

## COVID-19 and the media language

### From a health crisis to a terminological crisis

### كوفيد-19 ولغة الاعلام: من أزمة صحية إلى أزمة اصطلاحية

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**Abstract:** Since the arrival of the coronavirus, new terms have been created and flourished in the media language influencing the everyday conversations of people all over the world. The purpose of our research paper is to discuss and analyse the phenomenon of the intra and interlingual terminological variation and confusion that affected the use of terminology related to the COVID-19 pandemic by media language in the context of the current Global Health Crisis (GHC). Results obtained from the terminological comparative analysis show not only a terminological crisis rise in mediatic discourses, but it also extends to online multilingual COVID-19 glossaries.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 health crisis; media language; terminology crisis; terminological analysis; standardization.

ملخص: تهدف هذه المداخلة العلمية إلى مناقشة وتحليل ظاهرة المصطلحات الجديدة المتعلقة بجائحة كوفيد-19 والتي اكتسحت لغة الإعلام، وأثرت في المحادثات اليومية للناس في جميع أنحاء العالم. محدثة ما نسميه بأزمة اصطلاحية. تجلت في الخلط والتعدد المصطلحي في اللغة ذاتها، وما بين اللغات للمصطلحات المتعلقة بكوفيد-19، في ظل الأزمة الصحية العالمية الراهنة. لا تنم النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها من التحليل المصطلحي المقارن، عن تفاقم أزمة اصطلاحية في الخطاب الاعلامي- فقط- وإنما تتعدى ذلك إلى المسارد الرقمية لجائحة كوفيد-19 متعددة اللغات؛ الكلمات المفتاحية: أزمة كوفيد-19 الصحية؛ لغة الاعلام؛ أزمة اصطلاحية؛ التحليل المصطلحي؛ توحيد المصطلحات.

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## 1. Introduction:

In this contribution, we have been interested in vocabulary and terms that have increased in the media language during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are dealing with the phenomenon of terminological variation and confusion that has affected the media language simultaneously with the spread of the Global Health Crisis (GHC) imposed by the current coronavirus (2019-nCoV) since its appearance in Wuhan. And which is still continuing to surge across the world, with its new variants: Delta and Omicron. Over this terminological and conceptual confusion, we think it is imperative to take account of this ambiguity not only in the intralingual context but in the interlingual one. For the reason that in the field of terminology, terms should be used unambiguously to refer to clearly delineated concepts in order to assure unambiguous communication. (*Felber, Helmut 1984:31*). The objective of our research is to collect compare and examine the most frequently used COVID-19 terminology in the media language. Using an interlingual (English, French, and Arabic) comparative analysis in order to: ensure a good understanding of the concepts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and promote the appropriate use of the terms which designate these concepts.

## 2. Literature review:

### 2.1 What does the COVID-19 term exactly mean?

COVID-19 is the name of the disease caused by the Sars-CoV2 coronavirus, the one that concerns us today in this contribution. In the beginning, it was called "new coronavirus 2019", or "2019-nCov", but the World Health Organization (WHO) renamed it "Covid-19" in mid-February: "Co" for corona, "vi" for the virus, and "d" for "disease» (*Timothy Z, 2020:11*). The disease and the virus, therefore, have different names, such as HIV for the virus and AIDS for the disease. However, the media discourse is still often confused between the two terms, using one of them as a synonym for the other.

### 2.2 COVID-19 and Global Health Crisis:

The Global Health Crisis (GHC) refers to a situation in which a catastrophic number of people are dying of neglected diseases. (*De Campos, T. 2017:27*). The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced till now. Since its emergence in Wuhan late last year, the virus has spread all over the world. Despite the almost miraculous development of effective vaccines against

COVID-19 in 2020, the virus continued to spread and cases are rising daily causing what we call now a Global Health Crisis but COVID-19 is much more than a health crisis!!!?

### 2.3 Media language:

Media language is defined as any given media text(form) used to communicate an idea, message, image, etc. (*Sally J, 2009:45*) In this research paper, we examine the terms related to COVID-19 used by media practitioners and institutions in the context of the current Global Health Crisis. For the purposes of this study, media language is a framework for discussion of the ways the media communicates Intra and interlingual terminology related to the COVID-19 pandemic to audiences.

### 2.4 Terme and terminology standardization:

In its first definition, the word term means “a word or expression used in relation to a particular subject, often used to describe something official or technical.” (*Cambridge dictionary/English/term*).

Moreover, it can also be a symbol (€, @) or a formula (CO<sub>2</sub>). Terms can be similar to words in ordinary language. yet, what makes terms different from words in ordinary language is the specific and particular meaning that they have in their context or specialized language. (*Wright, S. & Budin, G.1997:56*) Terminology standardization is a process to ensure that terms conform to specific standards and criteria: linguistically correct; reflect, as far as possible, the characteristics of the concept which it represents; concise; able to generate other forms; only one term for a single concept. (*Richard A.1988*).

#### 2.4.1 Terminological analysis:

The terminological analysis is based on the identification of terms whether they are: Word, phrase, symbol, or formula designating a concept that is a unit of knowledge specific to a field of research. Also called a terminological unit, to certify its use with precise references, by distinguishing the correct use from the erroneous use, and to recommend or advise against certain uses in order to facilitate a specialized scientific communication without ambiguity. (*Pavel, S & Nolet, D. 2001:35*).

### 3. Research question:

Ever since COVID-19 emerged in December 2019 and the World Health Organization

declared a pandemic in March 2020, ([Http://WHO \(COVID-19\) Homepage](http://WHO (COVID-19) Homepage)) our knowledge of the disease and the resulting public health crisis has kept evolving, and so has the media language used to talk about it. Effective communication is important: everyone needs to be able to understand the terms related to COVID-19 and use them consistently. What has been apparent in the mass media is that the inaccurate interchanging of COVID-19 related terms was causing much confusion triggering what we call a terminological crisis. In this research paper, it is a question to analyse and discuss the nature of this terminological crisis and how do we deal with it?

#### **4. Research purpose and methodology:**

For the purpose of this research contribution, a methodological framework has been set out, on the basis of intra and interlingual terminological analysis in English, French, and Arabic. First of all, from a general point of view, we wanted to make the vocabulary in relation to COVID-19 as accessible to people as possible (editors, translators, writers, people, etc.). By consulting the comparative terminological list, readers will be able to enrich, confirm or modify their knowledge of terms related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, from a terminological point of view, we wanted to contribute to the enrichment of an already existing resource through a contextual terminological analysis based on terminological extraction of words related to COVID-19 health crises; presented in the form of a trilingual English, French, and Arabic terminological list. This involves constructing in the form of a table a list presenting the terminological analysis of the term COVID-19 taken in its mediatic context. The table will have three columns: one to name the sections and then one per language (see below). It will therefore consist of several lines to fill in (in each of the three languages) the following headings: term, definition, source of the definition, etc. The parametrization of these terms in question is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Antra and Interlingual terminological analysis for the most frequent Covid-19 terms used in media language**

Term / Definition	English designations	French designations	Arabic designations
<b>Coronavirus:</b> A genus of viruses of the family Coronaviridae that causes respiratory or gastrointestinal diseases in a variety of vertebrates.	Coronavirus /Coronavirus disease/CoV /2019-nCoV /2019-nCoV ARD /COVID-19 /COVID-19 disease	Coronavirus /CoV /Maladie à coronavirus 2019/ COVID-19 (n-f)/ (n-m)	كورونا /كورونا فايروس فايروس كورونا /كورونا المستجد - الفايروس التاجي /المستجد-كوفيد-19
<b>Confirmed case:</b> A person that meets all the established criteria of the case definition for a disease or whose condition is confirmed by at least one laboratory method.	Confirmed case	Cas confirmé/avéré	حالات مؤكدة/حالات ثبت اصابتها بالفايروس /بالعدوى /بكورونا /بالفايروس التاجي /بالفايروس المستجد
<b>Herd immunity:</b> The resistance of a group to the spread of an infectious disease based on the resistance to infection of a high proportion of individual members of the group.	Herd immunity Group immunity	Immunité collective/ de groupe	مناعة القطيع/المناعة الجماعية/الجمعية /المجتمعية
<b>Pandemic:</b> An epidemic occurring worldwide or over a very wide area, crossing international borders and usually affecting a large number of people.	Pandemic/Epidemic COVID-19 pandemic COVID-19 epidemic Coronavirus pandemic/epidemic	Pandémie/Épidémie Pandémie de COVID-19/ de Coronavirus- Epidémie de COVID-19/de coronavirus	جانحة/وباء-وباء عالمي / كورونا العالمي / الكوفيد 19 العالمي -جانحة عالمية/كورونا / كوفيد 19
<b>Quarantine:</b> A measure to prevent the spread of an infectious disease in which a healthy person who may have been exposed to an infected person is isolated during the incubation period of the disease.	Quarantine/Isolation/ Lockdown/Confinement	Quarantaine/Isolement / Confinement - Mettre/ Placer en quarantaine	الحجر /العزل الحجر الصحي / المنزلي العزل الصحي / المنزلي
<b>Social distance:</b> A distance determined by public health authorities should be maintained between people to prevent the spread of an infectious disease.	Social distance/distancing Physical barrier/ distance/distancing	Distance sociale/ sanitaire/physique/ de sécurité-Barrière physique /sociale/ sanitaire/ de sécurité-Distanciation physique/sociale/ sanitaire/ de sécurité Éloignement physique/sociale/ sanitaire/ de sécurité	التباعد الاجتماعي/الجسدي مسافة / مساحة الأمان المسافة /المسافة الصحية المسافة /المسافة الشخصية المسافة /المساحة الجسدية

Source: Definitions taken from <https://www.btb.termiumpplus.gc.ca/publications/covid19-eng.html#>.

## 5. Analysis and discussion:

We can see through the intra and the interlingual terminological list presented in the table above and according to scientific definitions provided by the World Health Organization

(WHO) with the collaboration of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that:

- The impact of the Corona pandemic was not limited to human health and their social and economic life only, but also to the languages in which they speak.
- Terms related to the COVID-19 pandemic still do not have today definitive and specific designations, unanimously accepted by all. It corresponds whether in language: English, French or Arabic, to a generic name given to the most common Corona terms (such as quarantine, confirmed case) Sometimes, it is presented as a word for word equivalent /literal translation or calque (such as in social distance/distanciation social/تباعد اجتماعي).
- Therefore, the terminology under discussion is characterised by a high degree of dependency on the English language;
- The multiplication of designations given to each term in question in English as well as in French and Arabic is due to the suddenness of the pandemic, which left no time for terminologists to propose standardized terms such as in the term "social distancing". In which the WHO has suggested using the term "physical distancing" instead of "social distancing" because it is a physical separation that prevents transmission, but people should remain socially connected via technology. But interlingual media language still uses the term social distancing rather than "physical distancing" (As shown in Table 1);
- Moreover, the same term" social distancing/ social distance" and quarantine, their use in English at first refer to the "intentional separation/العزل او الحجر المؤسسي" of a person from others, but today they refer to maintaining a physical distance "a safe distance" between people to avoid infection. As the "quarantine" on the infected person started relying on "institutional quarantine" when the numbers were limited and turned into a "home quarantine" with the increase in numbers;
- From the table above and their use in media language, we can see a real confusion between the two terms: "pandemic" and "epidemic", after the World Health Organization and with the difficulty of controlling this virus decided to launch the name "pandemic" because this term is associated with a rise in the number of deaths compared to the epidemic, however, mediatic discourse continues to use them as a synonym;
- Another terminological variation, which affects intra and interlingual terminological dynamism with the term "herd immunity" that some found it immoral in

terms of name and connotation in Arabic (مناعة القطيع) such as in other languages, others suggested (*community immunity/المناعة الجماعية*) as an alternative to it;

Regarding these terminological and conceptual confusions and in the absence of linguistic management and terminological standardization, we believe that it is imperative to take this form of ambiguity into consideration in media language as well as in scientific production.

## 6. Conclusion:

The focus of this research paper was to discuss and analyse the phenomenon of variation and confusion in terminology related to the COVID-19 pandemic in media language communication in English, French, and Arabic. A general observation in this research paper was that terminological variation appearing in English as a global language and dominant language tends to be reflected in the translation's French and Arabic COVID-19 terms. In other words: decisions with respect to translations of concepts in other languages were very much influenced by lexical/terminological choices in the English language.

An important outcome of this study was the observation that the COVID-19 pandemic exploded the problem of the term and its neologism as never before in the global intra and interlingual terminological system. Moreover, the terminological analysis shows that the multiplicity of equivalents representing the term COVID-19 is not limited only to the Arabic language, but there are several terminological forms and structures in other foreign languages, in English or French.

It is obvious that media language is fundamentally characterized by terminological dynamism, which emerges both at the linguistic level – with different terms used to refer to individual COVID-19 concepts – and at the conceptual level, where different conceptualizations of the same COVID-19 terms are reflected. From the intralingual perspective, the examination of the terminology extracted has shown that the terminological variation has affected either the linguistic aspect (*denominative variation as in quarantine/isolation/lockdown/confinement* العزل/الحجر) and the conceptual aspect (conceptual variation as in pandemic/epidemic) of terminology.

Whether from a multilingual perspective, COVID-19 terminology has turned out to be characterized by different degrees of interlingual equivalence commonly based on transcription or borrowing (*as in coronavirus/coronavirus/كورونا فيروس*). As well as the use of a descriptive or self-explanatory translation: It uses generic terms (related to COVID-19) to

convey the meaning, word for word translation, or calque (as it mentioned in the above discussion of results).

To the above-cited effects, we provide some suggestions to deal with this terminological crisis:

- More conceptual and terminological precision should be given to the term in its original language at first and then to the other languages.
  - More historical etymological studies of foreign terms should be established allowing a reorganization of studies going from concept to term.
  - Organizations/institutions of terminological harmonization and a specialized scientific translation in consultation with relevant Government authorities in the Arab world should be established.
  - Encourage scientific research in the field of terminology and the language industry for the digitization of specialized content and the creation of specialized terminology databases.
- Therefore, information technology provides real help to develop multilingual COVID-19 glossaries; from acquiring information sources, analyzing lexical material, documenting terms, publishing lists of terms, and assisting lexicographers in using general and specialized dictionaries and glossaries to help scientists, editors, translators, and people.

In conclusion, future contributions may take into consideration several directions, in order to optimize the analysis of terminology about the COVID-19 health crisis. Since the disease has spread globally, the intention of the research is to extend the interlingual analysis to other languages, such as Chinese or Hebrew. This aims to have a more complete and global representation of the response of the COVID-19 terminological crisis in media language as well as in online multilingual COVID-19 data banks.

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