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THE ROLE OF OFFICIAL DISCOURSE IN THE FORMATION AND STANDARDIZATION OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC NEOLOGISMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of official discourse in the formation, standardization, and semantic development of COVID-19 pandemic neologisms in English and Uzbek. It explores how official communication contributed to the dissemination, codification, and normalization of newly emerged lexical units during the pandemic. The findings reveal that official discourse functioned as a key mechanism in establishing terminological consistency and promoting the widespread acceptance of pandemic-related vocabulary. The study further demonstrates that official discourse accelerated the integration of pandemic neologisms into the language system by reducing lexical variation and encouraging the adoption of standardized forms.

Keywords

COVID-19 pandemic, neologisms, official discourse, lexical standardization, terminology, semantic change, English, Uzbek, language evolution, discourse analysis.

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Introduction: During the COVID-19 pandemic, official discourse became one of the communicative arenas where the functional transformation of language was clearly evident. While mass media facilitated the popularization of pandemic-era neologisms and their entry into everyday speech, official discourse—through government statements, documents from health organizations, legislative acts, and institutional communication channels—ensured their standardization and acquisition of terminological status. An analysis of English and Uzbek language data indicates that the stabilization of new lexical units during the pandemic occurred primarily within the sphere of official communication.

In linguistics, official discourse is defined as a form of communication generated by institutional authority that serves to regulate social behavior. Highlighting the significant role of official communication in shaping linguistic norms, N. Fairclough says: "Institutional discourse regulates social practice through language."[1] During the COVID-19 period, this process manifested itself particularly through the rapid standardization of pandemic-related terminology.

Methodology: In official English-language discourse, terms such as lockdown, social distancing, self-isolation, shielding, contact tracing, community transmission, herd immunity, mask mandate, and stay-at-home have become the terminological foundation for government policy and sanitary measures.

In official English discourse, the term "self-isolation" was actively used as a key element of pandemic-related communication. This term signified the necessity for an individual to isolate themselves from others for a certain period upon exhibiting symptoms of the illness or following contact with an infected person. For

[1]Fairclough N. Language and Power. – 2nd ed. – London; New York: Routledge, 2001. –P. 38.

instance, official statements from the UK government frequently repeated phrases such as: ”You must self-isolate if you have symptoms of coronavirus.” As a result of this repeated official usage, the term became an integral part of public discourse.

Some new pragmatic units also emerged in official English discourse during the pandemic. For instance, the phrase “new normal” was widely used to describe the altered landscape of post-pandemic social life. Although this term originally belonged to economic and political discourse, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it rose to the level of a conceptual term defining public health and daily routines. According to Robert Entman, a discursive frame determines how reality is perceived: “framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality.”[2] From this perspective, the ”new normal” served to interpret the pandemic not merely as a temporary event, but as a long-term social transformation.

In Uzbek official discourse, the formation of pandemic-era neologisms occurred primarily through translation, terminological adaptation, and institutional standardization. Specifically, terms such as karantin (quarantine), , ijtimoiy masofa (social distancing), o’zini yakkalash (self-isolation), masofaviy ta’lim, (remote learning), niqob rejimi (mask mandate or mask regime), sanitariya-gigiyena qoidalari (sanitary-hygienic rules), pandemiya to’lqini (pandemic wave), and koronavirus infeksiyasi (coronavirus infection) became actively normalized in the statements and official communications of government agencies, the healthcare system, and special commissions. For instance, in information released by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the phrase “o’zini yakkalash” (self-isolation) was employed as the functional equivalent of the English term “self-isolation.” This term became a key element in official recommendations regarding sanitary requirements. Although this phrase was rarely used in the language prior to the pandemic, it quickly attained the status of a standard lexical unit. Similarly, the term “niqob rejimi” (mask mandate) is also regarded as a product of official pandemic discourse. This term emerged as an administrative concept denoting the obligation of citizens to use protective equipment in public places. Here, the ”regime” component reinforces the sense of regulatory restriction, highlighting the directive nature of official discourse. Emphasizing that the primary function of official language from a pragmatic perspective is to regulate social behavior, Sh. Safarov uttered: “The pragmatic essence of speech is revealed in its communicative purpose.”[3]

Metaphorical units also played a significant role in the use of pandemic-era neologisms within official discourse. Government statements in English frequently employed war-related metaphors, such as “fight against coronavirus,” “frontline healthcare workers,” and “battle with COVID-19”.

Similarly, metaphorical constructs such as “virusga qarshi kurash”(fighting the virus), “pandemiyaga qarshi safarbarlik” (mobilization against the pandemic), “shifokorlar oldingi safda” (doctors on the front lines) were actively employed in official Uzbek discourse. Susan Sontag[4] has argued that portraying disease as “dush-man” (an “enemy”) in medical discourse - a military metaphor - heightens societal pressure. Such an approach leads to the stigmatization of and negative attitudes toward those afflicted by the disease. However, amidst the pandemic, these metaphors served as pragmatic tools to foster social solidarity and mobilization.

Results: A comparative analysis of official English and Uzbek discourse reveals that terminological innovation in English largely occurred through internal word-formation processes and the semantic reinterpretation of existing terms. In contrast, a significant portion of the new terminology in Uzbek emerged through translation, calquing, and the phonetic-graphic adaptation of international terms. For instance, terms such as “kontaktlarni aniqlash” (identifying contacts) for “contact tracing,” “ijtimoiy masofa saqlash” (maintaining social distance) for “social distancing,” and “masofaviy ta’lim” (remote education) for “remote learning” were adopted.

Furthermore, official discourse activated mechanisms that facilitated the standardization of pandemic-era vocabulary. Consequently, newly emerged lexical units stabilized into normative forms, and their usage became uniform within the sphere of official communication. This process accelerated the integration of pandemic-era neologisms into the language system. Certain units that were initially used in various forms eventually settled

[2]Entman R.M. Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm // Journal of Communication. 1993. Vol. 43, No. 4. – P. 52.
[3]Safarov Sh. Pragmalingvistika. – Toshkent: O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2008. – B.41.
[4]Sontag S. Illness as Metaphor. – New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978. – P.94.

into a single normative shape; for instance, while the Uzbek language offered variants such as “o‘zini izolyatsiya qilish” and “izolyatsiyalanish”, the phrase “o‘zini yakkalash” (self-osolation) subsequently emerged as the more widely used normative form. This development is interpreted as a natural outcome of terminological selection and the standardization of discourse.

Conclusion: During the COVID-19 pandemic, official discourse served as a primary arena for the standardization and semantic clarification of pandemic-related neologisms, as well as for their official recognition and adoption in both English and Uzbek. While the enrichment of terminology and the semantic reinterpretation of words predominated in English, the processes of translation and the creation of functional equivalents were more pronounced in Uzbek. The experience of both languages demonstrates that, amidst a global crisis like the pandemic, official communication acts as a key factor in the evolution of the language system.

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