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PANDEMIC IN 2021 “ECONOMIST” DISCOURSE

The research is dedicated to the corpus analysis of the semantic prosody of collocations with PANDEMIC in “The Economist”. The corpus has been processed with the help of Voyant Tools. Text passages containing collocations with PANDEMIC have been analyzed in order to state the prosody mode of the collocation in the context. The study mostly pays attention to determine discursive peculiarities of collocations with PANDEMIC in The Economist issues published in 2021. The dictionary definition of PANDEMIC defines it as a word with negative semantic prosody, whereas the discourse analysis demonstrates that collocations containing the lemma PANDEMIC can have positive, negative or neutral semantic coloring, which depends on the contextual meaning of the analyzed passage and which is also based on the semantic prosody mode of other words in the passage, which actually designates and presupposes the mode of the collocations in question. Although verbs such as to be and to have did not reveal much about the semantic prosodies of the word PANDEMIC, others, like hit and strike, appeared to be used negatively, justifying the pejorative effects that the pandemic had. The verb lift was perhaps more positive, speaking of the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions, whilst fear had a negative connotation and referred to the public worrying about the duration of the pandemic. Collocations PANDEMIC + throughout and before have a neutral semantic prosody, which shows that such collocations are used in text passages in the surrounding of neither positive nor negative words and the whole passage serves as a statement of some facts without being evaluated. Many of the collocates of PANDEMIC related to time (e.g., during, since, throughout, start, before, began, behind), which will be explored in further detail.

Key words: semantic prosody, corpus analysis, collocations, PANDEMIC, media discourse, The Economist.

Statement of the problem. The global reach of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing localized policy reactions provides a case to uncover how a global crisis translates into linguistic discourse. Language is not set in stone; it is constantly evolving to accommodate new ideas, technologies, and social change. Throughout our lives we are exposed to situations that require a change in the meaning of the words we already know. In the present study, we are interested in addressing the plasticity of lexico-semantic representations in a large-scale and ecologically valid experiment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Over the past three decades, a significant body of linguistic research has been dedicated to the topics of Semantic Prosody [4, p. 9; 6, p. 158; 10, p. 87] and Corpus Linguistics [7; 8; 13, p. 11]. The concept of semantic prosody, initially introduced by B. Louw in 1993, refers to the consistent aura of meaning that a word or phrase acquires based on its associations with other words. Consequently, semantic prosody serves as a reflection of the writer's or speaker's attitude within a text and is closely linked to connotation and context. In essence, the positivity or negativity of a word's semantic prosody depends on the accom-

panying words or phrases with positive or negative meanings. Some words tend to have a predominantly negative prosody, a few may exhibit a positive prosody, while many remain neutral. Furthermore, the presence of predominantly negative or positive lexical units among the word's collocates influences the strength of its negative or positive prosody. When both positive and negative collocates coexist in the context, the word is considered to have a neutral prosody, as described by the research [12 p. 160]. J. Sinclair underscores that semantic prosodies are essentially evaluative and attitudinal, providing a means for expressing the speaker's endorsement (positive prosody) or disapproval (negative prosody) of the current topic under discussion [10, p. 87].

Semantic prosody analysis uses corpora and corpus tools of analysis to study the collocates of the expression under study. Frequency count and collocation analysis generate statistical data with the aid of computer tools. However, the prosody analysis, based on the collocates of the expression under study, involves qualitative analysis. Semantic prosody, therefore, employs both quantitative and qualitative analyses [11].

The majority of research into semantic prosody has primarily relied on extensive general language

databases. A corpus can be understood as a 'body' of language, more precisely, an extensive collection of naturally occurring language that is stored in computer files. In their 2011 publication "Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice," T. McEnery and A. Hardie [7] discuss how corpus linguistics is concerned with explaining and describing language. They also emphasize that Corpus Linguistics is a quantitative approach, which means that it primarily deals with numerical data, specifically frequencies of words and phrases in these language corpora.

We use a cross-linguistic corpus that allows us to chart small-scale diachronic changes in news-media discourse during the first year of the pandemic. Second, a set of collocations with the PANDEMIC was isolated from the corpus, and their frequency of use was determined. Next, with the help of appropriate measures, the associated words were identified. These associated words were then interpreted and classified from a semantic perspective through an iterative qualitative analysis, laying the groundwork for a quantitative analysis of cross-linguistic and diachronic evolutions.

Task statement. Thus, the aim of the research is to determine discursive peculiarities of collocations with PANDEMIC in *The Economist* issues published in 2021. Considering the aim, the following objectives have been set forward:

- 1) to create and process the broadsheet and the tabloid corpora;
- 2) to analyse and compare discursive features of collocations with PANDEMIC in the newspaper singling out specific discursive characteristics.

Based on the Web Corpora that are automatically POS-tagged and accessible via Voyant Tools [14], this study provides a thorough analysis of the collocations with PANDEMIC. We extracted a total of 75 collocations retrieved from the *Economist* media data from January through December 2021 [15]. These associated words were then organized into categories describing the properties of the pandemic and metaphorical images created in the studied text passages.

Outline of the main material of the study. For centuries, newspapers have served as the primary hub of the news industry. Even with the expansion of digital media, people continue to consume newspapers in print format, on websites, or through mobile apps. Media discourse, particularly in newspapers, mirrors global events as they unfold. The discourse approach to the analysis of media messages allows us to evaluate both the text of the message itself and the extra-linguistic features of its implementation [5]. The distinction of media discourse as an independent type of discourse is due to the social significance of the communica-

tion sphere represented by this type of discourse [3]. In addition, when analysing the media as a discourse activity, it is necessary to take into account that the media act as a means of explaining, popularising and transmitting specially processed and presented information to the mass audience in order to influence it. From this point of view, media discourse reflects certain structures of world knowledge and assessments, guiding the addressee to a certain understanding of reality, and, most importantly, to further behaviour [1, p. 12]. Media discourse, like any other type of discourse, contains a linguistic and cultural code, which is defined as a system of cultural and linguistic characteristics that satisfy the communicative needs in a linguistic and cultural situation. The text of a media discourse as a projection of the generating linguistic and cultural space contains references to various types of realities, historical events, keywords of a particular era, which "bind" the text to the linguistic and cultural space that generates it [2, p. 269].

Thus, media discourse can be defined as a communicative and cognitive phenomenon created by the mass media, the study of which allows us to scientifically comprehend the formative knowledge that is reflected in the practice of modern life.

Consequently, the ongoing pandemic has garnered significant media coverage. Both broadsheets and tabloids have been focusing on the most pressing issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The word PANDEMIC has negative connotation, as it is defined as an occurrence of a disease that affects many people across a whole country or the whole world [9]. In this way, collocations with the lemma PANDEMIC have negative semantic prosody as well.

However, discourse analysis of newspaper text passages demonstrates that despite the negative semantic prosody of the collocations with PANDEMIC and clearly negative metaphoric pictures created in the articles there are some examples of positive consequences caused by pandemic.

PANDEMIC occurred 554 times in the corpus (see Fig. 1).

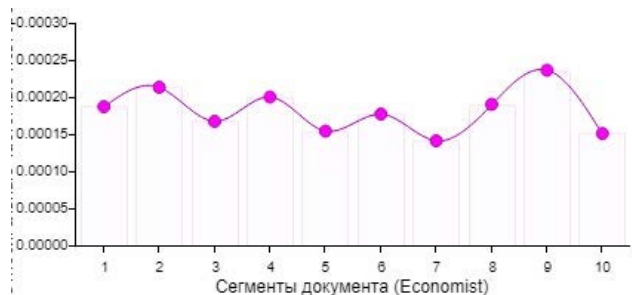


Fig. 1. Occurrence of PANDEMIC in *The Economist* 2021

Its top ten collocates are displayed in Table 2:

Table 2

Top 10 collocates of PANDEMIC

Rank	Collocate	Frequency
1	During	55
2	Since	31
3	Throughout	20
4	Start	20
5	Before	23
6	This	48
7	Began	12
8	The	466
9	Wave	12
10	Behind	11

Many of the collocates of PANDEMIC related to time (e.g., *during*, *since*, *throughout*, *start*, *before*, *began*, *behind*), which will be explored in further detail. *During* collocated with PANDEMIC when reporting events occurred since the Covid-19 outbreak, for example, infections and hospitalisations rising. *Since* referred to the same idea, but also to this being the busiest period of travel since the pandemic began.

For *throughout*, Andrew Opie also said, “Retail workers and suppliers, who have played a vital role throughout this pandemic, should be allowed to work provided they are double vaccinated or can show a negative Covid test, to ensure there is no disruption to the public’s ability to get food and other goods.” The repeated inclusion of this quote in various newspapers had, once more, influenced the collocational significance. However, the presence of this quotation in multiple articles could indicate the widespread reach and prominence that this statement achieved.

Behind, although a proximal preposition, was used in the corpus to refer to time. Frequently, articles questioned whether the worst of the pandemic was “behind us”, in structures such as “Most britons have tried to put the coronavirus pandemic behind them.” Thus, *behind* was used with PANDEMIC in a positive (the worst “is behind” us) context.

The Voyant Tool revealed further collocates that were not statistically significant, but had a positive connotation: “The BBC is having a good pandemic.” Although this might be seen as a collocational clash, further analysis exposed this as predominantly used when discussing Keir Starmer, leader of the Labour opposition party in the UK, stating that he had a “good pandemic” until the vaccine rollout. Concordance lines showed that there were repeated sentences in multiple articles, especially quotes, as previously mentioned. Unsurprisingly, occurrences like *coro-*

navirus, *covid-19*, *covid* and *global* all appeared with PANDEMIC. *Severe* also collocated with PANDEMIC, but only appeared twice in the corpus.

Wave referred to the pandemic phase, characterised by fluctuations in infection rates, mentioning the first (“As the first wave of the pandemic peaks, politicians go back to bickering”), second (“India’s catastrophic second pandemic wave”), third (“The gag captures the dismay many Germans feel about their state’s inability to fend off the third wave of the pandemic, even as other countries vaccinate their way towards freedom”) and latest (“The current wave of the pandemic sweeping across Britain was also likely to get worse before it gets better”) waves. These were usually contextualised through the numbers of infections and deaths in each wave. Therefore, although factual reporting, the reference to death and infection had negative connotations.

The Voyant Tool for PANDEMIC as a subject in the clause, shown in Fig. 3, included 32 verbs. Although verbs such as *to be* and *to have* did not reveal much about the semantic prosodies of this word, others, like *hit* and *strike*, appeared to be used negatively, justifying the pejorative effects that the pandemic had. As seen in Fig. 3, collocates of PANDEMIC, like *threaten*, *disadvantage*, *exacerbate* and *deprive* could be deemed as negative. Other collocates of PANDEMIC appeared to have a negative connotation, such as *devastate* and *cripple*.

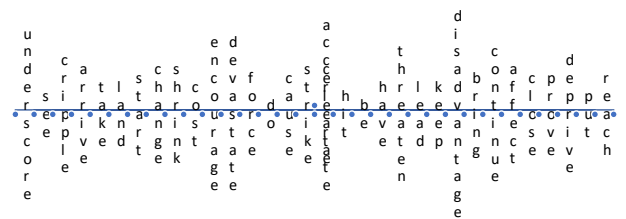


Fig. 3. Voyant Tool’s visualisation to show PANDEMIC as a subject

In Figure 4, PANDEMIC was explored as a grammatical object. *End*, again, appeared as a frequent collocate of PANDEMIC, particularly when attempting to end the pandemic. Both *stress* and *blame* emphasised the impact of the pandemic, yet removed such an impact from tertiary sectors, through a variety of positively and negatively connotated collocates. For example, *lift* was perhaps more positive, speaking of the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions, whilst *fear* had a negative connotation and referred to the public worrying about the duration of the pandemic.



Fig. 4. Voyant Tool’s visualisation to show PANDEMIC as an object

For our semantic classification and analysis, we looked for patterns and semantic clusters in the associated words. To this end, a qualitative iterative procedure was followed to identify overarching semantic categories in the list of associated words. As such, the complete set of 75 associated words was coded in a bottom-up iterative procedure and the words were grouped according to more general semantic categories that relate to the concept PANDEMIC. This coding procedure led to 7 emerging semantic categories that are summarized in Table 5:

Conclusions. As we have seen, more in-depth qualitative descriptions of the particularly associated terms form the first avenue for future research. Overall, the results of our study have indicated the tendencies in newspaper reporting on a sudden global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic while also highlighting some linguistic preferences. Through a combination of corpus linguistic methods and semantic classification, we have arrived at a description of the underlining semantic space that characterizes COVID-19 pandemic discourse in the English newspaper data. Further research is going to be based on corpora of American broadsheets and tabloids presenting a contrastive study of results and also a comparative analysis with the results obtained in this research.

Table 5

Overview of the semantic categories relating to PANDEMIC

Category	Description
LOCATION	The associated word indicates a geographic location or area.
DIFFUSION & SPREAD	The associated word expresses processes of spread across a community or an organism.
RECENCY	The associated word expresses that the item referred to the pandemic is considered to be novel at the time of discourse.
MEASURES	The associated word describes medical and societal effects and measures taken in response to the disease or following the pandemic.
CAUSE & EFFECT	The associated word indexes cause and effect relations.
COMPARISON	The associated word establishes relations of similarity and contrast to other entities.
EVALUATION	The associated word represents an emotionally loaded expression.

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Сіваєва О. С. PANDEMIC У МЕДІЙНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ 2021 РОКУ

Статтю присвячено контрастивному корпусному аналізу семантичної просодії словосполучень з PANDEMIC в газеті “The Economist”. Для проведення даного дослідження створено та проаналізовано за допомогою комп’ютерної програми Voyant Tools корпуси текстів, до складу яких входять словосполучення з PANDEMIC. Дана розвідка здебільшого зосереджена на дослідження дискурсивних особливостей словосполучень PANDEMIC у статтях газети The Economist, опублікованих у 2021 році. У словнику PANDEMIC визначено як слово, яке має негативну семантичну просодію, тоді як дискурс-аналіз отриманих даних доводить, що словосполучення з PANDEMIC можуть мати позитивне, негативне і нейтральне семантичне забарвлення, що, в свою чергу, залежить від контекстуального значення уривку, який аналізується, а також базується на семантичному забарвленні інших слів в уривку, яке фактично позначає та передбачає спосіб сполучень про які йдеться. Хоча такі дієслова як *to be* і *to have* не розкривають семантичної просодії слова PANDEMIC, інші, такі як *hit* і *strike* мають негативну семантичну просодію, виправдовуючи принизливі наслідки пандемії. Дієслово *lift* має позитивне забарвлення, говорячи про скасування обмежень пов’язаних з пандемією, тоді як іменник *fear* має і вказує на стурбованість людства щодо тривалості пандемії. Словосполучення з PANDEMIC + *throughout* і *before* мають нейтральну семантичну просодію, що показує, що такі словосполучення використані в уривках тексту в оточенні і не позитивних, і не негативних слів, і весь уривок служить констатацією деяких фактів без оцінки. Багато словосполучень з PANDEMIC пов’язані з часом, наприклад *during*, *since*, *throughout*, *start*, *before*, *began*, *behind* і це досліджено в статті більш детально.

Ключові слова: семантична просодія, корпусний аналіз, словосполучення, PANDEMIC, медійний дискурс, The Economist.