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# Specialized voices in the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua española*: Analysis of the COVID-19 field and its neologisms

## 1 Introduction

The unexpected spread of the Coronavirus has produced, among other things, linguistic and lexicographic changes with characteristics that are being studied as the pandemic unfolds. Neologisms were quickly coined and picked up around the world, while new words were created or new meanings were given to existing words.<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, Spanish language speakers were no strangers to this trend, which was soon examined by the media, linguistic observatories, and lexicographic works. Thus, in late 2020, when the updated edition of the *Diccionario de la lengua Española* (DLE, 23.4 2020)<sup>2</sup> came out, the lexicographic changes announced included several pandemic-related changes (<https://dle.rae.es/contenido/actualizaci%C3%B3n-2020>).<sup>3</sup>

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1 This study was conducted in the framework of the Research Program on Terminology, Specialized Lexicography, and Organization of Knowledge proposal, financed under the call for “Research and Development Groups” of the Sectorial Commission for Scientific Research (CSIC), Universidad de la República, Uruguay (2018–2022). The researchers jointly responsible for the program are Mario Barité and Magdalena Coll.

2 The dimension of the trend has been such that, shortly after the start of the pandemic, various “Coronadictionaries” drawn up by readers, journalists, and others began circulating on social media and traditional media (see, for example, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/sociedad/coronavirus-zoompleanos-tapabocas-palabras-nacieron-o-se-nid2370269/>).

3 This is an academic lexicographic work that is an essential authoritative reference. It originated as one of the leading objectives of the Spanish Royal Academy (Real Academia Española), in the framework of its foundation, in Madrid in 1713. Twenty-three editions had been published as of the year 2014. Starting with the 21<sup>st</sup> edition (1992), there was an increase in the number of meanings specific to individual Spanish-speaking countries, whose language academies are part of the Association of Academies of the Spanish Language (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, ASALE), formed in 1951. The DLE’s purpose is to compile the general lexicon used in Spain and in Hispanic countries throughout the world and it is aimed primarily at speakers whose mother tongue is Spanish. It is a normative work and receives more than 90 million queries each month on its online version ([dle.rae.es](https://dle.rae.es)).

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Not only were new words connected with the coronavirus included, some old definitions were also revised to adapt them to the new global situation.

This is, without a doubt, an unprecedented scenario in terms of updating practices of the academic lexicography; the new technologies make it possible for the dictionary to be updated at a pace never before seen in the history of the DLE. With the pandemic, exceptional decisions have been made, considering the short time that elapsed, in many cases, between the emergence of a COVID-related word and its publication in the dictionary (cf. Battaner 2021).

There is also another factor that has changed the academic lexicographic landscape: the boost that the historical dictionary *Diccionario histórico de la lengua española* (DHLE, 2013–)<sup>4</sup> has received in recent years, as will be discussed below.

Academic lexicography is therefore undergoing a unique moment, both because of the pace at which the DLE is updated and because of the coexistence of that process with a renewed and dynamic DHLE. This is the situation in which lexicography has addressed and is addressing, at the academic level, the vocabulary of a pandemic of extraordinary dimensions.

Along these lines, this article has a double objective. First, it seeks to offer an initial approach, with critical notes, to the group of pandemic-related neologisms incorporated into the DLE in the year 2020. To that end, the trends in the academic dictionary's incorporation of neologisms will be reviewed, focusing in particular on specialized language neologisms. Second, the article presents the design of a research study that allows for the examination of any new words beginning with CORONA-added to the DLE and the DHLE. An assessment will be made of the particularities of the DLE and the DHLE regarding the incorporation of the new words, as well as the degree of correspondence or complementarity between the two works in this sense. This will show the complementary roles that the DLE and the DHLE are currently acquiring. In this sense, the new additions open up a debate on the treatment of neologisms in academic lexicography, in a particularly unique scenario.

This paper will thus give a brief overview of the policy for incorporating neologisms into the academic dictionary (section 2), with special attention to technical neologisms. The general characteristics of the updating practices of academic dictionaries

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<sup>4</sup> The purpose of the DHLE, formerly known as the *New Historical Dictionary of Spanish* (*Nuevo diccionario histórico del español*, NDHE), is to present in an organized manner the evolution of the Spanish lexicon over time and up to the present. It is a “complete dictionary” accessed for free on the Internet that seeks to compile the entire lexicon, covering every period and every region where Spanish is and has been spoken. In doing so, it shows the changes that words have experienced in meaning over time and even the accidental linguistic uses of a given period. It is a long-standing project that had frustrated attempts throughout the years, but whose development has received a decisive boost with the creation of the Pan-Hispanic Network of Academies, Universities, and Research Centers for the Production of the Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Language (*Red Panhispánica de Academias, Universidades y Centros de Investigación para la Elaboración del Diccionario histórico de la lengua española*) in 2021 (<https://www.rae.es/dhle/>).

will be addressed, with respect, in particular, to terms that emerged in the pandemic (section 3), with subsection 3.1 dealing with the general aspects of the updating process for the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the DLE, and subsection 3.2 with those of the DHLE. The specific research on words beginning with CORONA- is discussed in section 4, which is divided into a description of the design of the research study (subsection 4.1) and its findings (subsection 4.2). The paper concludes with some final considerations in section 5.

## 2 Neologisms and technical neologisms in academic dictionaries

As is well known, the definition of neologisms is somewhat controversial and its lexicographic treatment even more so. Lexicographers have, in fact, been discussing the criteria for the inclusion of neologisms in dictionaries since the field was first developed, but in recent years there has also been a specific line of theoretical research on the subject (e.g. Bernal et al. 2020: 593).

As early as 1992, Alvar provided an overview of the treatment given to neologisms in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (DRAE).<sup>5</sup> He argued that the general dictionary cannot incorporate all the words that emerge, “as [to be incorporated, words] require widespread use among speakers, authorities that use them, and a stability to ensure they are not birds of passage. The process may seem slow, but it is the only way.” (Alvar 1992). This classic conception has clearly changed, primarily with respect to a word’s stability, which is something that cannot be measured given the very short time spans separating the start of the pandemic and the DLE’s incorporation of pandemic-related words.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Historically, the main academic dictionary was known as DRAE (*Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*) but “since its last edition in 2014, the acronym DLE (*Diccionario de la lengua española*) is being furthered because of its identification and recognition in the lexicographic landscape, as this acronym is optimal and corresponds to the official name the dictionary has always had” (Moreno Moreno 2019: 86). For this reason, we use the acronyms DRAE or DLE, as appropriate.

6 Usage, a criterion considered valid for incorporating a word into the dictionary, has also undergone several re-conceptualizations since the first dictionary of the Real Academia Española (1726–1739), when it was based on the use by authors who “have treated the Spanish language with the greatest accuracy and elegance” (<https://www.rae.es/obras-academicas/diccionarios/diccionario-de-autoridades-0>). Modern-day usage is documented with data from a corpus that covers different registers, styles, and geographical areas. But in recent years another tool has emerged that is strongly linked to usage: the possibility of retrieving the queries made by users in the DLE regardless of whether the words searched for are in the dictionary or not. Records are now available of word searches made by users in the DLE for words not yet included in the dictionary, but for which search frequency is very high. These can be analyzed and systematized by lexicographers, and that, in turn, can influence decision-making when updating the dictionary.

As observed by Adelstein and Freixa (2013), the incorporation of a neological form into a dictionary usually responds to a combination of different criteria, including frequency, formal, semantic, and documentation criteria. Thus, the words most likely to be included in a dictionary are those that are used very frequently, highly necessary for naming purposes, internationalized, easily adaptable, with a derivative family, etc. (Bernal et al. 2020: 606). These criteria must also be pondered according to the type of dictionary in question (Bernal et al. 2020: 594).

Bernal et al. analyze the words added to the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the DLE, updated in 2019, to “infer the non-explicit criteria used to perform the selection and contrast them with the criteria proposed by specialized literature” (2020: 608). This paper will only consider the pandemic-related words that were added in 2020, that is, in the 23.4 edition of the DLE.

In their analysis, Bernal et al. (2020: 608) suggest that the above criteria have been taken into account unevenly in the academic dictionary. The frequency criterion does not appear to have been used as an exclusion filter, while the formal criterion has, given that all “the derived and compound words [incorporated into the academic dictionary] are correctly formed words (in the sense that they follow the rules for correctly forming words)” (Bernal et al. 2020: 609). Thus, the inclusion of word families “lends consistency to the dictionary in the sense that complete derivative series are provided or else derivative series that already had a representative in the dictionary are completed” (Bernal et al. 2020: 609). As for semantic criteria, the selection of entries added to the 2019 edition of the DLE would appear to underscore the denominative need. Bernal et al. observe that a significant number of neologisms that have an entry in the dictionary are words that belong to scientific subject areas, such as medicine, biochemistry, or architecture, which lost their specialized terminological value once they were incorporated into the general language (2020: 610). Moreover, documentary criteria do not appear to have been decisive in the inclusion of certain words in the DLE edition studied by Bernal et al. (2020). As will be seen in the next section, the criteria found by Bernal et al. for the 2019 incorporations are the same that were applied for the 2020 incorporations.

The authors conclude that the criteria that appear to have had more weight in the decisions to incorporate words are the criteria connected with the work’s internal logic, an aspect that is maintained in the updated version considered here:

[O]n the one hand, it is observed that many of the new words added complete derivative series; on the other, the lexicon of subject areas present in the dictionary is enhanced, thus completing the coverage thereof, despite the fact that in some cases they are highly specialized words, a characteristic that apparently should be pondered as a negative aspect. (Bernal et al. 2020: 613)

The treatment of specialized words in the academic dictionary merits some reflections. A brief examination of that academic work reveals that many specialized words are not labeled as such. For example, the DLE (2014) assigns the diatechnical

label ‘Zool.’ to families, phyla, or groups, as in the case of echinoderms, but not to “starfish,” one of its species.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, it is important to bear in mind the information that is provided in the forewords and introductions of the last editions of the DLE. Both the 2001 and the 2014 editions omit any reference to the nature of the diatechnical labels and their treatment. Only one (isolated and indirect) consideration is made, and that is when establishing the precedence of the labeled meanings. Neither edition provides an explicit explanation of what a diatechnical label is, and no definition of it is given in the body of the dictionary either (Barité/Blanco 2014).

With respect to the application of diatechnical labels, in the 2001 edition there is an interesting explanation of the so-called “technical words”: “The dictionary includes any words and meanings from different fields of knowledge and professional activities whose current use – technical archaisms are also excluded – has gone beyond their original scope and spread to frequent or occasional use in everyday or cultivated language” (DRAE 2001: xlviii). In its 2014 edition, there is no mention of how diatechnical labels are applied. There is only an example in the sample entries in which the diatechnical label is explained as the specialized field to which the word or sense corresponds.

According to Barité/Blanco (2014), three different aspects of the treatment of specialized words in the academic dictionary can be inferred from the information in the 2001 edition of DRAE: (a) technical archaisms are excluded from the dictionary; (b) also excluded are specialized words or meanings that have not gone beyond their field and are therefore only known and used in internal communications in that field; and (c) specialized words and meanings whose use, whether frequent or occasional, has spread beyond its field are included. However, it is not always clear which words or meanings included merit a diatechnical label.

With the information available, it would appear that no other criteria were applied for the updates to the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the DLE, so that it can be concluded that the above criterion still applies. It is actually a very logical criterion, which accounts for the de-terminologization of certain expressions or an unusual socialization of certain words, without losing their condition of specialized word. It is reasonable to assume that in the innovative 24<sup>th</sup> edition, on which the Spanish language academies have been working for some years now, this type of information will be made explicit.

The inclusion of technical neologisms in dictionaries has a tradition of its own, which is strongly linked to the diversification of professional activities and fields of knowledge that give rise to specialized languages. There are also different real-life

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7 A diatechnical label, also known as a “subject label”, “specialization label”, or “thematic label”, qualifies the definition of a lexical unit by indicating the scientific discipline, technical field, profession, or specialized area it belongs to (Martínez de Sousa 2009: 147).

events, such as the pandemic that began in 2019, that force established disciplines to reallocate resources and quickly direct research toward problem-solving, in this case problems concerning the classification of a virus and the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of the disease it causes. This type of situation is fertile ground for the rapid emergence of new terms that are quickly picked up and become widespread.

All these circumstances naturally occur in the oral and written language used by specialists among themselves. These terms, as such, may be included in the dictionary, and, if they are, they may be accompanied by the corresponding technical label and an appropriate definition. As the pandemic progresses, these terms will be used by specialists in their communications with lay persons, or between health authorities or specialized reporters and ordinary citizens. These terms will also begin to be used in everyday language, making their lexicographic treatment different: they will not necessarily carry a label indicating a specialized field and their definition will tend to be less technical.

Things are not, however, that simple or linear. Strictly speaking, specialized languages would only include scientific terms used by specialists in their specialized communications or in dissemination activities, and which, for example, are part of the formal (scientific or technical) classifications of their specialized fields. Within this framework, and from a lexicographic perspective, in the general dictionaries of a language, only those words or meanings that contain a diatechnical label could be considered specialized. Applying instead a more open criterion, the set of specialized words or meanings could be expanded to include those that directly or indirectly refer to a specialization, and that are usually jargon or technical slang words, or just constructions coined for communication among non-specialists, even when they are adopted because of their picturesque quality.

### **3 Academic dictionary updates in the context of the pandemic**

#### **3.1 General characteristics of the updating process of the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition of the DLE**

The most recent edition of the DLE is the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and while it came out in 2014, it has been regularly updated in its online searchable version, which became available in 2015. Successive batches of modifications approved by the language academies, which will all be ultimately included in the 24<sup>th</sup> edition, have been periodically

incorporated.<sup>8</sup> The last such update, which is what interests us here, was announced in December 2020 and it is known as the 23.4 edition of the DLE.<sup>9</sup>

Like all dictionaries of such magnitude, DLE has been updated periodically since its first edition in 1780. In the eighteenth century, there were two updates; in the nineteenth, ten; and in the twentieth, eight. In the twenty-first century, the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition was released in 2001 and the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition came out in 2014, as noted above. In this sense, as of the twenty-first century, technological developments enabled a change in the very concept of updating, and, following the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition, updates are performed continuously. This has generated different and renewed versions of the edition published originally on paper in 2014. The dictionary is no longer something static; rather, changes can be made regularly to it and released as they are made. This is an unprecedented situation for Spanish academic lexicography.

The words connected with the pandemic that were added to the DLE as of December 2020 can be classified according to different aspects (cf. Battaner 2021): they can be considered hereditary words already present in the DLE (such as *distanciamiento* ‘distancing’, *normalidad* ‘normality’, *barbijo* ‘mask’, *aislamiento* ‘isolation’); new combinations (*distanciamiento social* ‘social distancing’ or *distancia de seguridad* ‘safety distance’, *nueva normalidad* ‘new normal’, *barbijo quirúrgico* ‘surgical mask’, *aislamiento social* ‘social isolation’, *contacto estrecho* ‘close contact’); or neologisms formed by derivation or composition (*anticuarentena* ‘anti-quarantine’, *desconfinamiento* ‘unlockdown’, *intrafamiliar* ‘intra-family’, *pospandemia* ‘post-pandemic’) (cf. Battaner 2021). There are also crude anglicisms (such as *home office*), often linked to new practices popularized in 2020.

In its 23<sup>rd</sup> edition, updated in December 2020,<sup>10</sup> the DLE features changes in the meanings of *confinado* ‘confined’ and *confinar* ‘confine’, while the entry for *confinado*, *da* ‘confined’ (masculine and feminine) was also amended. One new meaning of *confinamiento* ‘confinement’, related to ‘lockdown’, was added:<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> edition of the DLE will differ from all previous editions and will involve a thorough overhaul of the work in a wide range of its structural elements. The new DLE “will be digital from its very conception. It is no longer a matter of converting into an electronic resource something that was conceived, and in part developed, as a work intended to be published on paper, but of creating a genuinely electronic dictionary, with everything such a fundamental fact implies” (<https://www.asale.org/noticias/la-rae-presenta-la-primera-actualizacion-de-la-23a-edicion-de-su-dle>).

<sup>9</sup> The first update of the 23<sup>rd</sup> edition was done in December 2017; it was then updated again in December 2018 and in December 2019. This article focuses on the latest update, in December 2020. The academies are currently working on the 23rd edition and on the 24th edition simultaneously.

<sup>10</sup> This update includes more than 2,000 changes.

<sup>11</sup> The Fundación del Español Urgente (Foundation for Urgent Spanish), promoted by the EFE Agency and the Real Academia Española, even chose “confinamiento” as the word of the year 2020.



**confinado, da.** [Amended entry]. [. . .] adj. 1. Dicho de una persona: Obligada a vivir en un determinado lugar. U. t. c. s. || m. y f. 2. Persona sometida a un confinamiento (|| aislamiento impuesto a una población). || 3. Der. En algunos países, persona que sufre la pena de confinamiento.

[(adjective) 1. Said of a person: Forced to live in a given place. Also used as a noun. 2. (Masculine and feminine) Person subjected to a confinement. (|| isolation imposed on a population) || 3. (Law) In some countries, a person who suffers a penalty of confinement.]

**confinamiento.** [Amended meaning] m. 1. Acción y efecto de confinar o confinarse. [(Masculine) 1. Action and effect of confining or confining oneself.]

**confinamiento.** [Meaning added]. || m. 1 bis. Aislamiento temporal y generalmente impuesto de una población, una persona o un grupo por razones de salud o de seguridad. *El Gobierno decretó un confinamiento de un mes.*

[(Masculine) 1. bis Temporary and generally imposed isolation of a population, a person, or a group due to health or safety reasons. *The Government decreed a month-long confinement.*]

**confinar.** [. . .] || 2. [Amended meaning]. tr. Encerrar o recluir algo o a alguien en un lugar determinado o dentro de unos límites. U. t. c. prnl. *Se confinó EN su casa.*” [(Transitive verb) 2. Lock up something or someone in, or commit them to, a given place or within certain limits. Also used pronominally. *They confined themselves IN their home.*]<sup>12</sup>

*Cuarentenar* ‘quarantine’ and its variants *cuarentenear* and *encuarentenar* were added as verbs in the DLE and one of the meanings of *cuarenteno* ‘quarantined person’ was amended:

**cuarentenar.** [Entry added]. tr. 1. Poner algo o a alguien en cuarentena (|| aislamiento preventivo por razones sanitarias). *Cuarentenaron un hospital.* U. t. c. prnl. *Se cuarentenó durante la epidemia.* || intr. 2. p. us. Pasar un período de cuarentena (|| aislamiento preventivo por razones sanitarias). *Se permite el regreso a la ciudad de origen para cuarentenar.*

[1. (Transitive verb) To place something or someone in quarantine (|| preventive isolation for health reasons). *They quarantined a hospital.* Also used pronominally. *They quarantined themselves during the epidemic.* || 2. (Intransitive verb, scarcely used) To go through a period in quarantine (|| preventive isolation for health reasons). *They are allowed to return to their home town to quarantine.*]

**cuarentenear.** [Entry added]. intr. 1. Pasar un período de cuarentena (|| aislamiento preventivo por razones sanitarias). *Es más llevadero cuarentenear con alguien.* || tr. 2. p. us. Poner algo o a alguien en cuarentena (|| aislamiento preventivo por razones sanitarias). *Tendremos que cuarentenear el ganado. Las autoridades cuarentenearon el crucero.*

[1. (Intransitive verb) To go through a period in quarantine (|| preventive isolation for health reasons). *Quarantining is more bearable if you do it with someone.* || 2. (Transitive verb, scarcely used) To place something or someone in quarantine (|| preventive isolation for health reasons). *We will have to quarantine the livestock. The authorities quarantined the cruise.*]

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rae.es/noticia/la-rae-presenta-las-novedades-del-diccionario-de-la-lengua-espanola-dle-en-su-actualizacion>.



**encuarentenar.** [Entry added]. tr. Poner algo o a alguien en cuarentena (|| aislamiento preventivo por razones sanitarias). *Si alguien se infecta, habrá que encuarentenar a toda la colonia.* U. t. c. prnl. *Me encuarentené por precaución.*

[(Transitive verb) To place something or someone in quarantine (|| preventive isolation for health reasons). *If anyone is infected, the whole colony will have to be quarantined.* (Also used pronominally) *I quarantined myself just to be safe.*

**cuarenteno, na.** [. . .] || 7. [Amended entry]. f. Aislamiento preventivo a que se somete durante un período de tiempo, por razones sanitarias, a personas, animales o cosas”.

[|| 7. (Feminine) Preventive isolation that persons, animals, or things are placed under for health reasons.]<sup>13</sup>

Also, *desconfinamiento* ‘unlockdown’ (noun) and *desconfinar* ‘unlockdown’ (verb) were added as antonyms of *confinamiento* and *confinar*, respectively:

**desconfinamiento.** [Entry added]. m. Levantamiento de las medidas impuestas en un confinamiento.

[(Masculine). Lifting of the measures imposed in a confinement (or lockdown).]

**desconfinar.** [Entry added]. tr. Levantar las medidas de confinamiento impuestas a una población, o a parte de ella, en un territorio u otro lugar. U. t. c. intr. y c. prnl.

[(Transitive verb) To lift confinement (or lockdown) measures imposed on a population, or part of it, in a territory or other place. (Also used as intransitive and pronominally).]<sup>14</sup>

New definitions were given to the entry *mask* to adapt it to the meaning of ‘mask’:

**mask.** [. . .] 2. [Amended meaning]. f. Máscara que cubre la boca y la nariz de su portador para protegerlo de la inhalación y evitar la exhalación de posibles agentes patógenos, tóxicos o nocivos. Mask quirúrgica, sanitaria.

[(Feminine) 2. A mask that covers the mouth and nose of the wearer to protect them from inhaling and preventing them from exhaling possible pathogenic, toxic, or noxious agents. Surgical, sanitary mask.]<sup>15</sup>

*Coronavirus* ‘coronaviral’ and *coronavirus* were added as terms from the field of medicine. It is interesting to note that an etymology for *coronavirus* was also added, indicating that it is derived from the English word *coronavirus*, but also recognizing Latin as the language from which it was derived originally.

**coronavirus, ca.** [Entry added]. adj. Med. Perteneciente o relativo al coronavirus.

[(Adjective, medicine) Of or relating to coronavirus.]

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

**coronavirus.** [Entry added]. m. Med. Virus que produce diversas enfermedades respiratorias en los seres humanos, desde el catarro a la neumonía o la COVID. [ (Masculine, medicine) A virus that causes various respiratory diseases in humans, from the common cold to pneumonia or COVID.]

**coronavirus.**[Etymology added to the entry]. (Del ingl. *coronavirus*, de *corona* ‘corona solar’, por el aspecto del virus al microscopio, y este del lat. *corōna* ‘corona’, y *virus* ‘virus’, y este del lat. *virus* ‘veneno’, ‘ponzoña’).

[From the English *coronavirus*, from *corona* ‘solar corona’, because of the appearance of the virus under the microscope, and this from the Latin *corōna* ‘corona’ and *virus* ‘virus’, derived in turn from the Latin *virus* ‘venom’, ‘poison’.]<sup>16</sup>

The term *coronavirus* would appear to be a prototypical case of the model the Academy is adopting in an effort to address criticism it has received in the past. A brief definition is provided, which is simply phrased and straightforward. It includes the core propositions of the concept, so it can serve as a starting point for readers to work with texts of greater scope or depth, such as specialized texts.

This is an accurate definition, as it does not deny the fact that while it has gained visibility in the current pandemic, the term *coronavirus* has existed since 1968 (Ochoa Montes/Ferrer Marrero 2021), with seven varieties of the virus having been discovered thus far, including SARS-CoV-2. It also avoids the need to have an entry under the specific name of the virus that caused the pandemic.

At the same time, the definition of *coronavirus* mentions *COVID*, although the World Health Organization announced on February 11, 2020, that the official name of the disease would be *COVID-19*, a contraction of the term *coronavirus disease 2019*. However, in the DLE, *COVID-19* is recorded but it refers back to *COVID*, perhaps because it is assumed that that is the most frequent form used in the Spanish language.

A new entry was added for *COVID* as a medical term and its English etymology was also added. The DLE states that this word can be a feminine or masculine noun. In the process of its adaptation to different varieties of Spanish, it has developed two different accentuations: *covid* and *cóvid*, although this is not mentioned in the dictionary.

**COVID.** [Entry added]. m. o f. Med. Síndrome respiratorio agudo producido por un coronavirus. COVID-19. m. o f. Med. COVID.

[(Masculine or feminine, medicine) Acute respiratory syndrome produced by a coronavirus. COVID-19. (masculine or feminine, medicine). COVID.]

**COVID.**[Etymology added to the entry]. (Del ingl. *COVID*, y este acrón. de *coronavirus disease* ‘enfermedad del coronavirus’.)

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

[From the English *COVID*, the acronym of *coronavirus disease*.]<sup>17</sup>

The criteria that Bernal et al. (2020) had already observed in the 2019 update are also manifested in this update. Among these criteria, the most prominent in academic lexicographic practice is the consistency in updating a word with its derivatives. That lends rigor and internal consistency to the dictionary. In addition, a cautious attitude can be observed in the assessment of the frequency of a word and its stability. There is no urgency, at least in specialized language, to incorporate new words or meanings. As a result of the pandemic only two words with the label ‘*Med.*’ were included: *coronavírico*, *ca* and *coronavirus*. As we will see in section 4, the DHLE takes more liberties.

### 3.2 General characteristics of the DHLE update

One of the most noteworthy developments for Spanish language lexicographic research is the availability, since 2013, of some entries of the *Diccionario histórico de la lengua española* (DHLE, 2013–). This is the result of an academic pan-Hispanic project, which received its final ratification with the establishment, in April 2021, of the Red Panhispánica de Academias, Universidades y Centros de Investigación para la Elaboración del Diccionario Histórico de la Lengua Española (Pan-Hispanic Network of Academies, Universities, and Research Centers for the Production of the Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Language, <https://www.rae.es/dhle/>).

According to its introduction, it is a “digital-native dictionary that seeks to fully describe (diatopically, diastratically, and chronologically) the history of the Spanish language lexicon,” as well as to “analyze the history of the lexicon in a relational perspective, addressing the etymological, morphological, and semantic connections that are established between words” (DHLE 2013–). As a diachronically oriented database, the persons behind it aim to organize the entries by semantic fields or lexical families. It is important to note that the DHLE shares the same databases with the DLE, but it has its own seal and independent funding.

A detailed explanation of the DHLE’s structure, its characteristics, and the type of relations between words and meanings (morpho-etymological, change mechanisms, semantic) can be found in a document that is available on its website. The document also clearly defines the terms of reference (lemma, sub-lemma, hyperlemma, meaning, sub-meaning, variant, syntactic scheme, documentation, multiword unit, and lexical family). In addition, four types of labels are identified for the meanings included in the DHLE: diatopical, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and, most importantly for this study, diatechnical or specialization labels.

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17 Ibid.

Available online with more than six thousand entries, the aim of the DHLE is to show, in an organized manner, the evolution of the Spanish lexicon over time and up to the present. In March 2021 alone, 715 new monographs were added, which led to the production of entries for words in different semantic fields and lexical families. A difference observed between the DLE and DHLE is that the former usually incorporates new words or meanings in more or less numerous batches, on a regular basis; whereas incorporations in the DHLE are done by lexical families, among other criteria.

The context of the pandemic has been particularly productive in terms of recording new expressions. A brief exploration of the DHLE revealed that some of these expressions are related to the virus, but most of them have to do with COVID-19, with its prevention and treatment, and with concepts that are only understood in the new circumstances. Some of these expressions are scientific in nature, but in other cases their inclusion in specialization languages could be debatable. This is the case of words such as *covidengue* ‘covidengue’ and *covidfobia* ‘covidphobia’, for example. Others seem to be humorous or somewhat picturesque productions. This is the case, for example, of a significant number of entries beginning with *COVI-*, such as *covicho*, ‘covidbug’, *covidcidio* ‘covidcide’, *covidiota* ‘covidiot’, and *covidemia* ‘covidemia’.

With the aim of examining in greater detail a sample of expressions in vogue during the pandemic, which came to the attention of the DHLE and the DLE, as well as assessing their potential novelty, we chose to study a homogeneous universe: that of the words that emerged as derivatives or developments of *CORONA-*. This will be explained in the following sections.

## 4 The case of words beginning with *CORONA-*

### 4.1 Research design

As noted in the introduction, this section will present a concrete analysis whose universe is formed by the expressions beginning with *CORONA-*, provided they relate in some way to the Coronavirus. In considering only the terms that begin with *CORONA-*, the study leaves out many other words related to the pandemic, such as, for example, words beginning with *COVI-*, or words that are part of the set of words related to the prevention of the disease, such as *distancia social* ‘social distance’, *maskarilla* ‘face mask’ or *sanitización* ‘sanitization’. In this sense, the universe studied constitutes a partial sample with respect to the total of words or meanings that can refer to the pandemic in the dictionaries studied.

The corpus includes: (i) the 23<sup>rd</sup> printed edition of the DLE, also known as the Tercentenary edition (DLE 2014); (ii) the 23.4 DLE version, which is currently online (DLE 23.4 2020); and (iii) the DHLE version available as of the date of this study, May 2021 (DHLE 2013–).

While the three works that make up the corpus are not completely homogeneous, neither in their structure nor in their objectives, for the purposes of this analysis the findings are comparable and allow for general and specific conclusions to be drawn regarding the recording status of neologisms, or neologism candidates, in the Spanish language in the pandemic scenario that unfolded as of 2019.

It should be noted that equivalents and variants, which are moreover only included in the DHLE, are recorded together or separately following the criterion used in the dictionary itself. In this sense, *coronasalmonela* and *coronasalmonella* each have their own entry because they are featured separately in the DHLE, but *coronadengue* and *corona-dengue* are considered as one entry because that is how they are recorded.

## 4.2 Research findings

The data presented below shows, as noted above, the recording status of words beginning with CORONA- and which are related to the coronavirus, in the three sources selected as corpus (DLE 2014; DLE 23.4 2020; DHLE 2013–).

The thirty-one words identified are *coronaplauso* ‘coronapplause’, *coronabebé* ‘coronababy’, *coronabicho* ‘coronabug’, *coronaboda* ‘coronawedding’, *coronabono* ‘corona-bonus’, *coronabulo* ‘coronahoax’, *coronachikunguñá* ‘coronachikunguya’, *coronachivato* ‘coronainformer’, *coronacompra* ‘coronapurchase’, *coronacrisis* ‘coronacrisis’, *corona-dengue*, *corona-dengue* ‘coronadengue’, *coronadiccionario* ‘coronadictionary’, *corona-divorcio* ‘coronadivorce’, *coronafiesta* ‘coronaparty’, *coronafobia* ‘coronaphobia’, *coronahisteria* ‘coronahysteria’, *coronahistérico,a* ‘coronahysteric’, *coronalengua* ‘coronalanguage’, *coronalenguaje* ‘coronalanguage’, *coronamanía* ‘coronamania’, *coronacionalismo* ‘coronationalism’, *coronapositivo* ‘coronapositive’, *coronasalmonela* ‘coronasalmonella’, *coronasalmonella* ‘coronasalmonella’, *coronaviral* ‘coronaviral’, *coronavírico, a* ‘coronaviral’, *coronavirología* ‘coronavirology’, *coronavirólogo, a* ‘coronavirologist’, *coronavirosis* ‘coronavirosis’, *coronaviroso, a* ‘coronainfected’ and *coronavirus* ‘coronavirus’. All thirty-one words that fit the search equation are recorded in DHLE, while only two of them are recorded in DLE 23.4 (*coronavírico, ca* and *coronavirus*), and none in DLE 23. Thus, the only two words beginning with CORONA- that are featured both in DLE 23.4 and DHLE are *coronavirus* and *coronavírico, ca*.<sup>18</sup> None of the humorous constructions, such as *coronaplauso*, *coronabebé*, or *coronabicho* are recorded in DLE, perhaps in the understanding that their stability is not ensured.

Four of the thirty-one words included in DHLE were documented before the pandemic (*coronavirus*, since 1980; *coronavirosis*, since 1992, *coronaviral*, since 1997; and *coronavirología*, since 2012). This thus verifies that, while these documented instances

<sup>18</sup> The entries for these two words in both dictionaries are attached as figures 1–4 in annex I.

predate 2014 (year in which the DLE 23<sup>rd</sup> edition came out), at that time there were not sufficient arguments to include any of those words in that dictionary, or in its 23.4 online edition. Documented instances may exist prior to 2019 because *coronavirus* is a generic term coined in 1968. In fact, a research study conducted in the United Kingdom toward the mid-1960s revealed that the first of what are now known as *coronaviruses* corresponded to a virus found in chickens suffering from bronchitis, around the year 1930 (Tyrrell/Bynoe 1965). SARS-CoV-2 is just one of the viruses in the Coronavirus family. This clarification is necessary to determine which words are neologisms or potential neologisms, and which have a long-standing existence, although without the exposure they have now.

Of the thirty-one words recorded in DHLE, only two have a diatechnical label, and in both cases, it is medicine ('*Med.*'). *Coronavirus* receives a diatechnical label both in the DLE 23.4 and DHLE, while *coronaviral* has one but only in DHLE, given that the word is not recorded in DLE or in DLE 23.4. The DHLE also assigns it a double label: medicine and veterinary. The adjective *coronavírico*, *ca*, for its part, has the '*Med.*' label in the 23.4 edition of DLE but not in DHLE.

There are at least four other expressions, featured only in DHLE, that could be considered specialized words that merit a diatechnical label, although they do not have one, at least to date: *coronavirología*, *coronavirólogo*, *coronavirosis*, and *coronavirioso*. These four words have not gone beyond their specialized field and do not appear to be used outside it, so that they meet the generally accepted criteria for receiving a diatechnical label.

*Coronabono*, for its part, is a word clearly connected with the field of economics, an area of knowledge that has its own diatechnical label in DLE, and which could constitute another case to consider.

The twenty-seven words in DHLE that have no documented instances prior to the pandemic could be considered candidates for full neologisms, taking into account also that they were not recorded in the last 23.4 version of DLE.

None of the dictionaries incorporates any foreign words connected with the pandemic.

In Table 1, the thirty-one words identified are distributed geographically based on the data recorded only in DHLE, given that that dictionary is the only one of the three sources that features all the words, and also locates each documented instance geographically. This table also has a chronological reference, as DHLE indicates the year of the documented use.

The geographical indications are divided into four large regions: Europe, North America, Central America and the Caribbean, and South America. This division, however, precludes the drawing of reliable conclusions or trends regarding the scope of use. Moreover, as previously noted (Bernal et al. 2020), applying exclusively a frequency criterion is not enough in the usual practice for updating language dictionaries, so that the geographical data gathered here has illustrative rather than descriptive value.

**Table 1:** Geographical and chronological distribution of the documented uses of the thirty-one corona- words in DHLE.

Word	Europe	North America	Central America and the Caribbean	South America	Total	2020	2021 (as of 30/05)
<i>Coronaplausos</i>	4				4	2	2
<i>Coronabebé</i>				6	6	6	
<i>Coronabicho</i>	4	3			7	6	1
<i>Coronaboda</i>	3			2	5	4	1
<i>Coronabono</i>	6		2		8	8	
<i>Coronabulo</i>	11				11	9	2
<i>Coronachikunguña</i>				1	1		1
<i>Coronachivato</i>	2				2	1	1
<i>Coronacompra</i>	1	2	1	1	5	4	1
<i>Coronacrisis</i>	4			6	10	8	2
<i>Coronadengue</i>		2		5	7	4	3
<i>Coronadiccionario</i>				1	1	1	
<i>Coronadivorcio</i>	2	2		1	5	5	
<i>Coronafiesta</i>	2	2		2	6	4	2
<i>Coronafobia</i>	5		1	2	8	6	2
<i>Coronahisteria</i>	5	1			6	5	1
<i>Coronahistórico,a</i>	2				2	2	
<i>Coronalengua</i>	1			1	2	2	
<i>Coronalenguaje</i>	1	1			2	2	
<i>Coronamanía</i>	1			1	2	2	
<i>Coronacionalismo</i>	4				4	4	
<i>Coronapositivo,a</i>				4	4	4	
<i>Coronasalmonela</i>				1	1		1
<i>Coronasalmonella</i>				1	1		1
<i>Coronavírico,a</i>	7	1			8	6	2
<i>Coronavirólogo,a</i>	4	1		1	6	4	2
<i>Coronaviroso,a</i>	1		4		5	4	1
TOTALS	70	15	8	36	129	103	26



Only one word (*coronacompra*) is recorded in every region, which does not mean that it is used in every country of those regions.

While the criteria for the inclusion/exclusion of neologisms in DHLE are not made explicit, an inductive analysis of the recorded instances of the thirty-one words studied allows us to conclude that only one documented instance is needed in order to be included in DHLE, as in Table 1 there are four cases with a single documented instance (*coronachikunguña*, *coronadiccionario*, *coronasalmonela*, and *coronasalmonella*).

The maximum number of documented instances is eleven, and there is only one word with that many instances. This may reflect the very recent emergence of all of these words, in line with the unfolding of the pandemic. Moreover, of the 129 documented instances in total, 103 are from the year 2020 (80 percent) and 26 (20 percent) from the year 2021, although the analysis for 2021 only goes up to May 30.

While we understand the logic that is intended to be established for the progressive construction of DHLE, as far as neologism candidates are concerned, with this repertoire, in addition to acting as a historical dictionary, it also becomes, in practice, a refined emergency dictionary<sup>19</sup> that gathers new words – even some whose validation could be questionable – that in the future could either be potential lemmas of DLE or discarded outright for not meeting the usual criteria for incorporation into the main dictionary of the Spanish language.

## 5 Final considerations

A pandemic of the magnitude of the one that broke out in 2019, and with the speed at which it has spread around the world, is unusual. With the virus, the disease, and the social and economic changes brought on by the pandemic, words and terms also spread very rapidly, quickly capturing the attention of linguists and lexicographers. The academic dictionaries of the Spanish language are facing this situation in an unprecedented technological and methodological scenario for Spanish academic lexicography, which allows for an aggiornamento never seen before with respect to the updating practices both for DLE and DHLE. Two absolutely exceptional situations thus converged: the pandemic and a modern updating system.

At the same time, as the possibility of updating the DLE coincides with a momentum in the DHLE, the academic outlook is even more unique. DHLE operates

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<sup>19</sup> This term stands for the Spanish phrase “diccionario de emergencia” or “diccionario de urgencia” (emergency or urgency dictionary), as it is used on websites such as [http://www.intranet.senasa.gov.ar/intranet/imagenes/archivos/prensa/caja\\_herramientas/Diccionario\\_de\\_Urgencia.pdf](http://www.intranet.senasa.gov.ar/intranet/imagenes/archivos/prensa/caja_herramientas/Diccionario_de_Urgencia.pdf) or <https://www.meneame.net/m/actualidad/mami-guillao-masacote-diccionario-urgencia-descifrar-canciones> or <https://www.consumer.es/economia-domestica/finanzas/diccionario-de-urgencia-para-entender-que-ocurre-con-los-bancos-espanoles.html> (last access: 10 June 2022).

methodologically as an emergency dictionary; it does not abandon its role as historical dictionary, but it acts also as an emergency dictionary, while DLE functions as an exclusion corpus. DHLE plays the role of witness corpus, in which all lexical creations are recorded. By recording neologisms it is writing the history of these words, bearing witness to terms that may or may not remain in the language, but whose appearance and disappearance can be dated and documented. DLE will incorporate only some of these words added by DHLE. It will incorporate only those that have stability, that can still be observed after a reasonable period, that have resisted the passage of time. All the words that remain in DHLE and are not incorporated into DLE are in quarantine, or, more precisely, in limbo, because it is a quarantine that is not necessarily going to end. They may remain there for an indefinite period of time, unless usage determines otherwise.

In this particular aspect, DHLE can be compared to the *Diccionario manual e ilustrado de la lengua académica* (1989) (Manual and Illustrated Academic Language Dictionary),<sup>20</sup> in that it distinguishes, as Alvar noted (1992), the neologisms-general/usual language dictionary relationship from the neologisms-manual dictionary relationship. Alvar understands that the manual dictionary gathers new words “aware that they could be a vocabulary that will have a fleeting existence in the general language.” And he adds, “this is a necessary process: these words may disappear without leaving any other trace than the ephemeral presence of a limited use, but they may become widespread in their use and this non-normative repertoire will have been the anteroom for accessing the *Diccionario usual* [DLE]” (Alvar 1992). The idea of an “anteroom” can also be applied to DHLE.

Moreover, it should be noted that in DLE there is a reluctance to incorporate words, because there is a clear awareness of the difficulty involved in removing a word from the dictionary once it is included. In contrast, DHLE does not face a horizon in which it will be necessary to discuss whether or not a word is removed from the dictionary: it only needs to document the year of its last recorded use.

DLE aims, as it should, to be increasingly more user-friendly for native speakers, who, incidentally, are its intended audience; DHLE, by dating the first documented instance of the word in question, becomes a very user-friendly dictionary for researchers. Researchers often find it difficult to see in DLE the principles and criteria that govern the incorporations into the dictionary. These principles and criteria are not made explicit with the 2020 incorporations either, but it is clear that it has adapted to the emergence of the pandemic and that it took advantage of the technological resources available, which are, moreover, part of its new institutional policies.

The analysis of the nature of the new pandemic-specific expressions reveals that only two words in DLE (*coronavirus* and *coronavírico, ca*) are, strictly speaking,

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20 Cf. also *Diccionario esencial de la lengua española* (2006).

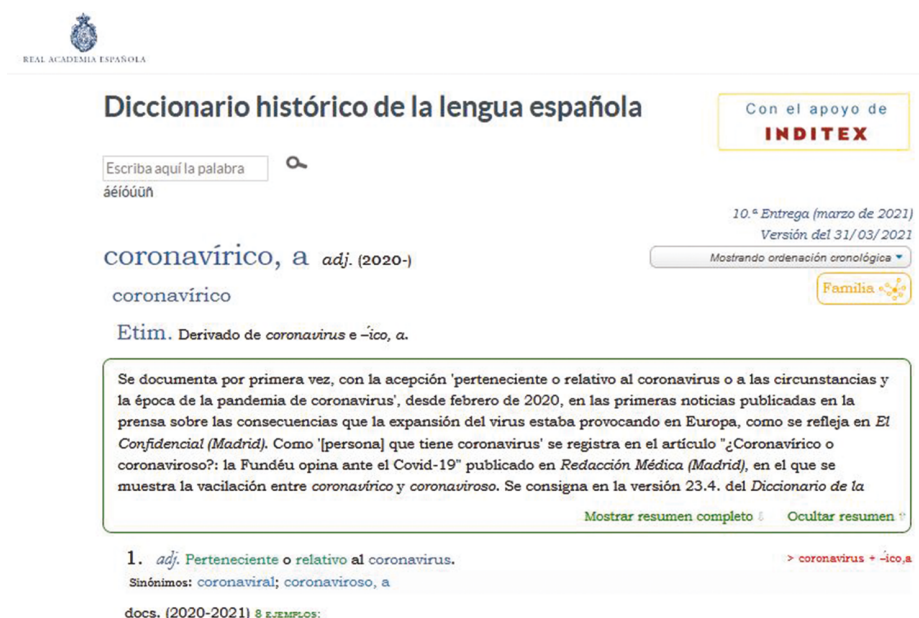
specialized terms: they receive a modern lexicographic treatment, which does not pose past difficulties when it comes to defining specialized language words.

These two words are also recorded in DHLE, but only *coronavirus* has the label 'Med.' As noted, other words beginning with CORONA- could be assigned that label too.

The new additions open a debate on the treatment of neologisms in lexicography, in a particularly unique scenario. It could be said that the changes made in DLE – as a result of the coronavirus pandemic – in a way rekindle old discussions regarding the criteria and methods used by DLE to select, incorporate, and define expressions belonging to specialized areas.

The pandemic represents an opportunity for lexicography and terminology researchers to discuss and propose consistent solutions for the incorporation of scientific and specialized words into DLE and other Spanish dictionaries. In this regard, it offers a chance to leave behind vague criteria for incorporating or excluding scientific terms, scientific definitions not easily understood by a regular audience, conceptual inaccuracies, and somewhat erratic assignments of thematic labels, among other criticisms that DLE has received.


## Annex I



REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA

### Diccionario histórico de la lengua española

Con el apoyo de **INDITEX**

Escriba aquí la palabra 

áéíóúñ

10.ª Entrega (marzo de 2021)  
Versión del 31/03/2021  
Mostrando ordenación cronológica

**coronavírico, a** *adj.* (2020-)

**coronavírico**

**Etim.** Derivado de *coronavirus* e *-írico, a*.

Se documenta por primera vez, con la acepción 'perteneciente o relativo al coronavirus o a las circunstancias y la época de la pandemia de coronavirus', desde febrero de 2020, en las primeras noticias publicadas en la prensa sobre las consecuencias que la expansión del virus estaba provocando en Europa, como se refleja en *El Confidencial* (Madrid). Como '[persona] que tiene coronavirus' se registra en el artículo "¿Coronavírico o coronavirus?: la Fundéu opina ante el Covid-19" publicado en *Redacción Médica* (Madrid), en el que se muestra la vacilación entre *coronavírico* y *coronavirus*. Se consigna en la versión 23.4. del *Diccionario de la*

[Mostrar resumen completo](#) [Ocultar resumen](#)

1. *adj.* Perteneciente o relativo al coronavirus.

Sinónimos: *coronaviral*; *coronaviruso, a*

docs. (2020-2021) [8 EJEMPLOS](#)

[coronavirus + -írico, a](#)

Figure 1: <https://www.rae.es/dhle/coronavírico>.

REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA

## Diccionario histórico de la lengua española

Con el apoyo de **INDITEX**

Escriba aquí la palabra 

áéíóúñ

10.ª Entrega (marzo de 2021)  
Versión del 31/03/2021  
Mostrando ordenación cronológica

**coronavirus** s. (1980-)

**coronavirus**

**Etim.** Voz tomada del inglés *coronavirus*, atestiguada en esta lengua al menos desde 1968, en un artículo científico publicado en *Nature* (véase *OED*, s. v.).

Se documenta por primera vez, con la acepción 'virus de la familia *Coronaviridae*, compuesto por un núcleo de ARN y cubierto por una corona de glucoproteínas, que causa enfermedades respiratorias e intestinales en personas y animales', en 1980, en la *Guía de enfermedades de los cerdos* de J. A. Chipper. Se consigna por primera vez en el *Vocabulario científico y técnico* (1983) de la Real Academia de Ciencias Exactas, Físicas y Naturales. Por metonimia, pasa también a denominarse *coronavirus* la enfermedad que provoca, como muestra, en 1997, un anuncio publicado en *Nuevo Heraldo* (Aranjuez), donde se emplea con el valor 'enfermedad

[Mostrar resumen completo](#) [Ocultar resumen](#)

1. s. m. *Microb. Med. Virus* de la familia *Coronaviridae*, compuesto por un núcleo de ARN y cubierto por una *corona* de glucoproteínas, que causa enfermedades respiratorias e intestinales en personas y animales.

docs. (1980-2021) 25 EJEMPLOS:

Figure 2: <https://www.rae.es/dhle/coronavirus>.

REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA



Diccionario de la lengua española Edición del Tricentenario Actualización 2020

Consulta posible gracias al compromiso con la cultura de la  Fundación "la Caixa"

por palabras  Escriba aquí la palabra 

**Consultar**

**coronavirus**

Del ingl. *coronavirus*, de *corona* 'corona solar', por el aspecto del virus al microscopio, y este del lat. *corōna* 'corona', y *virus* 'virus', y este del lat. *virus* 'veneno', 'ponzoña'.

1. m. *Med.* Virus que produce diversas enfermedades respiratorias en los seres humanos, desde el catarro a la neumonía o la COVID.

Figure 3: <https://dle.rae.es/coronavirus>.



Diccionario de la lengua española   Edición del Tricentenario   Actualización 2020

Consulta posible gracias al compromiso con la cultura de la

por palabras   Escribe aquí la palabra   Consultar

Fundación "la Caixa"

## coronavírico, ca

1. *adj. Med.* Perteneciente o relativo al coronavirus.

Figure 4: <https://dle.rae.es/coronavírico>.

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