summarizes the survey's findings and examines how the German language continuously expands its vocabulary, using the coronavirus pandemic as a case study.

**Keywords** Vocabulary Expansion in German; Coronavirus Vocabulary in German; Basics of Word Formation in German COVID Vocabulary

### INTRODUCTION

Assigning abstract linguistic symbols to new topics, ideas, or realities has always been one of our greatest challenges. In times of rapid change, we are constantly creating or redefining lexical structures in order to have common points of reference with which to describe our experiences and share them with other speakers in our community. Of course, radical external events leave particularly clear traces in the linguistic structures of all languages, and in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, life has been referred to as the “new normal,” as the first part of the title suggests. It also refers to the well-known passage from the Bible (Romans 5:12), which explains the beginning of sin and death for humanity, and is intended here to emphasize the seriousness of the situation with regard to the quite unexpected and overwhelming outbreak of this pandemic. In this context, the title alludes to a time of great challenges for the survival of humanity, as if to say that the world was no longer exactly the same as before.

This contribution deals precisely with the so-called “COVID vocabulary” (German: *Corona-Wortschatz*), the creativity and variety of formation, change, and morphological, lexical, and phraseological expansion in different areas of use. The corpus was collected from German media<sup>1</sup> and updated, starting with the outbreak of the pandemic in February 2020<sup>2</sup>. The first part is devoted to the description of the processes involved in lexical expansion with particular reference according to Eisenberg (20183, 20063), Fleischer/Barz (19952), Lemnitzer (2007), and Lohde (2006). The descriptions of the individual morphological and lexical processes and phraseological criteria according to Burger (2015), Burger et al. (1982), Fleischer (19972), and Marx (1999), are accompanied by representative examples from the collected coronavirus vocabulary. The third and final section deals with new word combinations, but also with modifications of existing idiomatic expressions, which were adapted to specific contexts and supplemented with some new lexical constituents.

### 1. BASICS OF WORD FORMATION IN THE GERMAN COVID VOCABULARY

In order to name new referents (a subject, a reality, or a circumstance), it is necessary to assign them a suitable abstract linguistic sign (a word or expression). In the German language, we can mainly use the following processes:

- forming new words and phrases through the main morphological processes such as composition, derivation, conversion, and abbreviation;
- assigning the referent a linguistic sign with a signifier, *signifié*, from another language;
- resorting to a word or phrase that already exists in one's own language and assigning it a new meaning (modification).

Word formation, “a discipline at the intersection of linguistics and philology”<sup>3</sup>, examines the processes of forming new terms such as derivation<sup>4</sup> (German: *Ableitung*, f or *Derivation*, f), composition (German: *Zusammensetzung*, f or *Komposition*, f), and conversion (German: *Konversion*, f). Lexical semantics (German: *lexikalische Semantik*, f) is concerned with the meaning of lexemes and the semantic relationships between signs and concepts belonging to the lexicon, as well as the method by which these are constructed.<sup>5</sup> Among the objects of study, we can distinguish, on the one hand, the semiological process (German: *semasiologisches Vorgehen*, n), which is based on the identification of the meaning of a given linguistic sign and the changes that arise as a result of external or internal changes that influence the use of language over time. The onomasiological process (German: *onomasiologisches Vorgehen*), on the other hand, starts from the identification of the sign and its various realizations in the German vocabulary, studying its conceptual aspects such as its denotative and connotative meanings. Phraseology (German: *Phraseologie*, f) deals with the origin, structure, meaning, and use of so-called “fixed combinations” and typical combinations between words. These are phrases of varying length and structure, which also perform different grammatical and syntactic functions within sentences or utterances and texts.

<sup>1</sup> The reference corpus consists of articles published in German media such as *Deutschlandfunk*, *Deutsche Welle*, *ARD*, *3sat*, and *DeReKo* (*Deutsches Referenzkorpus*, IDS, Mannheim, Germany).

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this article, examples up to November 2022 were taken into consideration.

<sup>3</sup> See Marx (1999: 14).

<sup>4</sup> The gender of the nouns listed is abbreviated with the initial letters f: feminine; m: masculine, and n: neuter; V: verbs; Nouns: N.

<sup>5</sup> See Marx (1999: 153).

A criterion for selecting entries was the occurrence in at least two sources of the reference corpus, to ensure that they were structures used on multiple occasions and by multiple speakers of German. After the ‘manual insertion’ of the entries in tabular form, they were classified and analyzed, according to lexical criteria (by lexical class, root, and origin), morphological criteria (based on the morphological process identified), semantic criteria (by thematic area), and phraseological criteria (such as the degree of *fixity* between components, the type of motivation or conversion, see section 3.).

The creation of new terms as a result of the coronavirus pandemic can be attributed to several factors, some of which acted simultaneously. The main reasons, motivations, and triggers for the formation of new words and expressions are therefore:

- changes in the world defined as external influences (in this case: the global spread of the coronavirus and the subsequent pandemic);
- linguistic-communicative aspects (e.g., lexical mapping by institutions such as the government and authorities or the European Union);
- psychological and social factors (i.e., the creation of terms by non-institutional means, by speakers of a language community).

In the German COVID vocabulary, most new words were created with constituents (words or morphemes) that already exist in the German lexicon, following the rules of word formation. These are ancient phenomena present in all Indo-European languages, especially the Germanic ones. In view of the “infinite combinatorial possibilities and expressive [potential] of word formation”<sup>6</sup>, every text published in the media may also contain impromptu and occasional constructions (German: *Ad-hoc-Bildungen*) that are therefore not found in dictionaries. It is laborious to look up spontaneous neologisms, and it is necessary to consider the general and specific context in which they are used, to know the principles of word formation, and to try to apply extra-linguistic knowledge (logic, logical and rational possibilities, stylistics, and knowledge of the context).

In the COVID vocabulary, we can find words and components (morphemes) created through morphological processes such as composition, derivation, conversion, and abbreviation, or through a combination of these processes. Morphemes consist of one or more phonemes, the smallest segments that change meaning. From a semantic point of view, the morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of language. It can construct complex words, which are also called “morpheme structures.” In the process of composition, free lexical morphemes are used to form words. In derivation, bound (or grammatical) derivational morphemes are affixes divided into prefixes and suffixes, as in the prefixed verb *ver-schärf-en* (‘to make more severe, to strengthen’) or in the neuter nominal compound *Infekt-ion-s-ge-scheh-en* (‘infection rate/process’) or in nominal compounds with a free root constituent and other bound constituents such as the feminine suffix *-schaft*, e.g. in *Impf-bereit-schaft* (‘willingness to be vaccinated’). As far as suffixes are concerned, we can also note some examples such as the suffixed adjective *corona-tauglich* (‘useful/suitable with regard to the coronavirus’), but not in the sense of ‘serving its spread or propagation’, but because it is followed, for example, by a noun such as “building,” it means to make a place, facility, or event ‘suitable for the pandemic situation’ by putting in place measures such as maintaining ‘distance between people’ (German: *Abstand halten*), ‘wearing a mask’ (German: *Maske tragen*), and so on. We all had to learn these rules of behavior for which new words or groups of words were created.

### 1.1 Compound words (composition)

Nominal compounds between two or more nouns account for 80% of all compound words in German. Within these, multiple composition types exist. Depending on the lexical classes involved, we can distinguish groups of nouns based on their constituents, as follows<sup>7</sup>:

A. The constituents<sup>8</sup> (C) of nominal compounds are simple words or word roots. These sometimes include connecting elements—typically single letters such as *-n* or *-s*. For example:

*Maske+n+pflcht* (‘mask requirement’); *Maske+n+typ* (‘mask type/model’); *Virus+Form* (lit. ‘viral form’); *Mund+nase+n+schutz* (‘nose and mouth protection’).

The constituents of the feminine nominal compounds *Maske-n-pflcht* (‘mask-wearing obligation’) and *Virus+Form* (lit. ‘viral form’), and those of the masculine nominal compound *Maske+n+typ* (‘type/model of mask’) are ‘simple words’ and are therefore also used as standalone words. In the compounds listed above, the “connecting element” *-n* is added after the first constituent, *Maske*. With regard to nominal neologisms with the first constituent (or determinative constituent) *Maske*, we can mention an example of active word formation, i.e., the masculine nominal compound *Maske-n-muffel* with the masculine base constituent (German: *Grundwort*) *Muffel* whose origin dates back to the 18th century and later became a familiar word with the meaning of ‘grumpy man’, a person who is ‘slow, unfriendly, uncommunicative, surly’ (19th century). Over time, the constituent has taken on the meaning of ‘a person who does not like [to do] a certain thing’ and therefore refuses to do it, follow it, or anything else. There are already German compounds such as *Morgenmuffel* (‘morning grouch’), *Fernsehmuffel* (‘not being a fan of TV’), and *Gurtmuffel* (‘person who does not fasten their seatbelt’). In mid-2020<sup>9</sup>, the compound *Maskenmuffel* was used for the first time in German media to refer to people (male and female) who refuse to wear mouth and nose protection, which were prescribed for disease control<sup>10</sup>. The nominal compound *Mund+nase+n+schutz* (‘nose and mouth protection’) has three constituents. It is a determinative compound in that the two constituents, *Mund* and *Nase*, are subordinate to the ‘base word’ *Schutz* (‘protection’).

The German coronavirus vocabulary also contains numerous examples of ‘onomic compounds’, i.e. words whose first constituent (C) is the name *Coronavirus*, the abbreviated form of which, *Corona*, has been in widespread use since April 2020<sup>11</sup>, and whose second constituent (C) is a simple word such as in:

*Corona+Fall* (‘COVID case’)<sup>12</sup>; *Corona+Folge* (‘consequence of COVID’); *Corona+Gipfel* (‘COVID-19 summit’); *Corona+Hilfe/n* (‘COVID aid’); *Corona+Jahr* (‘year of the coronavirus’); *Corona+Lage* (‘COVID situation’); *Coronavirus+Karte* (‘COVID map’);

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> See Lohde (2006: 63f.). The classification has been expanded to include examples of compound and derived words from the analysed reference corpus.

<sup>8</sup> Also referred to as “constituent units” or “constituent parts.”

<sup>9</sup> See Deutschlandfunk: “The daily increase in coronavirus infections must be taken seriously, said FDP health policy expert Andrew Ullmann onDLF.. However, strict upper limits for events are “too simple,” and pressure through penalties for mask refusers is not enough.” (August 22, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Maskenmuffel>

<sup>11</sup> “Compound words” in which one constituent is a proper noun are classified by Fleischer/Barz as “Onymische Komposita” mit dem Hauptakzent auf dem Eigennamen (“onymic compounds” with the main emphasis on the proper noun”; see Fleischer/Barz 1995: 130-133). “Onymic compounds” are compound names with constituents of personal names or occupations. This term has been adopted in this case to refer to compound words containing the name of the virus *Coronavirus* or the appellation *Corona*.

<sup>12</sup> In English translations, both the name of the virus and the acronym, COVID or COVID-19, are given.



*Corona+Opfer* ('coronavirus victim(s)'); *Corona+Regeln* ('coronavirus/COVID rules'); *Corona+Toter/e* ('COVID death/deaths'); *Corona+Trott* ('coronavirus routine / monotony'); *Corona+Urlaub* ('vacation in the time of coronavirus'); *Corona+Zahlen* ('coronavirus case numbers'); *Corona+Zeit/en* ('time/s of coronavirus').

### 1.2 Combinatorial word formation (derivation, composition and mixed forms)

In addition to the examples of new formations created by composition, we can also point to some compounds whose constituents are a combination of composition and derivation German, this process is called *Kombinatorische Wortbildung* (literally: 'combinatorial word formation'), and the following subcategories (A, B, and C) illustrate some examples.<sup>13</sup>

A. The first or second component (C) is a word derived from suffixation or prefixation, a compound word, or a simple word, even a loanword, such as:

*Beherbergung+s+verbot* ('ban on accommodation' in accommodation facilities); *Belastung+s+spitze* ('maximum/peak pressure'); *Bewegung+s+radius* ('range of action'); *Durchimpfung+s+quote / rate* ('vaccination rate of the population'); *Lüftung+s+konzept* ('ventilation concept'); *Impfstoff+beschaffung* ('vaccine procurement'); *Impfstoff+lieferung* ('vaccine delivery'); *Impfstoff+zulassung* ('vaccine authorization'); *Kind+er+notbetreuung* ('emergency childcare'); *Kontakt+nachverfolgung* ('contact tracing'); *Zwang+s+schließung* ('forced closure').

B. Both constituents (C) are words derived from suffixation or prefixation, e.g. in:

*Freiheit+s+einschränkung* ('restriction of freedom'); *Impfung+s+verweigerer* (lit. 'vaccination opponent'; 'no-vax');

C. The first constituent part (C) is the name of the virus, Coronavirus or Corona, and the second (C) is a noun derived from suffixation and prefixation, e.g.:

*Corona+Ausbreitung* ('spread of the coronavirus'); *Corona+Beschränkung* ('COVID restrictions'); *Corona+Erkenntnisse* ('knowledge about the coronavirus'); *Corona+Erschöpfung* ('exhaustion / great fatigue due to COVID').

Compounds derived from other lexical classes mainly concern adjectives and participles used as adjectives, as in the categories (A) and (B), as in:

A. the first (C) is the name of the virus, Coronavirus or Corona, and the second (C) is an adjective of Latin origin or a participle containing the respective grammatical affixes (ge- and -t), e.g.:

*corona+konform* ('compliant with anti-COVID measures'); *corona-bedingt* ('due to/because of the coronavirus'); *corona-gebeutelt* ('exhausted by the coronavirus'); *corona-gerecht* ('compliance with anti-COVID measures'); *corona-gestresst* ('stressed by/because of the coronavirus').

B. The first (C) is the name of the virus Coronavirus, also in its abbreviated form Corona, and the second (C) is a compound noun or a noun with a loanword from another language as a constituent unit (see 1.3), e.g.:

*Corona+Hilfspaket* ('COVID aid package'); *Corona+Folgeschäden* ('consequences of the COVID crisis'); *Corona+Notstand* ('COVID state of emergency'); *Corona+Schutzimpfung* ('COVID vaccination'); *Coronavirus+Impfstoff* ('COVID vaccine'); *Corona+Neuinfektion* ('new COVID infections'); *Corona+Infektionsrate* ('coronavirus infection rate'); *Corona+Inzidenzwert* ('incidence of infections / incidence value'); *Corona+Krisenstab* ('COVID-19 crisis committee'); *Corona+Langzeitstrategie* ('long-term coronavirus strategy'); *Corona+Massentest* ('mass coronavirus testing'); *Corona-Maßnahme* ('anti-COVID/coronavirus measure'); *Corona-Notbremse* ('COVID emergency brake'); *Corona+Risikogebiet* ('COVID risk zone/geographical area'); *Corona+Zwangspause* ('mandatory COVID break').

### 1.3 Acronyms

The COVID vocabulary also includes some acronyms<sup>14</sup> (German: *Kurzwort*) that are used almost globally, such as *Sars-CoV-2*. It is a mixed abbreviation composed of many segments, i.e., syllables and initial letters of the complex English name "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2". In the electron microscope image, conspicuous approximately spherical formations can be seen around this virus, like a ring of petal-like appendages reminiscent of the solar *corona*, which gave them the name *Corona*. Already in the early 2000s and around 2010, there were pandemics caused by coronaviruses (SARS; MERS). In these two previous cases, the acronym *SARS-CoV-2* is pronounced linearly, as if the abbreviations were a word following the phonetic rules of the respective letters and numerals and not by pronouncing the individual letters separately (e.g., DNA). In this section, the first entries are based on compounds that include "COVID-19" or simply "COVID," followed by entries with other types of acronyms.

#### COVID-19

The origin of this acronym is English, as it is an abbreviated form of coronavirus disease 2019 (German: *Coronavirus-Krankheit-2019*). The structure of the short word is mixed and consists of several segments, such as the two syllables *CO* (from Corona) and *VI* (from virus), and the letter *D* (from disease), followed by the last part of the year 2019. In media texts, the acronym is written either in capital letters or with only the first letter capitalized. The pronunciation is linear, as if it were a word (and not individual letters). Examples of noun and adjective compounds in German containing the first constituent COVID/Covid or COVID-19 are:

*COVID-19-Pandemie* ('COVID-19 pandemic'); *COVID-19-Patienten* (pl. 'COVID patients'); *Covid-Herdenimmunität* ('herd immunity for COVID-19'); *COVID-Tote* ('deaths from COVID'); *COVID-positiv* ('positive for coronavirus/COVID').

#### Querdenker-Demo

The acronym *Demo*<sup>15</sup> belongs to the group of abbreviations and is composed of the first syllables of the feminine noun with Greek roots *Demonstration* ('demonstration'). It has been widespread in the German language since the 1970s and 1980s, and since 2020, it has been used

<sup>13</sup> See Fleischer/Barz (1995: 209).

<sup>14</sup> For a classification of the different types of acronyms with different suppressions and pronunciations of the constituent elements, see Lemnitzer (2007: 89).

<sup>15</sup> See Marx (1999: 133).



together with *Querdenker* (lit. 'wrong thinker, not right in the head, thinking strangely'<sup>16</sup>) as a determiner (German: *Bestimmungswort*) to refer to demonstrations by people who disagree with coronavirus restrictions.<sup>17</sup>

#### Corona-Infos

Like the previous example, the acronym *Info* (pl. *Infos*) is an abbreviation and is composed of the first syllables of the feminine noun *Information* ('information'). It is used in various fields, from the media and websites to education and public administration, in all contexts where information is published. The "onomastic compound" with the name of the virus: *Corona-Info* / *Infos* refers to news or 'informations' about the coronavirus, and to topics, news, and issues related to the pandemic.

#### Coronials (also: Corona-Generation)

The short word (German: *Kurzwort*) is modeled on "millennials" and is composed in the first part of the truncated name of the virus, *Coron-* and then the suffix *-ials*, and means 'generation of people born or conceived during the coronavirus pandemic'. Already in early 2020, some experts predicted a "baby boom" for *Coronials* and that many *Coronials* would be born in 2021, but the prediction of a sharp increase in births in 2021 only came true in some countries, but not in Germany.

#### 1.4 Lexical Adoption from Other Languages

One of the mechanisms of lexical enrichment in German is the adoption of words from other languages (German: *Fremdwort*). According to Eisenberg (20183), the main distinguishing feature between a "native word" in German and a "non-native" word is the fact that:

native words are (regardless of their origin) those that correspond to the general grammatical regularities of German; non-native words are (again, regardless of their origin) those that do not correspond to these regularities.<sup>18</sup>

The approximately 8,000-9,000 simple native words in the German lexicon have only one morpheme and are, according to Eisenberg, "without internal morphological boundaries."<sup>19</sup> With regard to the German lexicon, it should be noted that it consists of a considerable number of common words that differ formally from the so-called prototypes of the core of native words described above, and that very often originate from other languages, whose origins are not always clearly identifiable.<sup>20</sup> Over time, they have been integrated and adapted to the phonetic, orthographic, and grammatical rules of German. Such words are called loanwords (German: *Lehnwort*).

The German COVID vocabulary partly draws on non-native words, i.e., lexical solutions that exist in other languages. Very often, "mixed words" are formed from native and non-native language material, with words of other origins being adapted to the rules of the German language. These are mostly word stems and lexical morphemes. Among the new formations in German COVID vocabulary are many terms from technical languages (e.g., medicine or biology). In many cases, these are loanwords of Latin and Greek origin, but also loanwords of French and English origin. In terms of word classes, nouns predominate, most of which are compound and/or derived and, with few orthographic and phonetic deviations, also occur in other languages. Their form and origin are explained in the following sections, in which we have classified the selected terms according to their different origins, such as Greek and Latin, French, and English.

#### 1.4.1 Examples of terms of Greek-Latin origin

The group of words of Greek-Latin origin mainly includes medical or scientific terms.<sup>21</sup> First and foremost is certainly the name of the virus, and as regards the explanation of the first part of the name "Corona" (see 2.1.4).

#### Coronavirus

The gender of Virus in medical and scientific terminology (biology) and in corresponding contexts is neuter (German: *das Virus*), but since viruses infect not only living beings but also computers, in technical IT contexts the word is used in German in the masculine gender (*der Virus*)<sup>22</sup>. The plural form is always *die Viren*. There is sometimes confusion regarding the inflection because the word does not take an apostrophe in the genitive case. According to the explanations of the meaning in Kluge's etymological dictionary and the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (DWDS), the word is of Latin origin and entered the German language via French and English. Over time, semantic changes have also occurred:

[...] probably via French and English synonyms virus < Latin virus = 'mucus, juice, poison'; genitive singular uninflected; only with particularly well-integrated foreign words of this type do long genitive endings also occur.<sup>23</sup>

According to the definition in the DWDS<sup>24</sup>:

[...] exists as a parasite in living cells and usually appears as a pathogen (first half of the 20th century), previously generally 'poison (poisonous substance), infectious agent' (second half of the 19th century), probably via 'virus' in English and French attested earlier (initially denoting external signs of disease such as 'pus, stench, poison', then becoming 'pathogen' in French) from Latin *vīrus* n. 'viscous liquid, mucus, juice, poison, stench, pungency, bitterness', probably via the adjective 'virulent' 'poisonous, purulent' (early 19th century), 'infectious, contagious, pathogenic' (late 19th century), probably via the French synonym 'virulent' from Latin *vīrulentus* 'poisonous', to Latin *vīrus*.

<sup>16</sup> See "verkehrt, nicht ganz richtig, seltsam," definition no. 2 of the German adverb *quer* (<https://www.dwds.de/wb/quer>).

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.dw.com/de/demos-von-lockdown-gegnern-und-corona-leugnern/a-55920081>

<sup>18</sup> See definition in Eisenberg (2018: 15f): "Native words are (regardless of their origin) those words that correspond to the general grammatical regularities of German; non-native words are (again regardless of their origin) those words that do not correspond to these regularities." [lit. translation of the original German text].

<sup>19</sup> See (ibid.: 18).

<sup>20</sup> See (ibid.: 25f.).

<sup>21</sup> The examples of words listed in this section 1.3.1 have been compared with entries in dictionaries such as the etymological dictionary Kluge (201125), the Digital Dictionary of the German Language (DWDS) and those in the medical dictionary "Medizinischer Wortschatz" by Pera and Schmiedebach (20102).

<sup>22</sup> See Kluge (201125: 961).

<sup>23</sup> In German: "[...] probably via the French and English virus < Latin virus = mucus, juice, poison; genitive singular without ending; only particularly well-integrated foreign words of this type also have long genitive endings." (cf. ibid.).

<sup>24</sup> In German: "Virus n. Plur. Viren, [...] which exists as a parasite in living cells and usually acts as a pathogen (1st half of the 20th century), previously generally 'poison (substance), infectious substance' (2nd half of the 19th century), probably via earlier attested French and English virus (initially denoting external signs of disease such as 'pus, stench, poison', then in French late 17th century 'pathogen') from Latin *vīrus* n. 'thick liquid, mucus, juice, poison, stench, sharpness, bitterness', virulent adj. 'poisonous, purulent' (early 19th century), 'infectious, contagious, pathogenic' (late 19th century), probably via the equivalent English and French virulent from Latin *vīrulentus* 'poisonous', related to Latin virus [...]. (See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Virus>).



## Virulent

The adjective derives from the noun *Virus* with the meaning of ‘virulent’ (definition in German: *lebenskräftige und deshalb ansteckend wirkende Bakterien, Erreger, Krankheitskeime; ansteckend; übertragbar*; lit. ‘viable and therefore infectious bacteria, pathogens, pathogenic germs; infectious; transmissible’). The word came into German via terms used in French and English (virulent) at the end of the 19th century, whose roots are Latin (cf. *Virus*).<sup>25</sup>

## Epidemie vs. Pandemie

*Epidemie* (‘epidemics’) has Greek roots (Greek: *epidemia* (*epi-* / *ep-* ‘on, above’ and *demos* ‘people or population’) and is part of the German lexicon referring to human diseases. According to the definition in the DWDS ‘Digital Dictionary of the German Language’, the word’s meaning in German is specified as follows<sup>26</sup>:

“[...] a very high number of cases of a disease of the same origin found in people in a specific geographical area within a limited period of time.

Also, the word “pandemic” (German: *Pandemie*) has Greek roots and presents a combination of the prefix *pan* (‘all, everyone, complete, whole’) and *demos* (see above). Compared to “epidemic,” the meaning of “pandemic” is broader, meaning that ‘the spread of the disease is not limited in terms of either geographical area or time period’, and is therefore an ‘epidemic of large proportions’.<sup>27</sup> The use of “pandemic” with the meaning of ‘universal epidemic’ dates back to the 16th century and with the meaning of ‘diseases’ in a medical text from 1660, after the plagues of the Middle Ages<sup>28</sup>:

[...] Often in history [...], there is a technical word that is associated with a significant event. In this case, the word ‘pandemic’ is not only technical, but also belongs to standard general language. It will probably be the word we use in the future to refer to this period of coronavirus.

## Vakzin /Vakzination

In standard German vocabulary, the words *Vakzin* (‘vaccine’; in German also: *Impfstoff*) and *Vakzination* (‘vaccination’; in German also: *Impfung*) were used during the pandemic. The two synonyms whose origins are in other languages often appeared in the media<sup>29</sup>, partly because virologists used these technical terms in interviews.

### 1.4.2 Examples of Gallicisms

#### Impfkampagne

The word is composed of the root *Impf-* and the feminine noun *Kampagne*. According to the definition in the ‘DWDS’, the latter word first appeared in the Middle French period and is of Late Latin origin (*campus*: *campanius*, *campania*). The French word *campagne* originally meant ‘field, flat/level ground’ but was later adopted mainly in military contexts to refer to ‘land or areas for military action’ (17th century) and finally to (military) campaign’. It was then adopted in German in this sense from the time of Goethe (1792/93), who refers to France as *Campagne* in his writings. Over the centuries, the meaning of the word has expanded to other contexts, including industrial production (17th century), trade, and agriculture (19th century). In German, before the pandemic, it was often used in compound words in political or media contexts (*Wahlkampagne*, ‘election campaign’; *Pressekampagne*, ‘media/press campaign’). During the pandemic, the feminine compound term *Impfkampagne* (‘vaccination campaign’) was used to refer to ‘government actions to vaccinate the population against coronavirus’.

#### Triage

The neologism is a loanword (German: *Entlehnung*) from French in combination with other words (French: *Camp de Triage*, German: *Entsonderung in der Katastrophenmedizin; Patientensortierung in Notsituationen (Krieg; Katastrophen)*; lit. ‘sorting [of patients] in disaster medicine (wars; major disasters)’). The expression has been documented in German press texts with this meaning since the 1880s, as can be seen from the texts<sup>30</sup> analysed in the corpora of the Institute for German Language (“DeReKo”). During the Coronavirus pandemic, it had taken on the meaning of ‘classification, categorisation of patients according to the urgency and expected success of treatment’.<sup>31</sup> When it comes to treating COVID-19 patients, the rules for treatment with ventilators and decisions about which patients receive a ventilator and which do not are very difficult and painful.<sup>32</sup> As the pandemic evolved, the expression *finanzielle Triage* (‘financial triage’) was also used in German to refer to ‘obtaining money or non-repayable public financial aid’.

### 1.4.3 Examples of Anglicisms

During the pandemic, the words “lockdown” and “shutdown” became part of the everyday German language and are still known throughout Germany, referring to the early 2020s. However, their original meaning goes beyond what these words still represent in Germany so far. In America, for example, lockdowns are generally used when authorities close certain areas in emergency situations. This meaning applies to the previous Corona measures in Germany with restrictions, because in the spring of 2020, the country was not shut down across the board, nor was there a far-reaching curfew as in Italy or Spain. The relatively mild Corona measures in Germany, referred to as lockdowns and shutdowns, were later specified, adding attributes, i.e. “hard” (German: *hart*), “strong” (German: *scharf*) or “severe” (German: *streng*).

In German, the use of the term lockdown is documented in press texts<sup>33</sup> for the first time in the late 1990s and early 2000s in relation to blocking and control measures by authorities or the police, and was initially preceded by the adjective-participle “sogenannt-” (‘so-called’). According to the definition. 3 in Merriam-Webster, the word “lockdown”<sup>34</sup> means:

<sup>25</sup> “Virulent adj. ‘poisonous, purulent’ (early 19th century), ‘infectious, contagious, disease-causing’ (late 19th century), probably via English and French virulent, from Latin *vīrulentus* ‘poisonous’, related to Latin *vīrus* [...]” (See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Virus>).

<sup>26</sup> “Occurrence of a very large number of cases of disease with the same cause in people in a specific geographical area within a limited period of time”; (see <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Epidemie>).

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Pandemie>

<sup>28</sup> See Peter Sokolowski, Merriam-Webster (see “Merriam-Webster’s Top Word of 2020 Not A Shocker: Pandemic,” A. P.; <https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/merriam-websters-top-word-2020-not-shocker-pandemic>

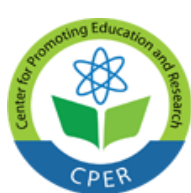
<sup>29</sup> The word has English origins and dates back to Latin, see definitions in Pera/Schmiedebach medical dictionary (20102: 108) and DWDS: “The word is derived from *variola vaccinae* [medical Latin for ‘cowpox’], whose pathogen was used by the English physician Edward Jenner (1749–1823) for immunization against smallpox [Latin] *variola*”; (see <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Vakzin>).

<sup>30</sup> The media texts analyzed come from “DeReKo” (*Deutsches Referenzkorpus*); the acronym stands for ‘German reference corpus’ of the Institute for German Language, Mannheim (IDS); see <https://cosmas2.ids-mannheim.de/cosmas2-web/>.

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Triage>

<sup>32</sup> Lit. English Translation: ‘Rules for treatment with ventilators; deciding which patients receive a ventilator and which do not’. Now also financial triage in order to receive subsidies.

<sup>33</sup> See DeReKo, IDS, Mannheim.



3. a temporary condition imposed by governmental authorities (as during the outbreak of an epidemic disease) in which people are required to stay in their homes and refrain from or limit activities outside the home involving public contact (such as dining out or attending large gatherings).

In relation to the coronavirus pandemic, “lockdown” in German had the following meaning:

[an] emergency action and measures whereby people/the population are temporarily prevented from entering or leaving a restricted area or building (e.g., a school) for a period of time specified by regional or local authorities or the central government.

#### Shutdown

In English language reference works, we find the entry “Shutdown” by the end of the 1970s, i.e. in Collins English Dictionary: shutdown n. 1. the closing of a factory, shop, etc.; to shut down (adv.) 2. to cease or cause to cease operation; [...] 5. (foll. by on or upon) Informal. to put a stop to; clamp down on.<sup>35</sup>

In the corpora of the German Language Institute, ”DeReKo,” we find the first texts containing this word in the 1990s, where it is highlighted in quotation marks: (1. *der Shutdown*, m). Based on the use of the words “shutdown” and “lockdown” before the coronavirus pandemic, differences in meaning can be highlighted, as illustrated by the following definitions (i.e. DWDS, 2020):

#### Lockdown<sup>36</sup>

‘sealing off; protecting an area in an emergency situation to avert danger; a measure by which persons in a dangerous situation are prevented from entering or leaving an area (e.g., school, retirement home, shop) or from carrying out an activity; the state caused by the widespread application of these measures, in which public life and business activity largely come to a standstill’.

#### Shutdown

‘Interruption or cessation of the operation of something.

a) [specifically] in the US: severe restriction or interruption of government services because they cannot be financed (temporarily)

b) [Information and telecommunications technology] Interruption or termination of all running processes on a digital device (computer or similar); temporary collapse of the digital infrastructure.

Summarising their meanings in German Covid vocabulary very briefly, the following differences between “shutdown” (the older English term) and “lockdown” are, i.e., *Shutdown* was mainly used in combination with verbs as *herunterfahren*, *schließen*, *suspendieren* (‘to stop, close, suspend’), whereas *Lockdown* was used with verbs as *abriegeln*, *sperren*, *schützen* (‘to block, lock, protect’). During the pandemic, some countries resorted to using these two words, perhaps in part to avoid the use of the very harsh restrictive word *Ausgangssperre* (‘curfew’). In the meantime, *both* terms are considered synonyms in German (‘combination of restrictions, measures, rules, curfew’ and, in some cases, ‘closure’).

#### Homeoffice

The compound noun *Homeoffice* was imported from English and integrated into the German language according to grammatical and orthographic principles. The assignment of the neuter gender was based on the principle of semantic similarity. In this case, the meaning of the second element, the word “office,” partially coincides with that of the German word *Büro*, which is neuter.<sup>37</sup> From a semantic point of view, however, it refers to ‘working from home’ (what in Italian, for example, would be “smart working”), and the German expressions *im Homeoffice arbeiten* or *von zu Hause aus arbeiten* both mean ‘working from home’. Due to the fact that the meaning of the term was originally different from that assigned to it during the coronavirus pandemic (Home Office in English: ‘Ministry of the Interior’), some authors also refer to pseudo-Anglicisms, as Eisenberg observes<sup>38</sup>

[...] It would probably be interesting to know which words were taken directly from other languages and which were formed in German with their respective lexical components. [...] First of all, it should be borne in mind that most *Latinisms* and *Greekisms* in contemporary German are not direct borrowings, but are “formations of words” of foreign origin. A word such as ‘Universitätspräsident’ (‘university president’) does not exist in Latin, just as the word ‘Chaostheorie’ (‘chaos theory’) does not exist in Greek.

#### Homeschooling

Originally, the English word meant that ‘children are being educated (at home) by their parents or by a private teacher’. During the restrictive measures to contain the pandemic (see “lockdown”) and therefore due to partial or total closures of schools, educational institutions, universities, kindergartens, and nurseries, the word “homeschooling” literally meant ‘teaching school from home’. In this context, i.e. to refer to (school) lessons that do not take place in the classroom and therefore without the presence of pupils and teaching staff, other words have also been formed, such as the compound masculine noun *Fernunterricht* and the verbal noun *Distanzlernen* (‘distance learning’) or the expression *digitaler Unterricht* (‘digital teaching’).

#### Superspreader

Since the term was borrowed from the English language, we look first at the respective meaning. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition<sup>39</sup>, it refers to:

An individual who is highly contagious and capable of transmitting a communicable disease to an unusually large number of uninfected individuals.

The meaning of this technical term, used informally in medicine, was then adapted in German to situations that arose during the pandemic, and the meaning was reported in the Digital Dictionary of the German Language<sup>40</sup>:

<sup>34</sup> See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lockdown> (12.12.2023).

<sup>35</sup> See Hanks (1979: 1350).

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Lockdown>

<sup>37</sup> According to Eisenberg (lit. translation: “when an Anglicism enters the German language, the first thing it is assigned is gender,” and in most monosyllabic Anglicisms, this usually occurs by semantic analogy, i.e., by comparing it with a German word with which it has a certain semantic affinity”. (cf. Eisenberg 20183: 29f.).

<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/superspreader>

<sup>40</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Superspreader>

A person who is infected with an infectious pathogen and contributes significantly to its spread through their above-average number of social contacts.

### 1.5 Compound words with mixed linguistic material

In addition to “pure” borrowings from other languages, there are also many formations composed partly of linguistic material from other languages and partly of existing components in German. We can classify these examples of words of mixed origin (Mischformen) into the following categories:

- a) mixed forms from Greek-Latin elements and German elements;
- b) mixed forms from French (and Latin and Greek) and German elements;
- c) mixed forms from English and German elements;
- d) mixed forms from English elements and elements of Greek-Latin origin.

The group with the most entries is group a), where we identified certain morphological and lexical characteristics, such as in the following examples:

#### *Überdispersion* (lit. ‘overdispersion’)

The word is composed of a root of Greek-Latin origin (*dispersio*) and a free morpheme of the German language, the affix (or prepositional prefix) *über* (‘above, on’). The meaning of its Latin root is<sup>41</sup>:

*dispersione* n. [from Latin *dispersio* -onis, derived from *dispergere* (see *disperse*), but understood, in most meanings, as derived from *disperse*]. – 1. To disperse or scatter; to be scattered.

According to the literally translated definition of DWDS<sup>42</sup>, it is a technical term used in physics or chemistry where it refers to:

[a] very fine distribution of one substance in another substance in such a way that the particles of the former are suspended in the latter.

Yet during the pandemic, the word *Überdispersion* was used in German in contexts, e.g., *Wenige Menschen stecken viele Menschen an und das passiert vor allem bei sogenannten „Cluster-Ereignissen“* (lit. ‘a few people infect many people, mainly during so-called “cluster events”’). In addition, in group a) (see above), we have classified four subcategories, i.e., (I, II, and III):

I. One of the two constituent units (C) is a word of Greek or Latin or Greco-Latin origin, and the other (C) is a compound noun, e.g., in: *Präsenz+gottesdienst* (‘religious service in person’); *Schnelltest+strategie* (‘rapid testing strategy’); *Feiertag+s+symptome* (‘holiday symptoms’).

The word *Feiertagssymptome* (pl.) is a mixed nominal compound consisting of: *Feier* (here: ‘holiday’) + *Tag* (‘day’), a connecting element ‘s’ and *Symptom* (word of Greek origin) with the inflectional morpheme ‘e’ (plural). It refers to the observation that case numbers were less meaningful on public holidays or during or after weekends because fewer people were tested during the holidays, and therefore fewer cases that tested positive for coronavirus were identified.

II. One of the two constituent units (C) is a derived noun, as in the following two examples:

#### *Risikobegegnung*

This is a derived noun with the nominal suffix -ung (*Begegn+ung*, ‘encounter’). According to the Corona Warning App, ‘risk encounters’ were encounters with a person who tested positive for coronavirus and exceeded the threshold for several measured values.

#### *Virenschleuder*

The derived noun has the derivational suffix -er (n., *Schleuder*, ‘sling’). The etymological definition in the Digital Dictionary of the German Language, DWDS, is as follows:

*Schleuder* f. ‘throwing device, medieval siege engine’, early New High German *slewder*, *schleuder* (15th century, the latter adopted by Luther into literary language), (...) Today, *Schleuder* (following the meaning of the verb) mainly stands for ‘centrifuge’, especially as a short form of *Wäscheschleuder*. *schleudern* Vb. ‘to throw with a slingshot, with momentum [...]’. (lit. ‘throwing device, medieval siege engine’ [...]).<sup>43</sup>

Since the early 1990s, both in relation to contagion and computer viruses, the colloquial word *Dreckschleuder* was coined (‘industrial enterprise or similar, which pollutes the air to a high degree with its emissions’).<sup>44</sup> The new compound *Virenschleuder* was formed in semantic analogy with *Dreckschleuder* in relation to the emission and (high) contagion of the coronavirus caused during certain events or situations.

III. One of the two constituent units (C) is a root, i.e., (*Impf-*; ‘vaccin-’), and a noun of Greek and Latin origin, or a mixed compound based on French and English origin together with German elements as follows:

#### *Impfkampagne*

The feminine noun composed of the root *Impf-* and the noun of Latin and French origin *Kampagne* was formed to refer to the various vaccination campaigns of the federal government in Germany.

#### *Impftourismus*

The masculine noun is composed of the root *Impf-* and the noun *Tourismus* (of Middle French origin with Greek-Latin roots), and literally means ‘vaccination tourism’. The word was formed in the second half of 2020 following the phenomenon of people in Germany traveling to another country not for vacation but primarily to receive the coronavirus vaccination there, as this was not yet possible in Germany.

### 1.6 Conversion or change of inflectional class (Konversion)

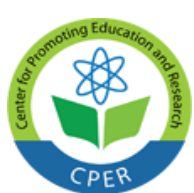
Among the German COVID vocabulary, we will examine examples with constituents that are derived from transformations of different lexical classes. These are mostly verbal nouns and “onomastic” nominal compounds, i.e., verbal nouns that refer to trades, professions, or simply social categories or groups of people. (see below category A). The examples represent an “active” type of word formation of nominal compounds

<sup>41</sup> See <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/dispersione/>

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Dispersion>

<sup>43</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Schleuder>

<sup>44</sup> See definition no. 2 in DWDS: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Dreckschleuder>



with the first constituent *Corona* and the second part consisting of a verbal noun, as in *Abstrich* (N, m) ('smear from a test') from *abstreichen* (V); *Auflage* (N, f) ('restriction, obligation') from *auflegen* (V); *Ausbruch* (N, m) ('outbreak') from *ausbrechen* (V); *Ausgaben* (N, pl.) ('expenditure, spending') from *ausgeben* (V); *Beschluss* (N, m) ('decision, resolution') from *beschließen* (V) and *Verstoß* (N, m) ('violation') from *verstoßen* (V). This group also includes basic constituents with the German prefix *Ge-*, whose origins date back to the Middle High German period, such as *Ge-schichte*<sup>45</sup> and *Ge-fahren* (pl.; sing. die Gefahr).

A. The first constituent unit (C) is the name of the virus, Coronavirus or Corona, and the second (C) is a noun derived with a prefix or a noun formed by conversion, i.e., a change in inflectional class, such as:

*Corona+Abstrich* ('COVID swab'); *Corona+Aufgabe* ('coronavirus rules'); *Corona+Ausbruch* ('outbreak (of the pandemic) of the coronavirus'); *Corona+Ausgaben* ('coronavirus expenses'); *Corona+Beschluss* ('decision on the coronavirus'); *Corona+Verstoß* ('violations of COVID rules'); *Corona+Gefahren* ('risks/dangers from COVID'); *Corona+Geschichte* ('history of/about the coronavirus'); *Corona+Leugner* ('COVID denier'); *Corona+Verweigerer* ('COVID objector'); *Corona+Infizierter/e* ('person infected with Coronavirus'); *Corona+Kritiker* ('coronavirus sceptic/s').

The last four examples of compound words with the first constituent *Corona* are within group A. (see above) are compounds with the derivational suffix *-er* (and *-erin* for females), such as in *Corona + Leugner* ('COVID denier') or *Corona+Verweigerer* ('COVID objector'). This nominal compound (from the German verb *verweigern*, 'to refuse/deny', in which the infinitive ending *-en* has been replaced with the affix *-er*) was formed on the model of the nominal compound that has existed in German since the 1970s (*Kriegsdienst+Verweigerer*; 'conscientious objector'). Suffixes such as *-er* for masculine and *-erin* for feminine are also found in the names of professions or occupations, as well as social categories, e.g., *Gärtner* ('gardener'), *Pförtner* ('doorman'), *Rentner* ('pensioner'), or *Partner*.<sup>46</sup> This is therefore an active type of conversion capable of forming new compounds. We can therefore see within the processes of word formation mechanisms for forming new words that proceed "in parallel" with structures already present in the German lexicon, i.e., by formal, lexical, and semantic affinity.

## 2. SEMANTIC ASPECTS AND POLYSEMY

Changes in meaning can occur in the form of extension, restriction, or shift in the meaning of a word or phrase. In the case of an extension of meaning, an existing word or phrase is linked to a new animate or inanimate referent to be named. The result of the change in meaning is as follows: the names now refer to different or other referents. In the case of COVID vocabulary, there have been changes in the meaning of words and phrases (such as "being positive" or "wearing a mask") that were already present in the German lexicon before the pandemic. An example of a *change in meaning* (shift) is the adjective *normal* ('normal'), which, before the pandemic, mostly had the connotation of 'habitual, usual' and 'according to the rule(s)'.<sup>47</sup> As the pandemic evolved, it was given the opposite meaning, i.e., 'before the pandemic'. In fact, the expression *Neue Normalität* means 'new normality', i.e., a 'normal' life under conditions dictated by the pandemic.

### 2.1 Examples of polysemy

An example of polysemy and extension of meaning is the word *Maske* ('mask'), which before the pandemic mostly meant 'face covering' during popular festivals such as carnival or on special occasions. During the pandemic, however, this term has taken on the meaning of 'protection of the mouth and nose,' and masks are now used exclusively to protect oneself and others from the coronavirus. This extension of meaning has subsequently given rise to new terms through morphological processes of composition (*Komposition*) such as *Maskenmuffel* (see 2.1.1) or *Maskengeschäft* ('mask business' but not 'mask shop') and many others. Another example of polysemy is the verb *herunterfahren* / *runterfahren* / *nach unten fahren*.

The verb or its truncated form (*runterfahren*), as well as the phrase *nach unten fahren*, are polysemous and therefore have several meanings, including a literal, original meaning that differs from those assumed later. The verb *herunterfahren* or *runterfahren* literally means 'to go down'. During the pandemic, another meaning of the verb has been used, which spread in Germany in the late 1960s when it was used in German press articles, initially with the paradigms highlighted in quotation marks, and in contexts such as steel production, where it refers to plants (blast furnaces) and mixers that were 'emptied' of their contents (German: *entleeren*) in order to be 'shut down' or 'closed' (German: *herunterfahren*). Since the 1970s, the verb *herunterfahren* has also been used in economic contexts to mean 'slowdown', for example, of the economic boom. During the coronavirus pandemic, *herunterfahren* is used with the meaning no. 3 ('to steadily decrease; to close; to stop; to slow down') and together with the proper names of countries, such as Deutschland, or with 'the country' (*das Land*), or with 'the economy' (*die Wirtschaft*), or with face-to-face teaching (*Präsenzunterricht*).

## 3. WORD GROUPS

In this last section, we will illustrate some examples of "free" and "fixed" word groups or combinations. The coronavirus lexicon also includes new combinations of words, so-called "word groups," such as the recurring use of certain words in combination with others. In some cases, these are phrases based on word group models already present in the German lexicon, while in other cases, certain lexical and semantic changes can be observed, such as internal additions or external additions to a word group. The additions or integrations come from the new coronavirus lexicon. Some of the new word combinations are presented as examples in this chapter, following a brief overview of the different classes involved.

### 3.1 Systematics of word groups

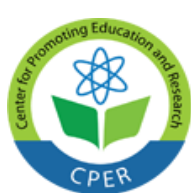
For the systematics of word groups in the coronavirus lexicon, we distinguish two main categories: "free word groups" and "fixed word combinations" (phraseologisms)<sup>48</sup>. "Free" word groups are characterized by transparency of each constituent's meaning (see 3.1.1). Fixed word combinations (phraseologisms) form the second category; their characteristics are detailed in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

<sup>45</sup> See Eisenberg (2006: 252).

<sup>46</sup> See Fleischer / Barz 1995: 158.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/normal#d-1-2-1>

<sup>48</sup> For references to "fixed word combinations" in this article, we will use the term *phraseologism/s* (pl.).



### 3.1.1 Examples of free word groups

As far as free or unbound word groups are concerned, we start with three examples of noun phrases (*substantivische Gruppen*) composed of an attributive adjective preceding a noun. The subsequent examples consist of verbal syntagmas.

#### *Vulnerable Menschen*

Before the pandemic, the German adjective *vulnerabel* ('vulnerable') was reserved for medical and scientific contexts. Its meaning is 'unstable, vulnerable, susceptible; not sufficiently protected from attacks, negative influences, or the like'. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic and in German press reports, *vulnerable Menschen* mainly referred to elderly people and people with certain health risks who were likely to suffer a severe course of coronavirus disease.

#### *Europäische Solidarität*

This combination of words refers to the new EU policy following the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the assumption of joint debt.

#### *Neuer Alltagswahnsinn* ('new everyday madness')

As a result of the prolonged coronavirus pandemic, living and working conditions changed fundamentally, leading to new living conditions and a "new" everyday life. Due to the nature, severity, and duration of the restrictions and changes, many people who worked from home during this period, while looking after and educating their children, taking care of the household, and possibly caring for relatives, were suffering from this "new everyday life" and referred to all this using the combination 'everyday madness'.

#### *Unter der Corona-Auszeit leiden* ('suffering from the coronavirus break')

This is an example of a partial lexical transfer based on the model of a "fixed phrase", e.g., *sich eine Auszeit gönnen* ('to treat oneself to a little vacation/time-out or downtime') with the addition of Corona ('COVID'), as it was a "forced break" linked to the pandemic. Other examples of verbal combinations are

#### *Die coronabedingte Auszeit nutzen*

The derived noun *Aus+Zeit* ('time-out') is a calque from English sports terminology, generally used with the indefinite article (*eine Auszeit*) to refer to a break or pause, often for relaxation or reflection. This aspect of a "break" extends to other contexts, such as professional development or household tasks (German: *zur Weiterbildung / zum Aufräumen*). Additionally, free word groups can include acronyms and verbs, as shown in the following examples:

#### *AHA (+L+A) einhalten*

The two acronyms (AHA) and (+L+A) are followed by *einhalten* (V, 'to maintain, to respect'). It is a calque of mathematical or scientific language, characterized by acronyms and symbols such as "+". The mixed structure with a sequence of initial letters of words seems to be "selected" in order to form a "pronounceable" acronym. It represents the German words: *Abstand halten* ('keep/respect distance'), *Hygiene beachten* ('observe hygiene'), *Alltagsmaske tragen* ('wear a normal mask'), *regelmäßiges Lüften* ('ventilate regularly'), *die Corona-Warn-App nutzen* ('use the COVID contact tracing app'). These behavioral rules were disseminated throughout Germany and other countries to stem the spread of the pandemic. The acronym is pronounced linearly and as a word and is identical to the familiar German exclamation *Aha* (written with only the first letter capitalized), which is used in spoken language to signal to another person that you have understood.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2 Modifications of fixed word combinations (*phraseologisms*)

In this final section, we will draw on examples that either show a lexical difference (i.e., with or without the component 'corona') or a structural and syntactic difference, and can be distinguished between examples of 'lexical units' and 'phrases and syntagmas'. Lexical studies classify word combinations into different types based on their forms, but also on differences in usage.<sup>50</sup> According to a classical perception of phraseology back to the early 1990s, the spectrum of fixed word combinations ("phraseologisms") is as follows<sup>51</sup>:

*Phraseologisms* consist of at least two words, but can also be very long and complex constructions (*polylexicity*); they possess a degree of *fixity* which, although variable, does not allow, as a rule, the replacement of constituents within a phrase; however, "modifications" may occur (see 3.2 and 3.3).

They have a so-called "unitary" meaning that cannot be derived from that of the individual constituents that make them up.

At the semantic level, a further distinction can be made between the unitary meaning and the different meanings of the components of a group of words, i.e., between the *literal* and the *figurative* meanings. We understand the literal meaning to be the "proper" and "concrete" meaning of the components, while the figurative meaning evokes an image that goes beyond the literal one, thus attributing a meaning to the group that makes it a *phraseologism*. For example, the phrase *die Notbremse ziehen* ('to pull the emergency brake') is a common group of words that can have a 'literal' meaning derived from that of its individual components in this sense: 'to act by pulling the emergency brake of a means of transport in a situation of extreme emergency in order to stop it'. However, this phrase can also be used in contexts outside of transport or vehicles and without involving someone who 'pulls the brake'. We can therefore 'extrapolate' the meaning of the image of 'a sudden, radical action, often taken at the last moment to save oneself from an emergency situation' using the words 'pull the emergency brake'.

With regard to the meanings of a phraseologism, we also distinguish between transparency and opacity. By transparency (German: *Transparenz*), we mean phrases whose figurative meaning is minimal and therefore transparent. On the other hand, if its meaning is difficult to trace due to the need for additional extralinguistic, cultural, or contextual knowledge, we call this phraseologism opaque (German: *opak*).<sup>52</sup> This aspect is also linked to the degree of idiomaticity, i.e., the greater the degree of opacity, the greater the idiomaticity. According to Burger, when there is a discrepancy between the literal meaning and the phraseological meaning of the entire construction, the latter is an "idiomatic construction," and we also speak of "motivation" (German: *Motivierbarkeit*) in this regard.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See the definition in the Digital Dictionary of the German Language: "[...] expresses a feeling of sudden understanding in response to an explanation."

<sup>50</sup> See Duden (2020: 9-10).

<sup>51</sup> See Burger et al. (1992: 10).

<sup>52</sup> See Burger (2015: 69).

<sup>53</sup> See ibid: 67.



### 3.3 Word combinations with “Corona”

*Corona+Schlinge* (‘noose’) + *sich zuziehen* (‘to close’)

The expression “*die Schlinge zieht sich zu*” refers to a situation in which the image of a “noose” tightening around the neck is transferred, causing a feeling of suffocation and danger to life. We have collected examples with the phrase updated to the pandemic situation using the name *Corona* as the first constituent in the new nominal formation “*Coronaschlinge*.” This addition describes a situation in which people (or others) feel suffocated or are in danger of dying due to the coronavirus pandemic and therefore risk not surviving.<sup>54</sup>

Other examples of idioms “adapted” to situations caused by the coronavirus and illustrating its dangers both to everyday life and to the survival of people (or things) are *das Coronaschwert + kreisen/schweben über jmdm./etwas* (lit. ‘the sword of COVID hovers over someone/something’); *in die endlose Corona+Starre verfallen* (lit. ‘to fall into endless COVID stagnation/rigidity’); *aus dem Corona+Trott herausgerissen werden* (lit. ‘to be pulled out of the routine/monotony or boredom caused by the coronavirus’). Examples of phraseologisms with verbs as fundamental constituents are as follows:

*Das / ein Corona-Hilfspaket schnüren*

The meaning of this expression lies in the fact that the German government took financial and other measures to support the economy during the coronavirus pandemic. The phraseologism integrated with *Corona* refers to the meaning of *ein Hilfspaket schnüren*, i.e., ‘to put together aid’, where ‘the package’ means ‘a set, unit, bundle of different related proposals or measures, including (sales) offers or similar’. [55]

*Die coronagebeutelte Wirtschaft (wieder) aufrichten*

The “new” compound adjective *coronagebeutelt* (‘in tatters, in pieces due to the coronavirus’) refers to the economy, which is suffering during the COVID crisis. The semantic basis is the participial adjective *gebeutelt* of the verb *beuteln* (‘to make folds’). The meaning of the participial adjective in combination with ‘economy’ (*gebeutelte Wirtschaft*) is ‘an economy in crisis that is constantly under threat’. In the pandemic crisis, the phrase has been expanded by the verb *aufrichten* (‘to put on one’s feet’), and the phrase therefore means ‘to put (or put back) on one’s feet the economy constantly threatened by the coronavirus crisis’.

### 3.4 Word combinations without “Corona”

The German verbal phrase *Abstand halten* generally means “keep your distance.” During the pandemic, it was officially stipulated that interpersonal distance must be at least 1.5 meters. Formally, the two components cannot be replaced with other lexical elements (for example, replacing the verb *halten* with synonyms such as the German verbs *wahren* or *respektieren*), but there is a variant of this phrase with the compound *Mindestabstand* (‘minimum distance’) and the verb *wahren* (‘to respect’). During the coronavirus pandemic, compliance with the 1.5-meter distance rule was considered one of the most important ways to protect oneself and others from infection with the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, and the German expression *Abstand halten* was mostly used to refer to this.

The word combinations *am Limit / am Anschlag (sein/arbeiten)* have adverbial grammatical functions and refer to work in hospitals or intensive care units where staff were literally working at the limit of their abilities and the facilities themselves. The phrase “the staff is at the limit” means at the limit of endurance or of its strength or abilities. The expression ‘working at the limit’ is used in American English, and this could therefore be a calque of this American expression. In German, we also have the phrase *am Anschlag* (lit. ‘to the stop’) to indicate an “extreme limit of endurance.” It is based on the image of a regulator/rotator that is stopping and preventing further rotation until it inevitably signals ‘the end’. This image of having reached the “end” was especially transferred to the situation of medical staff in intensive care units, but also to other ward personnel, to signal their great suffering due to the coronavirus pandemic and the difficulties of surviving in those areas.

### 3.5 Modifications of phraseologisms

Many phraseologisms have a fixed order in their form, due to both semantic and syntactic restrictions. However, there are many examples in the German coronavirus lexicon that feature lexical changes, such as the replacement of terms with those from the new Covid vocabulary, or syntactic variations (mainly additions of other lexical elements). For example, while in the German expression *die Lage in den Griff bekommen* (‘to get the situation under control’) the noun *Lage* can be replaced with *Coronasituation*, in the expression *seinen Alltag verlieren* (lit. ‘lose one’s daily life / one’s everyday routine’), replacing a constituent or changing its number (\**sein alltägliches Leben einbüßen*) would no longer sound right and might not be accepted by speakers. However, there are many cases in which lexical changes (i.e., synonymy) and even syntactic changes have occurred, with the addition of modifiers, such as adverbs, to adapt idioms to the situation and realities that have arisen with the Coronavirus pandemic. Below are some examples of changes in certain verbal constructions.

*In den Lockdown gehen*

The regions in Germany with the highest infection rates were closed. Very strict public order measures were applied, such as curfews, school closures, together with restrictions on contact between people, to prevent the spread of the pandemic. “Going into lockdown” (German: *in den Lockdown gehen*) referred to these circumstances and was based on existing word combinations such as “going on vacation/maternity leave/retirement,” which imply a period of rest and protection, and in case of lockdown, going “into isolation”.

*jmdm ein Impfangebot machen*

The expression literally means ‘to make a vaccination offer to someone’ and refers to the federal government notifying citizens of an appointment for coronavirus vaccination. It is an extension of an existing fixed expression: ‘to make an offer to someone’ (German: *jmdm ein Angebot machen*).

## DISCUSSION

Comparing the COVID crisis with previous eras, we are reminded of the plague, i.e., the ‘contagious disease’ of the Middle Ages (Latin *pestis*; meaning ‘contagious disease; pestilence’, in Late Latin ‘the epidemic’). Among the phraseologisms, we still know the colloquial phraseological comparison in German: *wie die Pest*<sup>55</sup> (‘like the plague’) or *jmdm die Pest wünschen* (‘to wish someone the plague’: ‘all the evil

<sup>54</sup> See SRF (Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen; ‘Swiss Radio and TV’), *Corona-Schlinge im Schweizer Sport zieht sich wieder zu*; (19.10.2020).

<sup>55</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Pest>



imaginable; the greatest misfortune') or the colloquial phrase *die Pest haben* ('to have the plague': 'to have bad luck'). The term *Pestilenz* ('pestilence') dates back to the 17th century ('ruin, misfortune, rapidly spreading danger'); in early times in the Near East, pestilence was mainly applied to 'creeping, protracted disease, infirmity'.<sup>56</sup> The German word *Plage* ('plague') also refers to the diseases of times past. It was associated with the plagues sent by God in the Old Testament. Its meaning is 'torment, pestilence'. In German, we know the colloquial extension of its meaning in: *seine Plage mit jemandem haben* ('[to have one's] plague with something/someone'). We associate the word in particular with (arduous, heavy) work, (great) effort; having difficulties with someone or something. [58]

## CONCLUSION

Corona dominated our lives and our discourse for at least a couple of years, so it is not surprising that a plethora of new words and lexical structures emerged. In German, these were mainly compounds with specific constituents, but also groups of words with new formations, syntactic structures, and phrases that acquired a different meaning than before the coronavirus pandemic. Through the mechanisms described above, the vocabulary of German was temporarily enriched by extending the meanings of words we already knew before the pandemic, integrating words from other languages, or creating words with linguistic structures from other languages, or through morphological measures, which are typical mechanisms of lexical expansion. These words with their new meanings, together with a few neologisms, were found as constituents either in (unbound) word combinations but also in fixed word combinations such as modified or integrated phraseologisms. In the wake of the pandemic, scientific or medical terms, along with terms for vaccines and tests designed to save patients' lives. All of this was part of a new vocabulary that people needed in order to communicate and stay informed.

What will remain of the coronavirus pandemic in the German language? In common usage, the word *Pandemie* is still used in post-Corona times, as a reference to *those* times and to the crisis caused by the coronavirus, and similarly, the adverbial phrases "in the time of Corona", the Anglicisms *Homeoffice* and *Lockdown*, and their use in adverbial phrases such as *im Homeoffice / Lockdown*. These lexical structures can be identified in word formation processes as well as in word groups and phraseologisms, which sometimes function 'parallel' to structures already existing in the German vocabulary due to formal, lexical, semantic, and phraseological similarities. The fact that most of the 'coronavirus lexicon' has not been permanently incorporated into the German vocabulary is now part of linguistic history.

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<sup>56</sup> See <https://www.dwds.de/wb/Plage>