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Spanish in Times of COVID: Lexical and Pragmatic Innovation in Spain

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Abstract

COVID-19 has drastically changed our lives in many ways that impact language use, including how we describe new concepts (neologisms), compare them to existing realities (metaphors), and interact with others (verbally and non-verbally). This study focuses on the transformative effects that the pandemic and resulting government regulations have had on the Spanish language in Spain in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication – neologisms, metaphors, and greetings, which now require more awareness, thought, and negotiation due to changes in everyday life. Drawing from discourse analysis and sociolinguistics, this article contributes to the field in its multimodal methodology and findings. Data come from 160 participants in various cities across Spain via WhatsApp (a relatively untapped resource in applied linguistics studies), semi-informal virtual interviews, and an online survey, revealing how speakers react to changes brought about by the pandemic. Through our analysis of how they refer to the virus and describe their pandemic experiences, articulate their personal COVID protocols, and navigate the speech act of greeting, we offer a window onto linguistic and cultural changes in Spain. The findings speak not only to the language-culture interface in Spain but may also offer insight into pragmatic strategies in other languages.

Keywords

Spanish, greeting, neologism, metaphor, pragmatics

