Emotional Context of Newspaper Articles about Covid-19: Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of News in New Zealand

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Abstract: This paper explores New Zealand newspaper texts about Covid-19 from the point of view of emotions and emotivity. New Zealand has been chosen as a country where Coronovirus pandemic followed a very specific pattern. The virus was kept at bay for a long time, but finally the number of Covid-19 cases rocketed. This situation was reflected by the growth of negative contexts in New Zealand newspapers. The article is aimed at revealing the correlation of Covid-19 danger and raise of emotive vocabulary in New Zealand newspapers. The article researches three phases of Covid-19 situation in New Zealand, such as phase 1 when the number of new cases was controlled; phase 2 when the number of new cases was quickly escalating, and phase 3 when the number of new cases was still high but not so quickly changing. The findings display a strong correlation of the social and textual newspaper contexts. The corpora were analyzed from the point of view of negative and positive verbal reactions to the situation of pandemic escalation in the world and in New Zealand. The findings show that with escalation of Covid-19 cases the tone of newspapers changed. A sharp drop in positive contexts (by twofold- or even fourfold) was noted when describing the situation of danger from Covid-19 in the country. Though the direct nominations of danger did not occur in the analyzed corpora, there was noted a rise in negative contexts of words referring closely to Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, emotions, emotivity, mass media, social context, stress impact

1. Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic impacted all countries in the world forcing irrevocable transformations in people's lifestyles and ways of thinking. No one could stay away from the changes it has trigged irrespective of professional sphere, age or place of living.

The deadly virus has transfigured people's lives immensely, ruining businesses and undermining economic systems. Constant and prolonged lockdowns broke business chains by disrupting deliveries and blocking common business schemes. Workforce for some important business operations became unavailable for the countries did not let any immigrants in who used to do such work before. All companies connected with face to face communication and services became abridged; strict limitations that had been imposed on crowding made restaurants and cafes go bankrupt. Shopping at malls with restricted number of people at a time and queuing at a safe distance from each other altered habitual behavior and society patterns in many countries. All travelling was stopped, in some places being limited

to insane 1000 meters from home. Closed borders led tourism and hotel business to a catastrophe. The pandemic made people jobless, fearful and desperate.

Strict following the rules of pandemic lifestyle included restriction of crowded meetings that changed a lot of family rituals; in some countries gatherings of more than two guests were prohibited making impossible tender support of families and friends. Visits to institutions for elderly care were strongly prohibited because of vulnerability to the virus of the elderly people. In the places where such restrictions did not take place, there were multiple fatalities. People found themselves to be afraid of usual hugs and kisses; handshakes started to be infectious. Wearing masks distorted the way people perceive each other, respiratory protective devices gained life-importance. The necessity of keeping distance provoked a lot of distant services. Online communication replaced talking face to face in education and business spheres making people fear social contacts and feel lonely.

The Covid-19 pandemic transformed people's values. Unbelievably, the freedom of going out, the freedom of meeting with nearest and dearest, the freedom to breathe unmasked air became precious. Feeling of fear impregnated people all over meanwhile their support was limited. The constant feeling of menacing danger was enhanced by learning from personal experience and from mass media about devastating escalation of the Covid-19 cases all over the world and in homeland.

Multi-disciplinary researches try to shed light on how it has influenced households, people's emotions and lifestyles. Emery et al. (2021) revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic affected people's mental health. Consequently, a majority of young adults marked a negative shift in their mood and an increase in stress. These changes were evidently provoked by compelled modifications in life, such as lockdowns, restrictions and imminent danger. Sanchez et al. (2023) performed a nationwide survey about the US adults with depression which proved the correlation of the Covid-19 pandemic and increase in depression cases. Awareness of danger can come from personal experience as well as learning from mass media about people who have fallen ill with Covid-19.

One of the ways to estimate the evident perception of the situation is to analyze broadcasts that reflect the stress-causing factor. Mass media are aimed at giving factual information about the situation around, but they also give its evaluation. There has been little knowledge about correlation of Covid-19 danger and its emotive reflection in mass media so far.

The findings of this research speak about the verbal reaction to the Covid-19 danger reflected in New Zealand online newspapers. Actually, in this research the level of the Covid-19 danger is evaluated by the number of its fatalities and the number of Covid-19 cases in New Zealand. The most dangerous periods are marked by the peak numbers of new Covid-19 cases. Danger, and especially danger for life, is a strong concept that is extremely emotional. It comprises a so-called 'social filter' that takes place in speech production and emotional interaction as it was mentioned by Shakhovskij (2013: 4). This concept can be verbalized through words 'virus', 'Coronavirus' , 'Covid' and 'pandemic'.

The aim of my research is to find out how people react verbally to a dangerous situation caused by Covid-19. In my research here I analyze New Zealand newspaper articles and compare the results during different time periods of the pandemic in New Zealand.

2. Literature review

Stress can be caused by impact from what people witness and from what they learn about it in mass media. Stojetz et al. (2022) proved that consideration of several factors of the situation with Covid-19 can give fruitful results. Their survey conveyed health, economy, state and society themes; it also observed how shifts in these spheres influenced people's emotional state. I find that approach promising and compare social context of Covid-19 in one particular country, which is New Zealand, and verbal reflection of that situation in New Zealand newspaper articles. This research conveys different data, such as social data and peaks of infection when people encountered Covid-19, and texts from mass media about Covid-19 that were also a stressor for readers. The comparison of this data can shed light on the emotive state of the readers at that time.

Stress at that time was caused by lockdowns and necessity to work in a different mode (Mutch and McKnight 2023). The researchers revealed that fear and anxiety mold people's emotions during the pandemic. These negative emotions were caused by watching the news all the time. Mertens et al. also proved that fear was also a very common emotional response to the news about Covid-19 at the periods of the peak stress (2023). Liu et al. (2023) developed the Covid-19 Stress Scale to show the exact reasons of stress and its level depending on different people's parameters, such as age, education and family statement. My work fills the gap in researching the verbal reaction showed in mass media to the dangerous situation of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Critical Discourse Analysis that started in 1990s by Fairclough, van Dijk and others as an interdisciplinary science analyzing text, discourse and social situation, is now a problem-or-issue oriented approach that is used to study social problems (Amoussou and Allagbe 2018). Now it is seen as a qualitative method of data analysis used for investigation of texts and speech (Griffini 2022). In the current paper, the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis is seen as a sound basis of researching correlation of mass media texts and an emotionally marked social context that was provided by an ominous Covid-19 outbreak.

People's emotions are reflected in the texts that people produce. The impact of changed lifestyles and constant stress resonated in language and in the texts produced during Covid-19 pandemic. Pervukhina and Rood (2021) performed the research concerned Russia surveying language change and appearance of multiple neologisms. In the current paper, I investigated New Zealand newspapers writing about Covid-19. The combination of corpus linguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis was previously used to obtain fruitful results from analyzing media texts (Li and Gao 2023). Burnette and Calude (2022) explored how Twitter posts reflected New Zealand government measurements to cope with Covid-19

pandemic. Their research displays controversial stance and panic moods of New Zealanders expressed in Twitter that proves my findings based on interpreting online New Zealand newspaper articles.

My research is also based on Karasik's theory about the concepts' structure. It was revealed and fully proved that the concept has got the image, denotative part and valuable meaning, and can indicate the epoch (Karasik 2023). Karasik (2007) stated that concepts are mental structures kept in human memory that are perceived as fragments of human experience. The periodicity of a word and its synonyms can signal about its value for the culture at a certain period of time. So, researching contexts of the words 'Coronavirus' , 'Covid' and 'pandemic' in New Zealand newspapers gives a reflection of people's values at that time.

Studies of emotions in language are very valuable for this research, specifically the findings about connotation as a part of semantics. Shakhovskij (2013) and Telija (1988) defined connotation as a macrocomponent of meaning that includes imaginary and associative complex, emotive modality and stylistic features. Connotation can be connected with the semantic structure of a word and its stylistic component. In this research I aimed to investigate the semantic component connected with emotions and emotivity. The work of Semerdzhidi and Resepova (2022) evaluates the atmosphere in the society in the period of Covid-19 pandemic as highly emotional, and it is reflected in the texts of that period bearing emotions of fear, anxiety and despair. Lopez and Naranjo (2021) researched how emotions can influence cognitive control and the way people express their thoughts about Covid-19 pandemic, stating that reading negative information from the texts about Covid-19 led to even higher intensity of negative emotions in their translations of those texts. El-Kanash and Hamdan (2023) compiled two newspaper-based corpora with Covid-19 conceptual war metaphors to trace the change in public opinion during Covid-19 outbreak. Their research was based on Critical Discourse Analysis of daily Arabic newspapers and showed some cultural peculiar features in viewing Covid-19 pandemic and its terrible consequences.

3. Methodology

At the first stage of this research, I defined the periods of time when stress and fear of danger were at their highest. Actually, these periods can be very personal. To make them more or less fixed and explainable, the site www.worldmeters.info/coronovirus/ was addressed. It gives diagrams with statistics on the number of cases and the number of Covid-19 deaths for all the countries. It also gives some statistics on the population of the country, so judgments on the scale of the disease spread can be made. The dates with the peak numbers of cases were marked, and the newspaper articles within these periods were analyzed. The population of New Zealand is 4,898,395 people; the country has experienced 2,405,395 cases of Covid-19, with total deaths of 4,479 people (www.worldmeters.info/coronovirus/.). These figures suggest that practically every household either faced Covid-19 as personal experience, or became a witness of the disease.

The next stage of the research was choosing the peak situation of the most dangerous periods of the Covid-19 outbreak. The virus came to New Zealand on the 11th of February 2020, and for practically two years it was well-controlled by the government measures. After the 13th of March 2022, the number of cases rocketed, the daily results are presented in the graph below (taken from https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/new-zealand/#graph-cases-daily). After the 27th of August 2022 the growth became steady (Fig.1):

Total Coronavirus Deaths in New Zealand
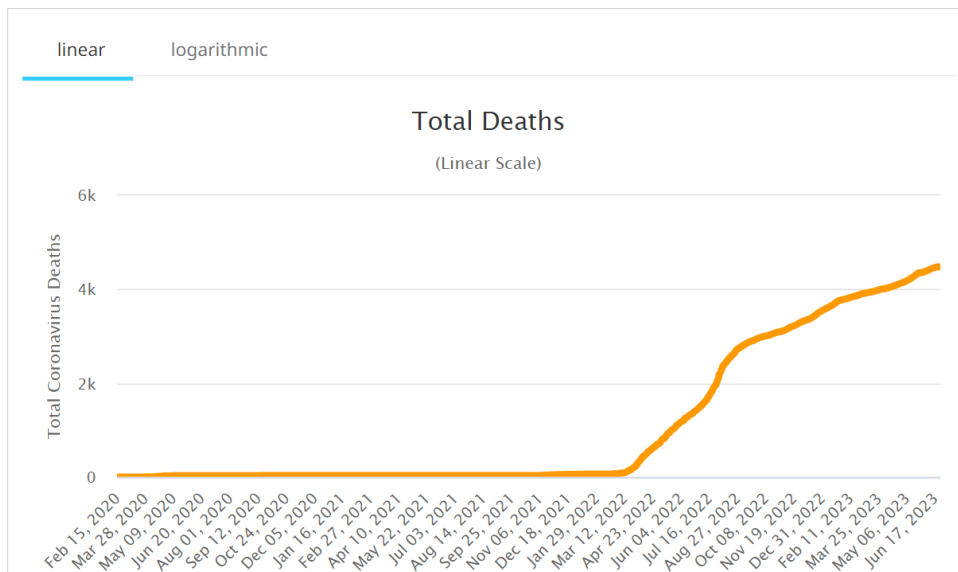
Figure 1. The graph with total Covid-19 deaths in New Zealand, taken from
https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/new-zealand/#graph-cases-daily

In 2020 there were practically no changes in the new Covid-19 cases daily. That means that though people definitely knew about the disease, there were no reasons for panic (about 27 deaths daily). The government of New Zealand undertook measures not to let the virus into the country till most of the population was vaccinated. It took a long time for Covid-19 to break through New Zealand, but finally it swept the country. Then there was a completely new picture: the number of Covid-19 cases rocketed after the 12th of March 2022 and continued to grow. So, I divided this graph into three parts, such as the plateau level (the 15th of February, 2020 – the 12th of March 2022) with 20-60 daily new cases; sharp rising (the 13th of March 2022– the 27th of August 2022) with 125-2723 daily new cases; steady rising (the 28th of August 2022 – the 17th of June 2023) with 2742 – 4477 daily new cases.

The next stage was to find the most common New Zealand newspapers, with the highest readership in New Zealand and very good online sites with the function

of search. The New Zealand Herald (https://www.nzherald.co.nz/search/advanced-search/) and Otago Daily Times (https://www.odt.co.nz/) were selected according to the rating at https://www.4imn.com/nz/. I took two newspapers for the analysis because they conveyed different views and different ideostyles. Besides, it was necessary to make sure that the choice of the articles is not mere a personal style of the editor and his or her point of view. According to the set period of time, the newspaper articles with key words '*Coronavirus*' , '*Covid*' and '*pandemic*' have been downloaded. The word 'Coronavirus' according to British National Corpora was the most cited among the above-mentioned lemmas.

On the next stage I made three corpora of the newspaper articles about Covid-19, according to the phases of number of cases with Covid-19. The phases reflect the number of infected people (see Fig. 1), where phase 1 is a minimum number of Covid-19 cases, and it is presented by Corpus 1. Phase 2 is a sharp rise of Covid-19 cases; it is presented by Corpus 2. Phase 3 is a steady rise of Covid-19 cases; it is presented by Corpus 3.

These corpora were to show the attitude of people towards the pandemic, and their verbal reaction to the situation of danger.

The corpora were analyzed by AntConc 4.2.0. The corpora included newspaper articles comprising words '*virus*', or '*Coronavirus*' or '*Covid*' or '*pandemic*'. These words were chosen because they reflect the reason of fear at that period of time, and they present notions of the phenomenon that caused instability in the world and in the country.

4. Data collection

The hypothesis of this research is that the three corpora of New Zealand newspaper articles about Covid-19 published at different periods of time reflect different emotional states of New Zealanders which can be expressed verbally by finding out connotation of the vocabulary, as well as emotivity and evaluation.

The first phase was displayed by files with 42 articles that included 23497 tokens; the second phase was displayed by 15 articles with 8838 tokens, and the third phase was displayed by 29 articles with 17209 tokens.

At first, I analyzed the frequency of words referring to Covid-19 topic in the corpora using Word-tool in AntConc 4.2.0. After annihilating syntactic words and pronouns, it showed the following results:

Table 1. Frequency of words in Corpus 1 using Word-tool in AntConc

Type	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange

Covid	31	105	17	4468.656	0.739
cases	79	38	8	1617.228	0.348
deaths	240	12	5	510.703	0.217
death	240	12	6	510.703	0.261
virus	44	64	13	2723.752	0.565
coronovirus	70	43	12	1830.021	0.522
omicron	63	47	4	2000.255	0.174
hospitalisations	-	-	-	-	-
pandemic	34	93	20	3957.952	0.870
health	40	82	14	3489.807	0.609

The words '*Covid*' (rank 31), '*health*' (rank 39), '*pandemic*' (41), '*virus*' (51) occupy leading positions. Phase 2 shows different results that are presented below:

Table 2. Frequency of words in Corpus 2 using Word-tool in AntConc

Type	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange
Covid	7	108	6	12219.959	0.750
cases	12	76	5	8599.231	0.625
deaths	20	61	4	6902.014	0.500
death	77	17	3	1923.512	0.375
virus	24	59	7	6675.718	0.875
Coronovirus	193	7	3	792.034	0.375
Omicron	51	26	5	2941.842	0.625
hospitalizations	100	13	1	1470.921	0.125
pandemic	44	29	8	3281.285	1.000
health	32	44	7	4978.502	0.875

In Corpus 2 the word '*Covid*' is ranged 7, comparing with Corpus 1 where '*Covid*' was ranged 31. The words '*deaths*' and '*death*' occur 12 times (range 6) in Corpus 1, though in Corpus 2 they occupy rather high positions, ranged 15 and 61 respectively. Interestingly, but in Corpus 2 there is no word '*Coronavirus*'. It has been replaced with '*Covid*' with rather high frequency of 90. There was no word '*hospitalizations*' in Corpus 1 because the situation was not that difficult at that period of time, but this word occurs in Corpus 2.

Some word frequencies in Corpus 3 are presented below. Words '*Covid*' (frequency 178), '*pandemic*' (frequency 72) and '*deaths*' (frequency 38) are highly ranged.

Table 3. Frequency of words in Corpus 3 using Word-tool in AntConc

Type	Rank	Freq	Range	NormFreq	NormRange
covid	8	178	22	10343.425	0.917
health	29	71	16	4125.748	0.667
pandemic	37	64	16	3718.984	0.667
long	39	57	8	3312.220	0.333
government	62	38	11	2208.147	0.458
cases	64	37	9	2150.038	0.375
deaths	66	35	7	2033.820	0.292
virus	93	25	11	1452.728	0.458
hospital	117	19	7	1104.073	0.292
hospitalizations	232	10	3	581.091	0.125
death	232	10	4	581.091	0.167

Then, the contexts of usage of words '*virus*', '*Coronavirus*', '*Covid*,* and '*pandemic*' were divided into positive and negative. It was done using KWIC-tool in AntConc 4.2.0. Such a division is based on the principle of necessary possession of emotions in speech (Solodovnikova 2019). These words bore danger not only as referents that are dangerous phenomena, but also as triggers that ignite negative emotions from the reader.
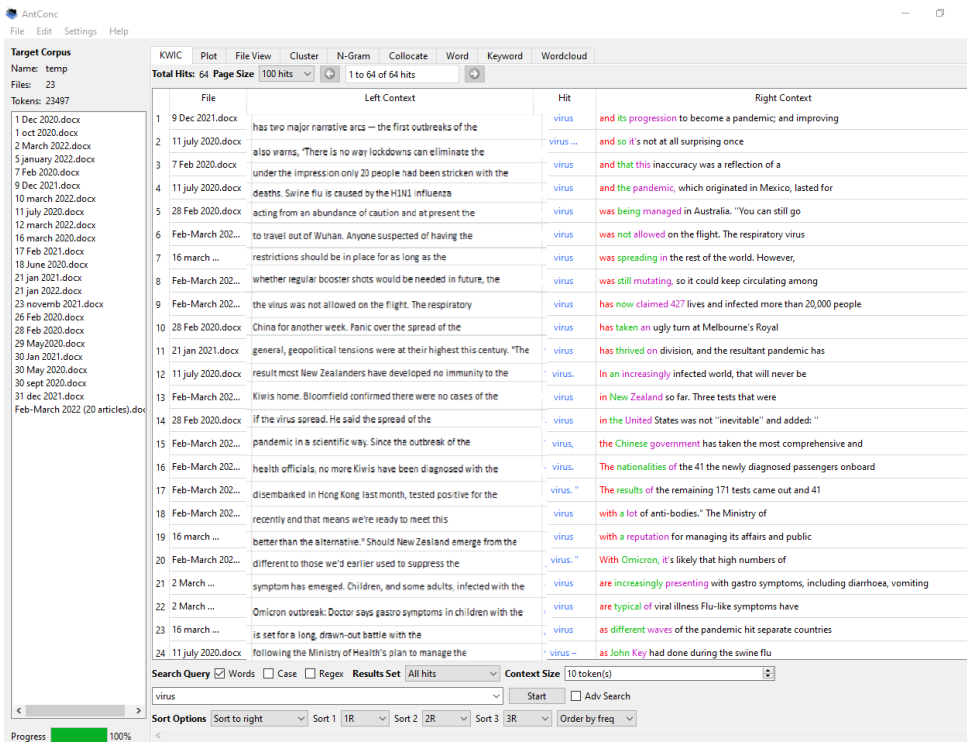
Figure 2. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'virus' in Corpus 1

In Corpus 1 there is a lemma 'Coronavirus' , though it does not occur in other corpora, see Fig. 3 and 4.
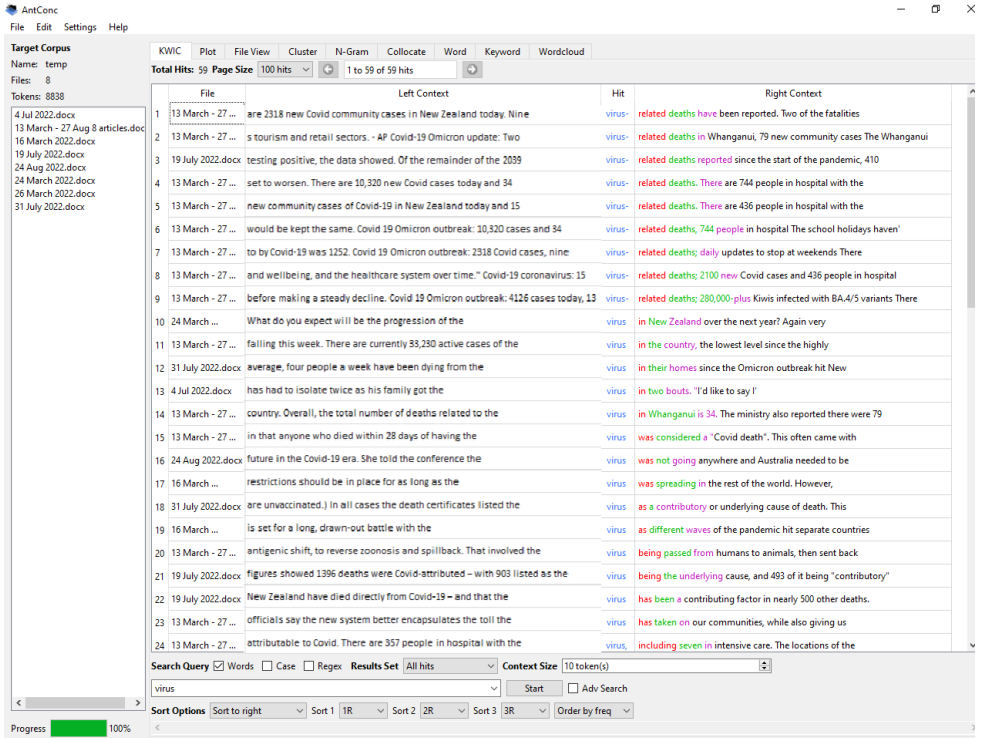
Figure 3. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'virus' in Corpus 2
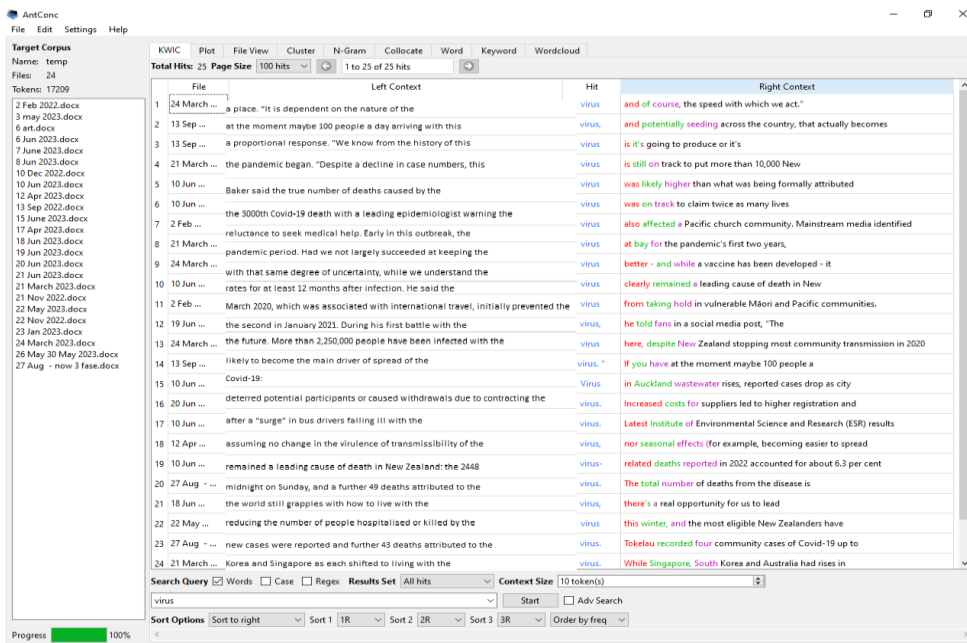
Figure 4. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'virus' in Corpus 3

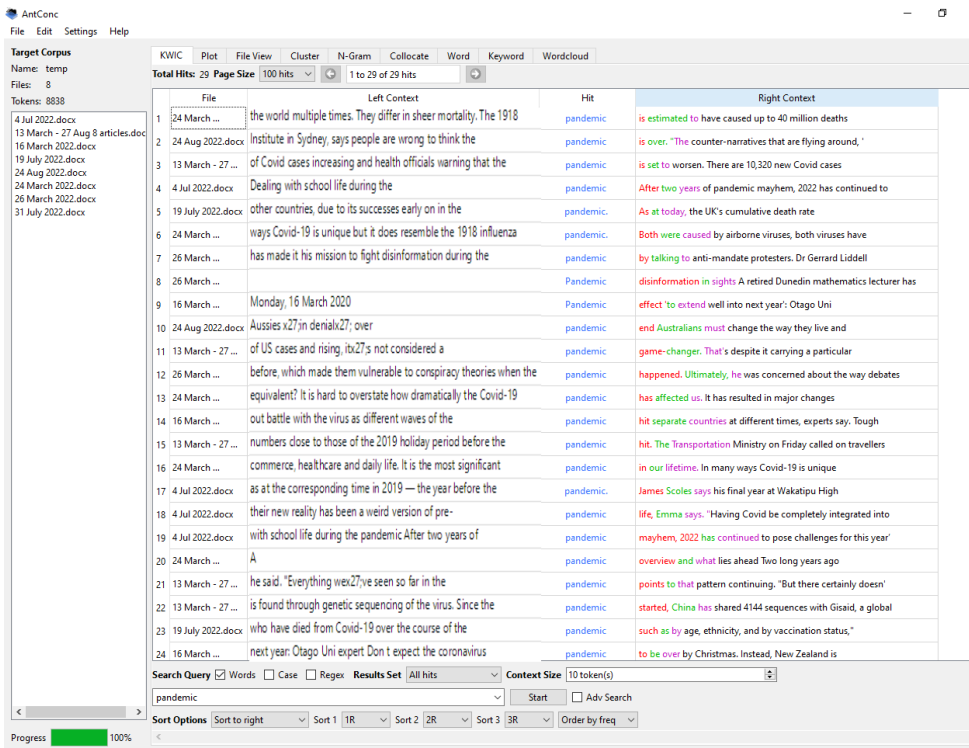Figure 5. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'pandemic' in Corpus 1

Figure 6. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'pandemic' in Corpus 2
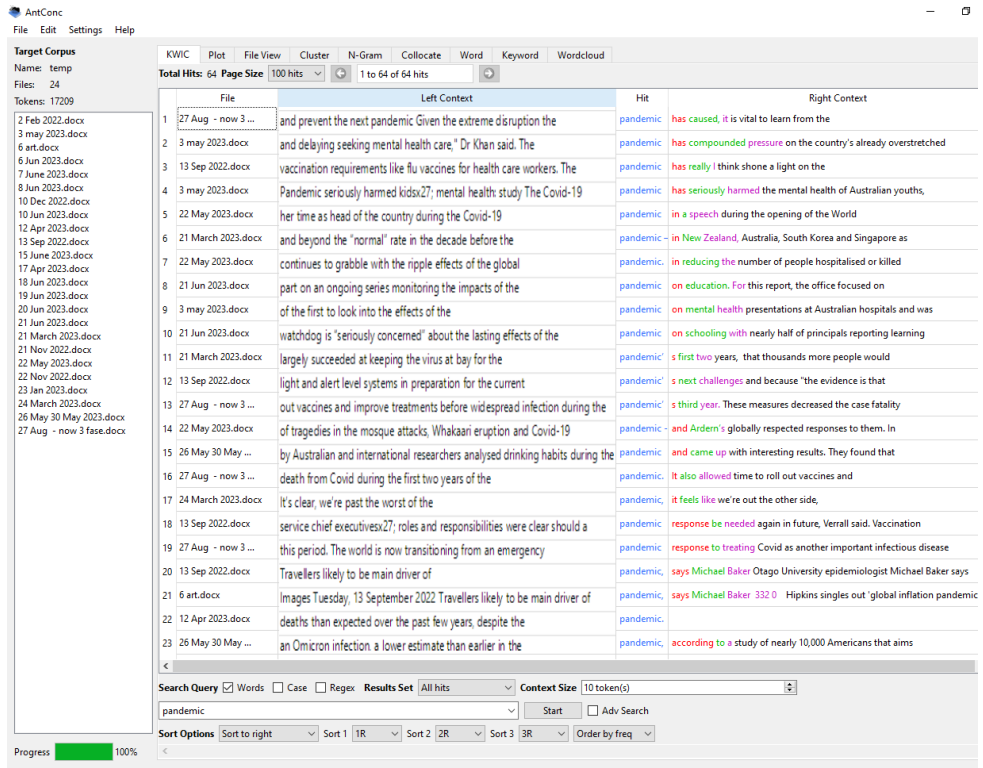
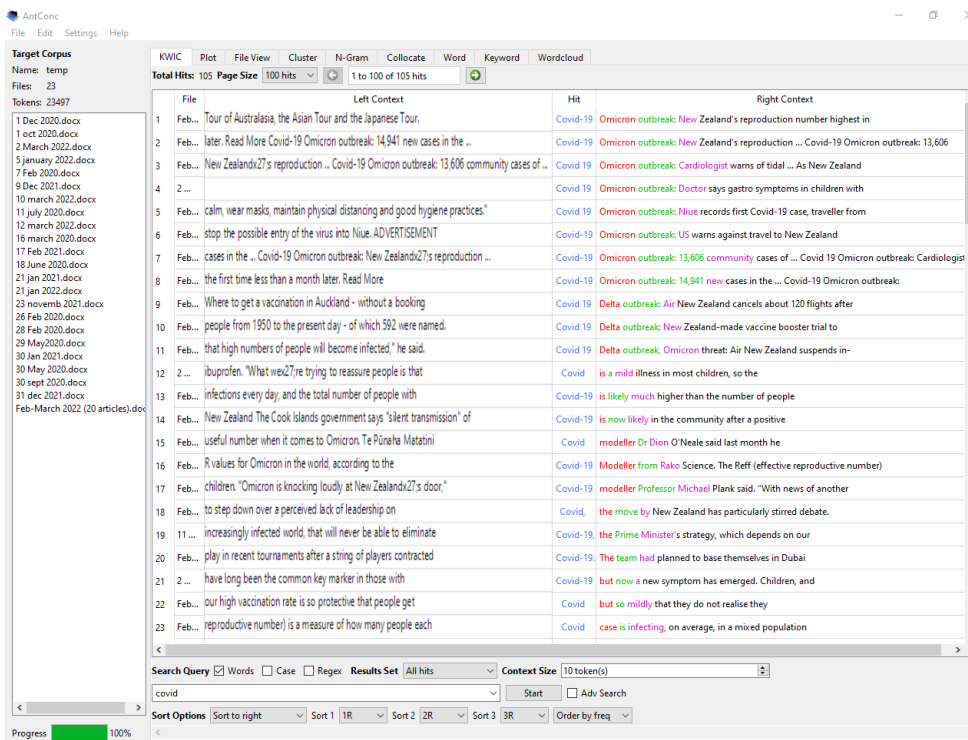Figure 7. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'pandemic' in Corpus 3

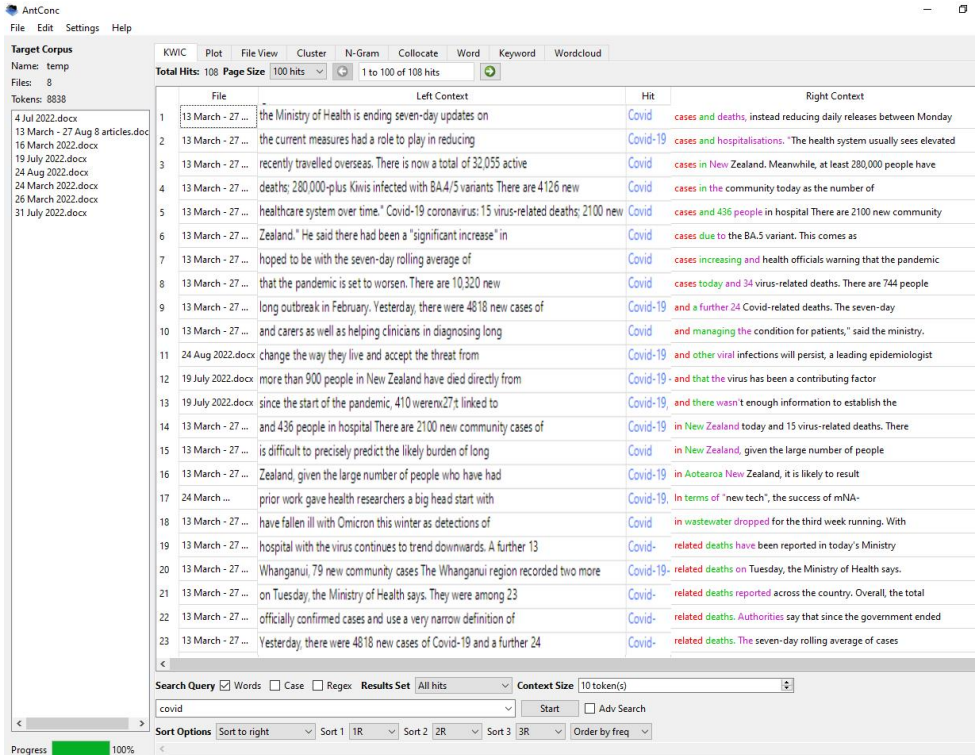Figure 8. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'Covid' in Corpus 1

Figure 9. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'Covid' in Corpus 2

Figure 10. Examples of contexts of the lemma 'Covid' in Corpus 3

Actually, in case the words '*virus*', '*Coronavirus*', '*Covid*', and '*pandemic*' happen to occur in positive contexts, they imply hope for the better.

5. Results

The chosen words '*virus*' (Fig. 2, 3, 4), '*pandemic*' (Fig. 5, 6, 7) and '*Covid*' (Fig. 8, 9, 10) bear negative connotation, so it is not a surprise that they occur mostly in negative contexts. Though, the percentage of these contexts varies in different corpora.

Positive contexts included optimistic views about how to avoid the pandemic (*"stop the virus spreading", "no cases of the virus so far", meet the virus with the anti-bodies", keep the virus at bay", "protect the New Zealand public from the virus",* etc.). Negative contexts included references to danger ("*outbreak of the virus", "infected with the virus*", "*appears more contagious than the previously dominating Delta variant. A virus can be more transmissible…"*). The texts reflected danger for a reader in particular (e.g. *infected with the virus*), and for the society in general (e.g. *outbreak of the virus*). A deeper corpus analysis displayed that there were clichés about avoiding the danger and coping with it.

The proportion of positive and negative contexts with the lemma '*virus*' is shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4. The contexts of the lemma *'virus'* in New Zealand newspapers during the pandemic time

Phase	Positive contexts %	Negative contexts %
phase 1	41.2	58.8
phase 2	0	100
phase 3	23.1	76.9

The results in Table 4 show that the stable phase (phase 1) comprised positive contexts of the lemma 'virus' showing hope for the better and positive perspectives, though the majority of contexts still demonstrated worries about the disease. All verbal reactions in phase 2 connected with the lemma 'virus' turned out to be negative, and contexts of this lemma in phase 3 comprise about twice more negative reactions than in phase 1.

The proportions of positive and negative contexts with the lemma *'Coronavirus'* are different, and they are shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5. The contexts of the lemma *'Coronavirus'* in New Zealand newspapers during the pandemic time

Phase	Positive contexts %	Negative contexts, %
Phase 1	33	77
Phase 2	0	0
Phase 3	7.56	92.44

Still, positive contexts of the word 'Coronavirus' can occur (see Tab. 5). Comparing the results of Table 4 and Table 5, it can be noted that the word '*Coronavirus*' has fewer positive contexts than '*virus*' (33% and 41.2 % respectively). It can be explained by severer danger of Coronovirus and its more contagious nature than that of other respiratory diseases.

The proportion of the contexts of the lemma *'pandemic'* is different, and it is shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6. The contexts of the lemma *'pandemic* in New Zealand newspapers during the pandemic time

Phase	Positive contexts %	Negative contexts %
Phase 1	70	30
Phase 2	0	100
Phase 3	17.54	82.45

The findings in Table 6 show that during phase 1, New Zealanders were hoping to cope with the pandemic in spite of the seriousness of the virus. The prevalence of positive contexts is explained by a low level of daily new cases (see Figure 1) and

evident government control over the virus during this period. The situation changes dramatically with the escalation of cases (see phase 2 and phase 3 in Table 6).

Positive contexts include such examples as shown below:

> For many visitors from the long-haul markets, New Zealand was already a once-in-five-to-10-year bucket list holiday, And now, health concerns, complexity and costs have increased since the pandemic,

> After more than two years of the Covid pandemic, New Zealand has once again imposed strict restrictions over just a handful of cases, and it has the rest of the world talking.

The positive contexts underline the care for the people in New Zealand, unlikely the other countries. The consequence that can be inferred is the drop of the pandemic in New Zealand.

Negative contexts imply the growth of danger in other countries and can imply the probable growth of Covid-19 danger for New Zealand, too:

> It's interesting to see, in somewhere like Russia, the pandemic has now killed almost 0.8 per cent of the entire population.

> The pandemic is now thought to have killed about 20 million people across the globe," he said.

The negative contexts of the lemma '*pandemic*' comprise words with strong negative connotation (E.g. *kill*) and present the definite percentage of victims.

The proportion of contexts of the lemma *'Covid'* is different, and it is shown in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Contexts of the lemma *'Covid'* in New Zealand newspapers during the pandemic time

Phase	Positive contexts %	Negative contexts %
Phase 1	9.61	90.39
Phase 2	2.22	97.77
Phase 3	7.47	92.52

The lemma '*Covid*' has found the fewest number of positive contexts. Covid (or Covid-19) is the nomination of a very dangerous virus. The significe of this word has got negative information, the word has got negative connotation.

Positive contexts include words with positive connotation referring to positive situations:

the vast majority of people who tested positive for Covid **recovered** within weeks and **returned to normal health**,

in the next example the positive context can be inferred:

New Zealand has seen **the number of people hospitalized** from Covid-19 **on a slow and steady decline.**

Here it can be inferred that the danger has lessened.

Overall results from Tables 4,5,6,7 clearly exibit that though positive contexts might occur during phase 1, the situation changed dramatically later during phase 2 and phase 3. A rapid worsening of the situation with Covid-19 cases around and the information in mass media about the deadly virus provoked negative contexts during phase 2 and phase 3. It is reflected in the contexts of the words *virus'*, '*Coronavirus'* , '*Covid',* and '*pandemic'.* So, the positive contexts for the analyzed words decrease with the increase of the risk of life that can be inferred from the context of the situation. Actually, these results coincide with the ones obtained in (Whitecross and Smithson 2023), who also noted the correlation of negative thoughts with uncertainty. It could be seen that there is direct dependence of the number of negative contexts of the words '*virus'*, '*Coronavirus'* , '*Covid',* and '*pandemic'* and the risk of life during investigated periods of time.

The comparison of corpus 2 (phase 2) and corpus 3 (phase 3) shows that the most frequent words in the corpus are *cases, virus, deaths, confirmed, omicron, died, today* and *reported.* The contexts of these words reflected the major worries of public during phase 2 when everyone in New Zealand traced the news about escalating the Covid-19 danger.

Previous researches (Kero, Podlesek and Kavcic 2023) found out that people were in despair during the Covid-19 pandemic. So, the questionnaire in that work showed that during phase 1, people felt positive emotions rather than negative emotions, but the situation changed during phase 2 and phase 3. I used AntConc 4.2.0 to see the most frequent words in the newspaper articles during these periods of time.

Here are the words that appear in corpus 1 (phase 1) starting from the most frequent words (syntactic words are not presented in the list), giving in bold those having direct reference to the Covid-19 pandemic and negative connotation as a part of their meaning:

New Zealand, said, people, **Covid**, flight, **omicron**, health, passengers, home, travel, year, international, country, **Coronovirus**, many, **quarantine**, team, airport, back, other, time, could, students, around, **case**, children, another, need, **pandemic**, **symptoms**, years, Australia, countries, day, event, government, next, only, open, **restrictions**, see, some, **vaccine**, crew, passenger, **cases**, come, long, officials.

At that time New Zealand was isolated, and its citizens worried about the link to the outer world (E.g. *flight, passengers, travel, pandemic, around*). Words '*Covid*', '*Omicron*', '*Coronavirus*' did not have strong negative connotation because of the context. According to the results obtained, the analyzed newspapers did not put the emphasis on the deadly peril of the virus. Referring to Figure 1, it can be seen that the numbers of Covid-19 cases were few and controlled.

Now let us analyze corpus 2 (phase 2) and frequency of the lemmas there (syntactic words are not given in the list). Those that have direct reference to the Covid-19 pandemic are given in bold:

> **Covid, cases**, new, **deaths**, said, people, **virus**, health, reported, **omicron**, **hospital**, ministry, average, community, today, **death, died, related**, **hospitalization**, **long**, next, other, **pandemic**, time, **wave**, countries, daily, **numbers, outbreak**.

The results evidently display the main worries of New Zealanders, (e.g. *new Covid cases, new virus strains (Omicron)*). The verbs in the list (*said, reported, died, related*) present the emphasis on the finding out about the situation from mass media.

Actually, practically all the words in the list had a negative connotation due to their connection to the Covid-19 disease, poor health and death. Interestingly, the word '*long*' occurs in the context '*long Covid*' and denotes a disease.

The results of corpus 3 in phase 3 were different. They reflect the emphasis to the Covid-19 disease, but also show the role of public institutions and government (syntactic words are not presented in the list) giving in bold those having direct reference to the Covid-19 pandemic and negative connotation as a part of their meaning due to that reference:

> **Covid**, said, have, **new**, more, **health**, people, **long, pandemic**, percent, New Zealand, time, **cases, deaths**, judge, year, week, years, government, support, **virus**, last, response, think, living, study, **symptoms**, work, need, university, court, **hospital, infection**, know, **number**, **infections**, really, help, likely, man, **increase, risk,** care, communities, get, going, ministry, national, tax, **case,** countries, data, day, Maori, **patients**, public, **vaccination**, very, came, go, principals, professor, report, reported, school, world, community, country, important, level, **numbers**, only, past, research, says, see, take, taking, term.

Though still there are a lot of words with negative connotation, the list above includes words that denote a way out of the situation (*government, response, vaccination, research, court*). There are also words denoting members of society (*people, community, communities, Maori, patients, public, country, world*).

Actually, one of the stressors was loneliness (Caro, Clark, D'Ambrosio and Vögele, 2022), and such words in the articles could build a feeling of being a part of community for the readers. It is as a strong supportive trend that makes the contexts less negative.

6. Discussion

During the first phase, the Covid-19 was at bay for the country's policy was to close the borders and wait for the vaccine for all the citizens. New Zealand really managed to keep the virus out for quite a long period of time, and the situation there was different from a lot of other countries in the world. The verbal analysis displayed positive views about the outcomes of the Covid-19 situation. The ratio of evaluation of the contexts is presented in Table 4,5,6,7, in phase 1 line.

Still, after the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus during Phase 2, the number of its cases was escalating rapidly, and the same experience of the other countries was menacing. The articles during that period included graphs with the Covid-19 cases and the number of Covid-19 deaths. The danger to life became evident. The ratio of evaluation of the contexts for this period is presented in Table 4,5,6,7 in phase 2 line.

After the sharp rise of Covid-19 cases, there was phase 3, with the steady rise of the disease cases, reflecting a still dangerous situation but without its rapid escalation. The evaluation of the words '*virus*', '*Coronavirus*' , '*Covid*', or '*pandemic*' is presented in Table 4,5,6,7 in phase 3 line.

I used Wordcloud tool in AntConc 4.2.0 to trace the words with negative connotation. They are the following (excluding syntactic words): *Covid, Omicron, pandemic, Coronovirus, outbreak, restrictions, quarantine, virus, disease.* What is more interesting are the words that did not occur in the corpora. Describing Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of scientific researches signaled that people experienced fear and stress, which was detected by psychologists (Stone and Wang 2023; Kero et al 2023; Stojetz et. al 2022; Caro et al. 2022), sociologists (Sanchez et al. 2023) and others (Emery et al. 2021). Actually, the word '*fear*' did not occur in my corpora at all, neither did the word '*danger*'; the word '*stress*' occurred only once. My research shows that these states are reflected through the contexts of words related to Covid-19.

The emotions of fear and stress did not have direct nominations in New Zealand newspapers, according to the data in this research. I note a sharp drop in positive contexts of words '*Covid*', '*pandemic*', '*virus*' and '*Coronavirus*' (two- or even four-fold, see Tables 4,5,6,7) for all three corpora when describing the situation of danger from Covid-19 in the country.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this research show that the situation in New Zealand is reflected in its mass media, and contains the emotional feedback on the Covid-19 situation there and on the context of the media text.

People learn about the world not only from what they eye-witness, but also from what they read and from communication with each other. The utterances that people perceive can comprise both positive and negative emotional reaction. The discourse analysis can help compare the social context of the text-production with the verbal context that describes it; meanwhile the investigation of connotation and the emotive analysis can assess the major emotive tone of verbal reaction during that period of time. One word can bear negative connotation (as it can be seen in the examples with lemmas *Covid, Coronovirus, virus, pandemic*), but occur in positive contexts.

The information field where people live can not exist without emotions. The emotions can be ignited by texts, and they can be perceived from the texts. Positive emotions inferred from the text comprise positive mood of the reader, and vice versa. These views are stipulated within the approach of ecology of the language, and can serve for building certain emotional settings in society. Negative declarations on the one hand reflect negative views in the society, but on the other hand they can trigger other negative emotions that can be harmful.

In dangerous times, it is very important to use dangerous words in positive contexts, giving readers hope to overcome difficulties.

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