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# COVID-19 terminology and its dissemination to a non-specialised public in Brazil

## 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted numerous sectors at different levels and has imposed a radical change in the pace of life in societies across the globe. Its consequences can be seen in various social spheres: health systems have been on the brink of collapse, the economies of many nations have been almost paralyzed, and people have adopted other ways of social contact, principally virtually. In all these areas, language has been present. Inevitably, it has also been influenced itself by this pandemic context.

A partially technical vocabulary related to COVID-19 quickly became part of everyday life, introduced mainly by news and official bodies. Daily bulletins with data on the numbers infected, cured and dead, contagion and vaccination maps, information about hygiene care, use of personal protective equipment, social behaviour rules, curfews and possible treatments have been daily transmitted to a large part of the world's population.

In Brazil, more specifically, in addition to this partially technical vocabulary, it has been possible to observe the recurrence of lexical units closely related to political and economic issues. Some of these reflect the stance of denial by the federal government in the face of the pandemic, and others concern the attitudes of the Brazilian population regarding the ways in which they dealt with restrictions on social interaction.

In order to describe the characteristics of the terminology being disseminated in Brazil, the project *Study and dissemination of COVID-19 terminology* was proposed, which is being developed under the coordination of Professor Ieda Maria Alves with the support of the Institute of Advanced Studies (IEA) at the University of São Paulo. The dissemination of this terminology will be achieved through a dictionary that is under development. This work is aimed at a Brazilian public, which,

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in general, has difficulty in understanding this specialised language and, often, has problems interpreting the guidelines and information in official health documents regarding the prevention, transmission, diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

Thus, as a contribution towards alleviating the numerous problems caused by the pandemic, it is hoped that, through an examination of the syntax and lexicon in Portuguese, the present study may serve to minimise the effects caused by the misunderstanding of medical language, contributing to the accessibility and divulgation of scientific knowledge by disseminating pandemic terminology to a non-medical audience, on an online platform. The study is also a demonstration of how the Human Sciences, especially the Language Sciences, can contribute to alleviating the effects of this pandemic in Brazil.

Thus, within the scope of this project, the study reported here aims to detect, analyse and discuss the characteristics of COVID-19 terminology, in particular the role of the adjective *novo* [new] in this terminology, the high recurrence of terms in the plural and the resemantization of some of the terminological units used. The present paper also discusses how these characteristics influenced the choices that have guided the creation of the proposed dictionary. This paper presents, therefore, the results of the analyses of these aspects, starting with a discussion of the relation between terminology and neology and arriving at the characteristic aspects of the macrostructural and microstructural choices about which some considerations were made.

## 2 The constitution of the corpora in the study

The present study was based on two corpora. The first of these is the *Official Corpus* (OC), which is composed of 993 texts concerning COVID-19 published on the following official websites: *Organização Mundial da Saúde* (OMS), *Organização Pan-Americana da Saúde* (OPAS), *Ministério da Saúde do Brasil* (MinSaude), *Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária* (Anvisa), *Instituto Butantan*,<sup>1</sup> *Fundação Oswaldo Cruz* (Fiocruz)<sup>2</sup> and *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo* (FAPESP).<sup>3</sup> Given the target public of the dictionary in preparation, the *Journalistic Corpus* (JC) was also created

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<sup>1</sup> The Butantan Institute is the main immunobiological producer in Brazil and is responsible for a large percentage of the production of hyperimmune serums and a large volume of the national production of vaccine antigens, which make up the vaccines used in the PNI (National Immunization Program) of the Brazilian Ministry of Health (Instituto Butantan 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Created in 1900 as a pioneering initiative in the country, the Oswaldo Cruz Institute (OCI/Fiocruz) [. . .] constitutes a complex that generates knowledge, products and services in the biomedical area to meet the health needs of the Brazilian population (FioCruz 2021).

<sup>3</sup> São Paulo Research Foundation is one of the main agencies for promoting scientific and technological research in the country (Agência FAPESP 2021).

with the purpose of selecting the most used terms in large circulation press vehicles in the Brazilian territory. This corpus, which is complementary, contains 460 texts collected from the following websites: *Folha de S. Paulo* (FSP), *O Estado de S. Paulo* (ESP) and *O Globo* (GLO).

These corpora were compiled following a methodology based on the web as corpus (cf. Kilgarriff 2013). For that, the tools BootCat Bootstrap Corpora and Terms from the Web, version 1.21 (Zanchetta et al. 2011), and AntConc (Anthony 2012) were used. First, the BootCat served to find the texts available until March 2021 on the web regarding the topic in question. Once the corpora were constituted, the compiled texts were treated through the AntConc program. In this program, the observation and selection of the lexical units present in the corpora were carried out. To do that, different types of lists (keywords, wordlist, clusters and concordance) were created.

These resources were used to identify terminological candidates present in the corpora. These candidates were then checked in the light of terminological assumptions. Among the criteria used in this process, there are those presented by Barros (2007), which were used in order to verify the degree of lexicalization of terminological phrases and to determine the limits of the syntagmatic terminological units.

### 3 Main characteristics related to the constitution of COVID-19 terminology

Rey (1995: 11) states that the history of science and technology has shown that the relations between terminology and neology can be found since the first people began to name concepts and elements of their environment. The author stresses this character of the constitution of terminologies by emphasising that “terminology is fundamentally concerned with names and the process of naming” (Rey 1995: 11).

COVID-19, an infectious disease, is caused by the new coronavirus, which is a virus of the “family of Coronaviridae that causes infections in humans and animals (e.g., respiratory diseases, gastroenteritis *etc.*)”<sup>4</sup> (Houaiss 2012, online, our translation). Since the disease is caused by a previously unknown virus, which is nonetheless part of a family of existing and already known viruses, it has been named *novo coronavirus* [new coronavirus] by the World Health Organization (WHO). This designation, released on 30 December, 2019 by the Director-General of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom, specifies that, notwithstanding the fact that it is a virus of an existing family, this new member has its own characteristics, which correspond to the first

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4 Original: “família dos coronavírus, causadores de infecções em seres humanos e em animais (p. ex., doenças respiratórias, gastroenterite *etc.*)”.

meaning attributed to the adjective *novo* [new]: “1 that which was born or appeared recently, which has little lifetime, little time of existence (it is said esp. of living beings)”<sup>5</sup> (*Houaiss* 2012, our translation).

These new features of *novo coronavírus* have determined, in the studied terminology, the creation of several syntagmatic formations made up of the adjective *novo* and its gender and number inflections in Brazilian Portuguese (*novos*, *nova* (s)), which attribute to these lexical units the characteristics expressed in the aforesaid meaning. Among these formations, the present paper mentions the most frequent, mainly used in the plural because they refer, in various contexts, to a large number of *novas cepas* [new strains], *novas linhagens* [new lines] and *novas variantes* [new variants] of the virus. Some examples<sup>6</sup> extracted from OC and JC are presented below:

- (1) Os vírus mudam sempre, e são essas mudanças que levam ao surgimento de *novas cepas* ou variantes, que podem ou não ser mais perigosas. Mais de quatro mil mutações foram descritas no Sars-CoV-2 desde o início da pandemia. (<JC\_GLO\_211220>)
- (2) A cada mudança do vírus, são geradas também *novas linhagens*, o que justifica a necessidade de novos estudos para uma melhor compreensão dos fatores clínicos e epidemiológicos relacionados à doença. (<OC\_FIOCRUZ\_110221>).
- (3) Há o risco de que *novas variantes* do vírus possam acabar “driblando” a vacina e muitos especialistas estimam que com o tempo, seja necessário atualizar a vacina e reaplicá-la, como ocorre com as vacinas da gripe. (<JC\_ESP\_170121>)

Louis Guilbert, in two pioneering works on the constitution of terminologies, emphasises the role of classifier or specifier of adjectives, which, employed after the substantival core of a syntagma, allow the integration of this syntagma into another specialty area. In *La formation du vocabulaire de l'aviation* (1965a), Guilbert highlights the importance of the adjective *aérien* in the formation of aviation vocabulary, which is related to a new type of transport:

5 Original: “1 que nasceu ou apareceu recentemente, que tem pouco tempo de vida, de existência (diz-se esp. de seres vivos)”.

6 Our translations: (1) Viruses are always changing, and it is these changes that lead to the emergence of *new strains* or variants, which may or may not be more dangerous. More than four thousand mutations have been described in Sars-CoV-2 since the beginning of the pandemic. (2) With each change in the virus, *new strains* are also generated, which justifies the need for further studies to better understand the clinical and epidemiological factors related to the disease. (3) There is a risk that *new variants* of the virus could end up “bypassing” the vaccine, and many experts estimate that, over time, it will be necessary to update the vaccine and reapply it, as with flu vaccines.

When the transfer from an old semantic field to a new semantic field takes place in the form of an integrating syntagma, the second element, which has an adjectival form, is the main linguistic instrument of this transfer. The most common among transfer adjectives is *aérien*.<sup>7</sup>

(Guilbert 1965a: 198, our translation)

Some examples of formations with *aérien* cited by Guilbert (1965a) are: *argonaute aérien*, *navigateurs aériens*, *route aérienne*, *voiture aérienne*, *voyageurs aériens*.

In another work, *Le vocabulaire de l'astronautique* (1965b), Guilbert studies astronautics terminology, which was born in the early 1960s. Unlike his study on aviation, which has a diachronic character, this new study refers to a synchrony from 1961 to 1963. This work mentions some syntagmatic terms, whose high frequency is noted and which are formed with the adjectives *cosmique* and *spatial*. This terminology includes, respectively, *biologie cosmique*, *firmament cosmique* and *cabine spatiale*, *plate-forme spatiale*, among others. In these examples, it is observed that the “key adjectives” that indicate that a term is integrated (or is becoming integrated) into astronautics terminology are *cosmique* and *spatial*, which are part of several syntagmatic terms in this specialised area.

Humbley, in his study entitled *La néologie terminologique* (2018), refers to e-commerce terminology (*commerce électronique*). He affirms that it originated from an ancestral domain, or source domain (*domaine source*), which is the domain of commerce. In this example, the element that enables the transfer between domains is the adjective *électronique*.

Regarding COVID-19 terminology, it is possible to highlight the use of the adjective *novo*, which is quite recurrent, which enables us to consider it as a characteristic of this terminology related to the novelty of the pandemic. However, what is also found is that, in the case of *novo coronavirus*, the adjective *novo* loses its qualifier character, as occurs in *novas cepas*, *novas linhagens* and *novas variantes*, and starts to occupy the role of classifier / typifier, given the fact that what is being formed is a proper name from an already existing proper name (cf. Neves 2018). The term *coronavirus*, which is part of this formation, was already a name given to a disease through the name of a virus.

In addition to the terminological characteristic regarding the use of the adjective *novo* in several terminological syntagmas found in OC and JC, these corpora exposed another interesting recurrence: the constancy of the plural form in several substantive terms. This use of the plural occurs because the effects of infection caused by the new coronavirus are not singular. Indeed, they can be exacerbated by different diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, heart and lung diseases.

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7 No original: “Quand le transfert d'un champ sémantique ancien à un champ sémantique nouveau se réalise sous forme de syntagme d'intégration, le second élément de forme adjectivale est l'instrument linguistique principal du transfert. Le plus fréquent parmi les adjectifs de transfert est *aérien*.”.

The set of these diseases is designated by *comorbidades* [comorbidities], as exemplified below:

- (4) A probabilidade de uma pessoa obesa desenvolver a forma grave da Covid-19 é alta independentemente da idade, do sexo, da etnia e da existência de *comorbidades* como diabetes, hipertensão, doença cardíaca ou pulmonar.<sup>8</sup> (<OC\_FAPESP\_030920>)

Consequently, the forms of prevention and treatment of the disease are also multiple, as are the possible side-effects of the vaccine, and this characteristic is expressed by terms used primarily in their plural form. This use is exemplified by the terms *eventos adversos* [adverse events] and *equipamentos de proteção individual* (EPIs) [personal protective equipment (PPE)].

*Eventos adversos* [adverse events] related to the COVID-19 vaccine are varied, with headache, fever, myalgia, diarrhoea, nausea and localised pain being the most common:

- (5) Até o dia 04/02/2021, foram notificados ao Ministério da Saúde 7.768 *eventos adversos* supostamente associados às vacinas contra a Covid-19. Desses, 7.686 foram classificados como eventos não graves e 82 foram classificados como graves. Os eventos mais comuns foram cefaleia, febre, mialgia, diarreia, náusea e dor localizada.<sup>9</sup> (<OC\_MinSaude\_210720>)

*Equipamentos de proteção individual* (EPIs), including surgical masks, respirators and glasses, protect professionals who work with health equipment and patients with infectious diseases:

- (6) Usadas em conjunto com outros *equipamentos de proteção individual* (EPIs), como máscaras cirúrgicas, respiradores e/ou óculos, aumentam a proteção oferecida aos profissionais que estão atuando nos equipamentos de saúde.<sup>10</sup> (<OC\_FAPESP\_060520>)

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<sup>8</sup> Our translation: (4) The probability of an obese person developing the severe form of Covid-19 is high regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and of the existence of *comorbidities* such as diabetes, hypertension, heart or lung disease.

<sup>9</sup> Our translation: (10) Until 4 February, 2021, 7,768 *adverse events* allegedly associated with Covid-19 vaccines were reported to the Ministry of Health. Among them, 7,686 were classified as non-serious events and 82 were classified as severe. The most common events were headache, fever, myalgia, diarrhoea, nausea and localised pain.

<sup>10</sup> Our translation: (11) Used in conjunction with other *personal protective equipment* (PPE), such as surgical masks, respirators and/or glasses, they increase the protection offered to professionals who are working with health equipment.

Another characteristic of some terms related to COVID-19 concerns the resemantization process that these units went through. Among these terms, this study mentions, as examples, *confinamento* [confinement], *lockdown* and *quarentena* [quarantine]. These lexical units were reinterpreted through the extension of their concepts, which began to be used specifically in relation to the pandemic.

By way of illustration, the following excerpts<sup>11</sup> include the terms *confinamento*, *lockdown* and *quarentena* highlighted in bold:

- (7) Se não tiver política econômica, monetária e fiscal, vamos caminhar para uma depressão. O coronavírus não é uma gripe comum, tem muitas diferenças em relação às crises econômicas típicas do livro-texto. É um choque de oferta e, em seguida, de demanda, com *lockdown* (*confinamento*). (<JC\_GLO\_210320>)
- (8) Todos os pacientes infectados com o novo coronavírus precisam ser hospitalizados e colocados em *quarentena*, a menos que a condição seja grave, é melhor evitar o ambiente hospitalar; para isolar em casa, é melhor abrir a janela para ventilação. (<OC\_FAPESP\_040320>).

*Confinamento* refers to the “act or effect of imposing (by the authority, the government) a determined residence on an individual, away from social contact”, or to “prison isolation”<sup>12</sup> (Houaiss 2012, our translation). In its turn, *lockdown*, a borrowing from English that had already occurred in Brazilian Portuguese, designates the “action of isolating people, confining them for a certain time (at home, on a ship, in a hospital, etc.), for safety reasons (during pandemics, for example)”<sup>13</sup> (Houaiss 2012, our translation) and competes with its translated form, *confinamento*, within the scope of COVID-19. However, these two terminological units were reinterpreted in the pandemic context. Although the definition of *lockdown* has one meaning that refers to a type of security measure adopted in pandemics in general, both units came to designate, in a more specific way, measures that had to be established by the government for the purpose of containing the new coronavirus in society.

Another terminological unit that reveals this extension of meaning is *quarentena*. It is true that its concept already included semantic features related to: “40-day

<sup>11</sup> Our translations: (7) If there is no economic, monetary and fiscal policy, we are heading for a depression. Coronavirus is not a common flu, it has many differences from typical textbook economic crises. It is a clash between supply, followed by demand, and *lockdown* (*confinement*). (8) All patients infected with the new coronavirus need to be hospitalized and placed in *quarantine*; unless the condition is severe, it is best to avoid the hospital environment; to isolate at home, it is better to open the window for ventilation.

<sup>12</sup> Original: “ato ou efeito de impor (a autoridade, o governo) uma residência determinada a um indivíduo, longe do contato social”, ou a um “isolamento prisional”.

<sup>13</sup> Original: “ação de isolar pessoas, confinando-as por certo tempo (em casa, num navio, num hospital etc.), por medida de segurança (durante pandemias, p. ex.)”.



period”, “set of measures and restrictions that specifically consisted in the isolation, for a certain time (origin. 42 days), of individuals and goods from regions where epidemics of contagious diseases were raging”, “set of restrictions and/or isolation, for variable periods of time, imposed on individuals or loads from countries where epidemics of contagious diseases occur” and “Lent”,<sup>14</sup> among others (*Houaiss* 2012, our translation). In none of its meanings, however, is there a close relation with the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, what this term reveals as a characteristic marked by the pandemic context is precisely the fact that it refers to one of the government measures to contain this disease that tried to close cities, which forced the population to isolate themselves in their homes and whose duration varied according to the occupancy rate of hospital beds. This terminological unit also concerns the isolation during the incubation period of the new coronavirus practiced by people who have had possible contact with patients or have travelled through regions and situations of high risk of contagion (through air travel, for example), as well as by patients, so that they do not spread the virus.

## 4 Characteristics of COVID-19 terminology and terminographical implications

The corpus relating to the terminology of COVID-19, presented above, was created as a result of the elaboration of a terminological dictionary aimed at non-specialised speakers in the medical field and with little formal education. The aspects of this terminology that are emphasised in the present paper – the use of the adjective *novo*, the recurrence of the plural form in various substantive and syntagmatic terms, the process of resemantization that various lexical units have gone through – guided some aspects of the constitution of the dictionary that are highlighted in this section.

The motivation for the creation of this dictionary arises from the fact that Brazil is a country of gigantic dimensions, with a population of 213,797,113 million inhabitants on 11 January, 2021, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). This population is highly heterogeneous with regard to its educational level, which varies according to several factors, especially geographical and social.

Data from the Functional Literacy Indicator (INAF), released in 2018, indicate that 29% of the Brazilian population has difficulty in interpreting texts and performing

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<sup>14</sup> Original: “período de 40 dias”, “hist.med conjunto de medidas e restrições que consistia esp. no isolamento, durante certo tempo (origin. 42 dias), de indivíduos e mercadorias provenientes de regiões onde grassavam epidemias de doenças contagiosas”, “infect conjunto de restrições e/ou isolamento, por períodos de tempo variáveis, impostos a indivíduos ou cargas procedentes de países em que ocorrem epidemias de doenças contagiosas” e “Quaresma”.



simple mathematical operations in their daily activities. The INAF tests are applied to Brazilians who are between 15 and 64 years old, with the aim of analysing their skills and practices in reading, writing and mathematics aimed at everyday life. According to the INAF results, Brazil has 29% of functional illiterates. A functionally illiterate person is a literate individual “whose poor literacy leads him / her to write very poorly and not be able to interpret what he / she reads”<sup>15</sup> (Houaiss 2012, our translation). The INAF divides the functionally illiterate into two groups: *absolute* (8%), who cannot read words or phrases and telephone numbers, for example, and *rudimentary* (21%), who have difficulty in identifying ironies and sarcasm in short texts, and in performing simple operations such as calculating money (INAF 2021).

Based on these data and the interpretation difficulties manifested by about 29% of Brazilians between 15 and 64 years old, the macro- and microstructure of the dictionary were designed aimed at Brazilian speakers with different levels of education, especially those with little schooling.

Regarding the macrostructure, the terms will be presented according to the number of occurrences verified in the studied corpora. As commented in the previous section, these corpora indicate the predominant usage in a plural form in several substantive terms and in several syntagmatic terms, since the effects of the infection caused by the new coronavirus can reach several organs, cause different diseases and require different forms of treatment. Consequently, the forms of prevention and treatment of the disease are also multiple, expressed by terms used primarily in the plural form. This usage was exemplified with the terms *comorbidades*, *eventos adversos* and *equipamentos de proteção individual (EPis)*. The dictionary will highlight the plurality expressed by these terms by presenting their respective entries in the plural form. It is important to say that these terms do not correspond to the concept of *pluralia tantum*, as they also occur in the singular, much less frequently, within the scope of the studied terminology. In COVID-19 terminology, they are most commonly used in the plural because they refer to the multiple impacts of the virus.

Another characteristic that influenced the selection of syntagmatic terms that make up the dictionary's nomenclature concerns the formations in which the adjective *novo* appears. It is noted that this adjective attributes not only the quality of being new, but, above all, it brings a specificity to the concept designated by the simple term with which it is associated. In this case, the syntagmatic term *novo coronavírus* is an example. Thus, *novo coronavírus*, which, as explained above, designates another type of virus, different from the other coronaviruses that make up the family of Coronaviridae, appears as a terminological entry.

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15 Original: “cuja alfabetização precária o leva a escrever muito mal e a não conseguir interpretar o que lê”.

The presentation of the terms and their respective entries will follow an onomasiological organization, according to the categories established by the *DeCS/MeSH* (Health Sciences Descriptors 2021), released by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). According to the classification established by this organization, the terms will be separated into categories, such as: causative agent, anatomy, prevention, diagnosis, disease, treatment, equipment, among others.

As the dictionary is intended for a broad and non-specialised public in the medical field, it will follow the principles of an international tendency towards using simplified language, more easily understood by users who are not specialised in the area in question. Due to these principles, the definitions and explanatory or complementary notes, in relation to the term, are being written in plain language, which designates texts understandable by different types of speakers.

Named *plain language* in English, this type of communication, in Brazil, has been designated *linguagem simples* [simple language], *linguagem clara* [clear language], *linguagem cidadã* [citizen language], *acessibilidade textual e terminológica*<sup>16</sup> [textual and terminological accessibility], *inteligibilidade*<sup>17</sup> [intelligibility], but the first term is predominant in the country: “a communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information”, according to the Plain Language Network (Plain Language 2021), an international association for plain language supporters and practitioners around the world, which includes members from 30 countries and at least 15 languages.

In Brazil, some government initiatives are adopting and disseminating this type of language. The *Rede Linguagem Simples* [Simple Language Network], for example, was created by the federal government (*Empresa Brasil de Comunicação – EBC*), which is “a space for debate and fostering the construction of initiatives that promote the use of simple language”<sup>18</sup> (Agência Brasil 2021, our translation).

In 2016, in the State of São Paulo, the state government launched a manual called *Orientações para adoção de linguagem clara* [Guidelines for adopting clear language], which

should be understood as a guide for the elaboration of a *Clear Language* (CL), to be used in the way the São Paulo State government disseminates its information on the Internet, especially with regard to the meaning of technical expressions routinely used by specialists of the various areas of government action, in order to make them more accessible to the understanding of the common citizen.<sup>19</sup>

(Governo do Estado de São Paulo 2016, our translation)

<sup>16</sup> cf. Cortina Silva et al. (2021).

<sup>17</sup> cf. Carvalho and Rebechi (2021).

<sup>18</sup> Original: “um espaço de debate e de fomento para construção de iniciativas que promovam o uso da linguagem simples”.

<sup>19</sup> Original: “deve ser entendido como um roteiro para elaboração de uma *Linguagem Clara* (LC), para ser acoplada à maneira como o governo do Estado de São Paulo divulga suas informações na

In 2019, the City Hall of São Paulo launched the *Programa Municipal de Linguagem Simples* [Municipal Simple Language Program], with the release of a booklet, called *Princípios de uma Linguagem Cidadã e Manual de boas práticas de redação da Carta de Serviços da Prefeitura de São Paulo de Linguagem Cidadã* [Principles of a Citizen's Language and Manual of good practices for writing the Charter of Services of the City Hall of São Paulo for Citizen's Language], in order to

help PMSP servants to write texts for the population in a clear, inclusive and understandable way for people of all genders, classes and educational levels, discarding the use of bureaucratic and formal language used in public offices, which is also often used to address São Paulo society.<sup>20</sup> (Prefeitura de São Paulo 2021)

The concept of *simple language* does not imply the use of simplistic or informal language or the elimination of information elements. It seeks to use an understandable language with clear information, avoiding problems frequently reported by readers due to the use of long sentences, passive verbs, acronyms, abbreviations, little used adjectives and unexplained terms. Preference should be given to common words, better known by users and to the usual syntactic order of the language (Cortina Silva *et al.* 2021). Taking into account the precepts of simple language, the definitions in the dictionary are being written, preferably, with one syntactic period, since, in most cases, it is possible to elaborate a definition consisting of a single sentence.

Each of these definitions uses, primarily, the classic binary categorization *close genre + specific differences*. The close genre has the function of initial descriptor of the definitions and rescues the conceptual content of its hyperonym (a more generic term in relation to other terms) and, therefore, of the general characteristics of the term, thus expressing the general category or class to which this element belongs. The specific differences present the particularities that distinguish the term from others of the same class.

Other definitions, such as *extensional* ones, in which elements that characterise the term are enumerated, are also being used in cases where it is necessary to enumerate several features. An example of this type of definition corresponds to the term *medidas preventivas*: *medidas preventivas consistem em lavar as mãos, usar máscara, usar álcool em gel, evitar aglomerações* [preventive measures consist of washing hands, using a mask, using alcohol gel, avoiding agglomerations].

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Internet, em especial no que diz respeito ao significado de expressões técnicas utilizadas rotineiramente por especialistas das diversas áreas de atuação governamental, de modo a torná-las mais acessíveis à compreensão do cidadão comum”.

**20** Original: “auxiliar servidoras e servidores da PMSP a redigirem textos destinados à população de forma clara, inclusiva e compreensível a pessoas de todos os gêneros, classes e níveis de instrução, descartando o uso da linguagem burocrática e formal utilizada nas repartições públicas, e que muitas vezes também é usada para se direcionar à sociedade paulistana”.

By way of illustration, two examples of definitions are presented, accompanied by their respective entries (with English equivalent, context of use, explanatory note). These terms were extracted from the causative agent category (*carga viral*)<sup>21</sup> and from the diagnostic category (*comorbidades*):<sup>22</sup>

*Carga viral* s.f. Quantidade de vírus encontrada em amostras de sangue ou em outros fluidos da pessoa infectada.

Ing. *viral load*

Uma *carga viral* mais elevada foi observada mais frequentemente nos pacientes do sexo masculino e nos mais idosos. Febre e artralgia (dor nas articulações) foram os sintomas mais associados a uma *carga viral* elevada. (<CO\_FAPESP\_290421>)

Nota: O termo *fluido* designa uma substância que corre como um líquido, a exemplo de sangue.

*Comorbidades* s.f.pl.

Duas ou mais doenças presentes em uma pessoa, como diabetes, doença cardíaca ou pulmonar. Ing. *comorbidities*

Identificar grupos de maior risco para adoecimento, agravamento e óbito: Idosos; Pessoas com *comorbidades*: Diabetes, HAS, Doenças cardíacas/cerebrovasculares, DPOC, Renal, Obesidade, Câncer, Transplantados, Anemia Falciforme (<CO\_MinSaude\_271120>)

Nota: O termo *comorbidade* é usualmente empregado no plural porque se refere a pelo menos duas doenças.

The examples presented above show, respectively, *carga viral* and *comorbidades* as terminological entries. In *carga viral*, an explanatory note was presented to elucidate the meaning of the term *fluido* [fluid], as it is little known to the general public.

The fact that the term *comorbidades* was registered in its plural form reveals one of the aspects observed in relation to the constitution of COVID-19 terminology, which was explored in the previous section. This aspect is not only reflected in the expression of this term, but also in its definition, since the idea of plurality, as a

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**21** Our translation: *Viral load* f.n. Amount of virus found in blood samples or other fluids from the infected person. Ing. *viral load*. A higher *viral load* was seen more frequently in male and older patients. Fever and arthralgia (joint pain) were the symptoms most associated with a high *viral load*. (<OC\_FAPESP\_290421>). Note: The term fluid designates a substance that flows like a liquid, such as blood.

**22** Our translation: *Comorbidities* f.n. in pl. Two or more diseases present in a person, such as diabetes, heart disease or lung disease. Ing. *comorbidities*. To identify groups at higher risk for illness, aggravation and death: Elderly; People with comorbidities: Diabetes, SAH, Heart/Cerebrovascular Diseases, COPD, Kidney disease, Obesity, Cancer, Transplants, Sickle Cell Anemia. (<OC\_MinSaude\_271120>). Note: The term *comorbidity* is usually used in the plural because it refers to at least two diseases.

set, is incorporated within it. The preference of using it in the plural, instead of its singular form, is explained by the note in this entry.

## 5 Final considerations

The aim of the present study was to detect, analyse and discuss the characteristics of COVID-19 terminology, in particular the role of the adjective *novo* in this terminology, the high recurrence of terms in the plural and the resemantization of some of the terminological units used. It also sought to fulfil the objective of specifying how these terminological characteristics are reflected in the constitution of a COVID-19 dictionary, which is under preparation.

Regarding the use of the adjective *novo*, which proved to be quite recurrent in this terminology, it was found that, when added to the term *coronavírus*, this element assumes the function of being a classifier – which does not generally occur with this particular adjective, especially when placed before the noun that it determines. In other terminologies, such as those studied by Guilbert and Humbley, mentioned before, classifier adjectives have another nature, less common, and are directly related to a specialty domain that is formative.

The observation of corpora also revealed a high productivity of lexical units employed in their plural form. Through the examples mentioned in the present paper, it is noted that this plurality builds the concepts designated by the studied terms, as they mark, in their expression, which comorbidities are in focus in the pandemic context in which we live, the side effects associated with the COVID-19 vaccine and the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for professionals on the front lines of the fight against the pandemic. In these cases, the use of the plural indicates a very particular characteristic of the COVID-19 terminology: that the idea of a set, of the collective, is essential to the concepts to which these units refer, in addition to the fact of relating, from a semantic-conceptual point of view, these terms to the pandemic.

It was also found that some terms went through a process of resemantization, thanks to the fact that lexical units like *confinamento*, *lockdown* and *quarentena*, among others, had their meaning expanded to reflect conceptual information related to the context of the pandemic.

These characteristics influenced the choices that guided the creation of the proposed dictionary, which is a terminological dictionary aimed at non-specialised readers in the medical field with little formal education.

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