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# *"#COVIDSchmovid! #SummerTreats"* The usage and functions of *schm*-reduplications in corona virus related discourse

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to investigate the uses of *schm*-reduplications, also known as deprecative reduplications, in current corona virus related discourse. The investigation shows that *schm*-reduplications, such as *covid schmovid, corona schmorona* and *pandemic schmandemic*, are often used in a spirit-lifting function, to show that, despite all the threats and complications posed by the virus and national lockdowns, we are still able to do things and that we also continue to have a sense of humour in our lives. Another common function of *schm*-reduplications is criticism of other people's irresponsible behaviour. The functions identified in previous work on *schm*-reduplications—associations with aspects of irony, scorn, scepticism, disparagement and dismissal—are seldom present in the corona virus related formations.

## 1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact that speakers often resort to humour—especially the type known as gallows or black humour—when dealing with scary, detrimental, or otherwise unpleasant topics. There are several studies on humour and jocular language in medicine, for example, when cancer patients interact in discussion forums and when medical professionals joke about patients, illnesses, and death. In the military, humour and joking are viewed as ways of handling stress and coping with disturbing subjects like combat, deformity, and death; for discussion, see e.g. Henman (2001), Demjén (2016), and the references cited in these sources. Humour helps make distressing topics more manageable; the jokes and the wordplay—riddling, punning and other poetic devices such as rhyming—can help diminish the topics in size, make them more like "normal" topics and hence strengthen people's ability to confront them, to cope with them and, to an extent, laugh them away. One example of how a topic can be made to "shrink" is the use of derogatory labels. The *CancerSchmancer Movement,* for example, was founded by the US actor Fran Drescher, herself a cancer survivor. Similarly to the *#fuckcancer* movement, the aim is to raise awareness and educate about the importance of early detection. The wordplay and the use of offensive language—although it is not acceptable to swear in

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public, it is fine to swear at cancer—are not only ways to catch attention, but also ways to deal psychologically with a potentially fatal disease.

The label *CancerSchmancer* is formed using a process called deprecative or *schm*-reduplication in linguistic literature; see e.g. Feinsilver (1961), Zwicky & Pullum (1987), Nevins & Vaux (2003) and the references cited there.[1] Originally a borrowing from Yiddish, the formation is used in informal language situations and is, according to these authors, typically associated with aspects of irony, scorn, scepticism, disparagement, and dismissal. The label *cancer schmancer* in particular is argued to mimic the Yiddish expression *cancer shmancer—abi gezunt* where the second part, with the meaning 'for as long as you're healthy [you can be happy]', is already an item that minimizes and downplays the importance of the input word (Feinsilver, 1961, p 302). We provide further examples of *schm*-reduplications in English in (1)-(5):

1. cellphone,schmellphone!what did we do before they invented cellphones?when i was little we walked 8 miles to school,uphill both ways,barefoot in the snow,and weeeee loved it! (buzzcut, 2006)

2. State gives you a little chunk depending on your income. What you can do is accept that when a person dies they're gone and the funeral process is a complete sham and that the state will dispose of the remains for free. At least some places. Funeral shmuneral I say. (scorpipede, 2020)

3. "I'd been down to the States before—my family would travel to the States for music festivals and folk gatherings, and I loved it so much so that I was like 'Canada schmanada!' I didn't feel like there was anything special about where I was from, and I wanted to leave," she explains. (Kater, 2016)

4. The 'vore loves a deal. He is swayed by the deals. Those deals are strategically placed throughout the grocery store to offload crap they don't want onto you. You don't even *like* Nacho Cheesier Doritos. Don't buy them!  Sale SHMALE! (Branny, 2009)

5. Salad schmalad.
   "Salads! A cool relief on a hot summer's day!" the food magazine says. I am here to tell you this is not true. Not the eating of the salads, which is actually a very good idea, heat or no heat. It's the making of

[1] The spellings of the initial consonant cluster vary. Nevins & Vaux (2003) and Kauffman (2015) have noted that *schm-* and *shm-* are the most frequent spelling alternatives. Nevins & Vaux (2003) further observe that spellings with *sm-* are preferred by some speakers in situations where the input word contains any of the stridents {ʃ tʃ ʒ dʒ s z}, as in *ashmont smashmont* and *witches smitches*. In this paper, we will use the spelling *schm-* in our "own" text; direct quotations and examples from the data will be spelled as in the original.

> the salads that is a completely ridiculous thing to do when it's thirty-three degrees Celsius in the shade. (Carr, 2020)

The pejorative effect associated with the *schm*-formation is easy to detect from these examples. *Cellphone schmellphone* comes from an online discussion forum: it is used in a turn that mocks (other) people's dependency on their cellphones. *Funeral shmuneral* is used in a discussion on exorbitant funeral costs and how not having a funeral may be an option. *Canada Schmanada* and *sale schmale* also have the belittling 'who cares about X' reading that is, according to the literature, typical for *schm*-reduplications. And the idea behind a headline like *salad schmalad* in (5) becomes clear already in the first paragraph of this blog post: the most ridiculous thing one could even think of preparing in the middle of a heat wave, according to the author, is a fancy salad (schmalad). *Schm*-reduplications with the 'who cares about X' reading are also found in book titles: *Harvard Schmarvard* is the title of a book emphasizing the importance of selecting a college or university on the basis of one's interests, goals and needs, rather than on the basis of pure prestige (Mathews, 2003). Even here the role of the *schm*-reduplication is, then, to downplay and question the meaning of, as well as the associations with, the input word *Harvard*.

There is surprisingly little research that focuses on the formation, usage, and interpretation of *schm*-reduplications in English. Feinsilver's (1961) article where she observes that the formations have become more frequent in (American) English—most notably in spoken language as well as in comic strips, magazines, movies, and advertising—during the 1950s is only three pages long and the observations remain superficial. Zwicky & Pullum (1987) discuss *schm*-reduplications under the umbrella term *expressive morphology*. *Schm*-reduplications, like other items that fall under expressive morphology, such as expletive infixation of the type *abso-freaking-lutely* and suffixation with *-eria* as in *basketeria, candyteria,* are characterized as examples of special language use. The term covers special type of derivational morphology that is used to create items that have specific pragmatic effects; that show variation in terms of the category or form of their base; that show variation between speakers—different speakers will form the output in different ways and they will have different views on what type of words can serve as the input; and that also have special syntactic distribution. Although *schm*-reduplications in English, just like rhyming reduplications in more general, are often nouns formed of nouns (Bauer, 1983, p 212f; this observation is naturally in conflict with the assumption that there is variation in the category of the base), they do not have the normal

distribution of nouns. The examples in (6)-(9), based on Zwicky & Pullum's (1987, p 338) examples, show that the input word, the proper noun *Kalamazoo,* and the output word, *Kalamazoo Schmalamazoo,* indeed differ in their distribution:[2]

6. Let's not talk about Kalamazoo.
7. *Let's not talk about Kalamazoo Schmalamazoo.

8. Is Kalamazoo in Michigan?
9. *Is Kalamazoo Schmalamazoo in Michigan?

Nevins & Vaux's (2003) study of *schm*-reduplications focusses on their phonological properties and their morphology and syntax. The study shows, among other things, that the speech sounds in the input words and how the words are stressed play a role in how the *schm*-reduplications are formed and if they can be formed in the first place. A word like *obscene* may, according to these authors, result in the outputs *shmobscene,* where reduplication has targeted the first syllable; *obshmene,* where reduplication has targeted the stressed syllable; or nothing at all, i.e. speakers feel that the word cannot serve as input at all. In many cases where this happens, the input word finishes with a sound that makes the pronunciation of the /ʃm/-cluster difficult, or the input word and the reduplicand end up sounding the same or nearly so, due to assimilation. An example of this is *massage schmassage,* where the hearer may have difficulty distinguishing between *massage massage,* a case of full reduplication, and *massage schmassage,* a case of *schm*-reduplication. As full and *schm*-reduplication are associated with different readings—see e.g. Jespersen (1942, p 174) and Thun (1963) for some discussion of meanings associated with full reduplication in English—it is understandable why speakers may show reservations towards a process where the intended interpretation is unclear.

In terms of morphology, Nevins & Vaux's study (2003) shows that, in cases where the input is a compound word, *schm*-reduplication can target either of the compound constituents, both of them at the same time, or neither of them (i.e., the word cannot serve as input). A compound word like *cookie cutter* can, then, result in the outputs *schmookie cutter* (the preferred form, according to Nevis & Vaux, 2003), *cookie schmutter* (possible for some speakers), *schmookie*

[2] Zwicky & Pullum's (1987) account of expressive morphology also brings up the creation of ideophones. While the authors do not discuss ideophones in any great detail, later work by e.g. Dingemanse (2012, 2015, 2018) and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2017) has shown that the restrictions in the usage and distribution of *schm*-reduplications observed in Zwicky & Pullum (1987) and in Nevins & Vaux (2003) apply to (all) reduplicated ideophones more generally. We return to reduplicated ideophones briefly below.

*schmutter* (also possible for some speakers), or in nothing at all. These observations are very much in line with Zwicky & Pullum's (1987) earlier observation that expressive morphology creates items that show variation between speakers.

In terms of distribution, Nevins & Vaux (2003) propose that *schm*-reduplications are not allowed in argument positions. Although the authors fail to provide convincing evidence for this proposal, the observation is, at least partially, in line with Zwicky & Pullum's (1987) earlier observation that *schm*-reduplications do not have the normal distribution of nouns. However, as we already pointed out, these restrictions in distribution are not actually specific to *schm*-reduplications but are instead known to apply to reduplicated ideophones in general. Although the relation between *schm*-reduplications and reduplicated ideophones in English is somewhat unclear and although their status as *reduplications* can also be questioned—there are arguments for saying, for example, that these formations are actually compound words; see e.g. Thun (1963), Quirk et al. (1972; 1985) and Bauer (1983) for more discussion of English reduplicative words—*schm*-reduplications are nevertheless mentioned, in passing, in most accounts of reduplicated and repeated ideophones. As there is little research apart from what we have already reviewed above that would focus on the usage, properties and interpretations of *schm*-reduplications in English, we will follow the usual practice and use the work on reduplicated ideophones as a starting point. This will mean that we view *schm*-reduplications as a possible sub-type of reduplicated ideophones, where the umbrella term *ideophones*—such as the reduplicated expressions *hoity-toity, helter-skelter, splitter-splatter, dilly-dally, shilly-shally* and *hippety hoppity* in English—is defined as "marked words that depict sensory imagery" (Dingemanse, 2012, p 674). Ideophones are marked and stand out from more ordinary vocabulary items on grounds of how they are formed—reduplication (assuming we are indeed dealing with reduplication, rather than compounding; we will not pursue this question further in this paper) is not used productively to form more ordinary words in English—how their usage is limited to informal language situations; how they are highly expressive and depictive in nature and their tone is often playful and (at least seemingly) humorous; how they often carry pejorative associations; and how they often stand outside the sentence they are associated with, forming utterances on their own. In those cases where they are integrated in sentence structure, as arguments or even as the predicates, the sentences are nearly always affirmative and declarative.

## 2. Aims and methodology

In view of how humour and jocular language can help speakers cope with distressing topics and how labelling can be a tool that makes such topics appear less threatening, less serious or less important, we would—in this age of corona virus and national lockdowns—expect to find examples of corona virus related humour and joking in the public sphere. Many of us have seen references to the shortage of toilet paper that several countries experienced in March, 2020; one of the images circulating at the time is shown in Image 1:

**Image 1:** Netin Hauskimmat (2020)

Another topic that received media attention was the joking concerning a particular brand of Mexican beer and the effect that the associations with the current pandemic had on its sales figures (CBS Los Angeles, 2020):

**Image 2:** CBS Los Angeles (2020):

As *schm*-reduplications are viewed as derogatory forms that carry associations with aspects of irony, scorn, and dismissal, it is interesting to see if we find examples of *schm*-reduplications in the current corona related discourse. For the purposes of this paper, we have therefore conducted Google searches on six different pandemic related terms, in their various spelled forms. An overview of the searches (completed on 25 August, 2020, at approximately 14:35 CET) is presented in Table 1:[3]

| | *Schm-* | *Shm-* | *Sm-* | *All* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *covid schmovid* | 11500 | 9500 | 2100 | 23100 |
| *pandemic schmandemic* | 8150 | 3850 | 144 | 12144 |
| *corona schmorona* | 6450 | 2140 | 410 | 9000 |
| *quarantine schmuarantine* | 923 | 3650 | 337 | 9000 |
| *lockdown schmockdown* | 4290 | 2460 | 908 | 6870 |
| *virus schmirus* | 3530 | 2280 | 1060 | 4910 |

**Table 1:** Overview of the terms, 25 August, 2020

[3] It is possible that some of the figures for especially *virus schmirus,* in its various spelling forms, are not related directly to the 2020 pandemic. All the examples we present and discuss below are, however, related to the pandemic and have all occurred after 1 March, 2020.

In addition to the terms listed in Table 1, we searched for more complex combinations where some of the other items under Zwicky & Pullum's (1987) expressive morphology—most notably expletives like *bloody, freaking* and *fucking*—intervened between the input and the output words. While we found no occurrences of combinations like *covid bloody schmovid* and *corona fucking schmorona,* we did find examples where the combination *corona virus* had served as the base in its entirety. As also observed in Nevins & Vaux (2003), there was variation between the formations *corona virus schmorona virus* and *corona virus schmorona schmirus*, even if the numbers for these examples were small and in some cases, the same original example had been repeated in different contexts. One of the examples is Image 3 (coronavirus schmorona shmirus, 2020):

**Image 3:** coronavirus schmorona shmirus (2020)

Google searches and the use of the web as a corpus are of course open to debate: the web is not a structured collection of texts the way a proper corpus is; the "English" used in the web is not representative of the language in general or of any specific variant of it; and the examples found need not be produced by native / advanced / even very competent speakers of the language; for some discussion, see e.g. Kennedy (1998, p 3); Biber *et al*. (1998, p 246); and Baker (2006, p 26). At the same time, for an investigation such as ours where we are interested in items that are known to be part of informal language use and are collecting examples that have occurred during the past six months (so, in March 2020 or later), the web is the only source of data that is readily available. There simply are not any occurrences of items like *schmirus, schmorona* and *schmuarantine* in "proper" corpora such as the COCA or the BNC. Even the recent

Coronavirus Corpus that was launched in May 2020 on the English-Corpora.org website and that claims to provide examples of, as well as the frequencies of, various pandemic related terms such as *social distancing, flatten the curve, WORK * home, Zoom, Wuhan, hoard*, toilet paper, curbside, pandemic, reopen, defy, anti-mask** (Davies, 2020) fails to provide examples of the items listed in Table 1. The searches for both words and collocates in this corpus resulted in just one single hit to a book title—*Covid Schmovid: 19 ways to make your small business boom* (Davis, 2020)—that we had already located, a number of times actually, using Google searches. Table 2 shows the overall results for the searches in the Coronavirus Corpus:

| | *Schm-* | *Shm-* | *Sm-* | *All* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *covid schmovid* | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| *pandemic schmandemic* | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *corona schmorona* | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *quarantine schmuarantine* | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *lockdown schmockdown* | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| *virus schmirus* | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

**Table 2:** Overview of the terms in the Coronavirus Corpus, 29 September, 2020

That there are no hits is, of course, entirely expected, when one takes into account the fact that the Coronavirus Corpus is part of the NOW Corpus (News On the Web; Davies, 2020) that contains data from web-based newspapers and magazines, i.e. from sources where one would not expect to find many examples of informal language phenomena. At the same time a comparison between Tables 1 and 2 shows very clearly that, if one intends to investigate the type of informal and recently created vocabulary items that we are interested in—and the fact that they have been used as many times as indicated in Table 1 in just half a year suggests that they *are* worth investigating—then, despite all the shortcomings, the web is the only source of data that is available.

That there is no systematicity in Google data means, of course, that the numbers presented in Table 1 also contain multiple occurrences of some of the examples and that they will need to be taken with a pinch of salt. We have indeed encountered examples of tweets, for example, that have been re-tweeted a number of times and hence the same original example has popped

up equally many times in our searches. The examples we have located are also not arranged in any sophisticated or linguistically relevant way; instead, matters such as popularity of the website have affected what has been presented at the top of the list and what has come much later. Despite these shortcomings, the numbers in Table 1 can still tell us, at a general level, that some of the items—as well as how they are spelled—*are* more frequent than others. And while we are not able to say anything definitive about frequencies, apart from making general observations, the Google searches have nevertheless provided us with hundreds of examples of actual usage that allow us to say at least *something* about the contexts of use, the functions, and the interpretations of English corona related *schm*-reduplications. The findings can also be compared with what has been said about reduplicated ideophones in previous work.

## 3. **Results and discussion**

As noted above, *schm*-reduplications are often brough up in connection with reduplication and ideophones (e.g., Zwicky & Pullum, 1987; Gomeshi *et al*., 2004; Dingemanse, 2012, 2015, 2018). Previous work has shown that these items tend to occur mainly in informal language situations. Their typical contexts of use include internet discussion forums, blogs and other forms of the social media, advertisements, brand names, names of restaurants, shops and other businesses, cartoons and memes, poetry, children's literature and nursery rhymes (e.g., Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2017). Before looking at the contexts of use and the possible functions and interpretations of corona related *schm*-reduplications in the Google data, we will comment briefly on the numbers presented in Table 1. First, although we cannot rely on the numbers in Table 1 presenting the whole truth, we are nevertheless able to see which items are the most frequent ones as well as speculate on some reasons for this. *Covid schmovid*—in all three spelled forms—is the most commonly occurring item, with nearly twice as many hits in total as the next contender. This is hardly a surprise, as the input word *covid 19* is the official designation announced by the World Health Organization that uniquely identifies its referent as the causer of the current global pandemic. The label is also such that it avoids the type of inaccurate and stigmatizing associations that were caused by labels of some earlier pandemics, such as *swine flu* and *the Spanish flu*. The input word alone, without the *schmovid* added to it, is also more common than the other input words: a Google search (on 16 September, 2020) for the items *pandemic, corona, quarantine*, and *lockdown* shows, among other things, that *covid* is eight times more common than *pandemic* and four times more common than *corona*.

Searches in The Coronavirus Corpus (on 16 September, 2020) confirm this picture: searches for *covid** (i.e. searches that capture forms like *covid, covid-19, covid19, covid-related, covid-19-related*, and so on) result in over 800.000 hits, while searches for *pandemic** result in just 350.000 hits. Searches for *corona** in the Coronavirus Corpus result in over 900.000 hits, but on closer inspection these turn out to include thousands of hits for the above-mentioned brand of Mexican beer as well as for words like *coronary, coronation,* and *coronado*.

The next items in Table 1—*pandemic (schmandemic)* and *corona (schmorona)*—are also strongly associated with the current global pandemic, although they are clearly more generic in nature than *covid (schmovid)* and can, at least in theory, be used of other pandemics and other types of corona viruses than covid 19. In our investigation of the Google data, we have only come across usage that is related to the current pandemic. The same can be said of *quarantine (schmuarantine)* and *lockdown (schmockdown)*: both these words refer to the effects of the current pandemic, and while the words are generic and could, again, be used to talk about something other than the effects of the 2020 pandemic, all the examples we have been able to locate are used to refer to the current situation.

The last item in the list, *virus (schmirus)*, is the most generic one in terms of its referents. This is perhaps one reason why speakers seem to prefer the other terms in Table 1, when speaking about the current global pandemic. The web searches also located a number of examples of *virus schmirus* that were dated before March, 2020: *virus schmirus* has been used to refer to "ordinary" seasonal influenzas as well as to the ebola virus outbreak between 2013 and 2016, to mention a few of these previous uses. Searches for the single term *virus* in the Coronavirus Corpus reveal that even there, the term is used to talk about other viruses than covid 19, including the ebola, sars, flu, zika, nile and polio viruses. All the examples of *virus schmirus* that we bring up in this paper refer to the current pandemic and they are all dated March, 2020 or later. In sum, the fact that we have been able to find examples of all the items in Table 1 using Google searches shows that speakers are quick to react and that the topic—a global pandemic and national lockdowns caused by a new and potentially deadly disease that affects everyone on the planet—is such that it prompts a specific type of linguistic behaviour. The comparisons with the Coronavirus Corpus suggest, in turn, that not all linguistic behaviour will be visible in a proper corpus.

Another point that we want to comment on here is the spelling of the reduplicated items. As we can see from Table 1, all items except *quarantine schmuarantine* favour the *schm*-spelling, even if the difference between the *schm*- and *shm*-spellings is sometimes quite small. These findings are partially in keeping with Nevins & Vaux's (2003) and Kauffman's (2015) findings: while these authors were unable to distinguish between the *schm*- and *shm*-spellings or to make any predictions about the environments that would favour one spelling over the others, the fact that the *sm*- spelling is relatively common with the input word *virus* fits in well with their observation that *sm*-spellings are favoured by some speakers, when the input or base contains a strident sound {ʃ tʃ ʒ dʒ s z}.

## *3.1. Contexts of use*

In this section, we discuss the usage of corona related *schm*-reduplications in the Google data. On the basis of previous work on reduplicated ideophones, we would expect to find these items in typical informal language contexts, such as in internet discussion forums, blogs and other forms of the social media, in advertising, in brand names, in names of shops, restaurants, and other businesses, as well as in cartoons, memes, and images. As the items in Table 1 are used to talk about a potentially deadly disease, they are unlikely to occur in children's literature or nursery rhymes, which are known to be common contexts of use for other reduplicated ideophones.[4]

To begin with, while our investigations confirm many of the earlier findings regarding contexts of use, we have located a surprisingly large number of examples of corona related *schm*-reduplications in more formal contexts as well, such as "proper" newspaper and magazine articles and other "respectable" media. In these environments the *schm*-formations admittedly occur in the more informal sections: they are used, for instance, in sections and/or reports covering local or neighbourhood news, sports, culture and entertainment. *Schm*-reduplications are also used in columns, another less formal genre of journalistic writing. In these environments, the *schm*-reduplications can occur both in the headlines and within the running text. In the latter case, the *schm*-reduplication is often part of material that is attributed to a

[4] There are claims that children's songs and nursery rhymes such as *Ring a ring'o rosies* describe the symptoms of the Black Death, a bubonic plague that spread through Europe in the 1340s, or to the Great Plague of London in the 1660s. If true, one could argue that these are also ways to cope with a deadly disease. As our web searches have not located examples where the items listed in Table 1 would be used in texts that are written for children—we have found them in texts that are written *about* children and about children's birthday parties, however—we will not pursue the matter here and the interested reader is referred to the literature, such as Siegrist (2009).

specific speaker—for instance something that an interviewee has said. Below are some examples of these uses: in (10)-(11), the *schm*-reduplications occur in headlines of news reports, and in (12), in a headline of a column. (13)-(14) are examples of situations where the *schm*-reduplication is part of the running text and is presented as something that a specific individual has said, or, is presented as having *meant*, even if they might not have uttered the actual words themselves. As we are discussing contexts of use and role that the *schm*-reduplication plays in the bigger whole, the examples we provide often contain more material than just the sentence containing the reduplication:

10. Covid Schmovid, It's Authors Night
    No virus is going to stop the Hamptons fund-raising. You may have to stare at a computer screen to experience it, but, at least when it comes to Authors Night, some gripping content and a good cause -- in this case the support of the East Hampton Library -- remain. […] (Greene, 2020)

11. Covid, shmovid: Bangkok's rich sail through pandemic
    BANGKOK: As the coronavirus brought the global economy to its knees, Thai businessman Yod decided to buy himself an US$872,000 treat – a lime-green Lamborghini.
    Yod picked up the customised Huracan EVO supercar in Bangkok, a city of billionaires with a luxury economy unbroken by the crisis ripping through Thailand's wider economy.
    With tourism and exports in freefall, Thailand's growth could shrivel by as much as 10 per cent this year, dumping millions into unemployment.
    But in a split-screen economy, there are plenty with immunity to the economic scourge caused by Covid-19. (AFB, 2020)

12. Lileks: Some start to think pandemic, schmandemic
    Anyone else getting a bit ... relaxed about all this?
    I say this as someone who washes his hands after reading about COVID-19, because all hypochondriacs know you can get something just by perusing a list of symptoms. But have we become, let's say, slightly less alarmed?
    Of course, that's the last thing we should be. We should be determined to hunker as long as it takes. As the Jerry Lee Lewis song would say, updated for the time: "Don't come over! / Whole lotta hunkerin' goin' on." […] (Lileks, 2020)

13. […] After all, they could quote Shelley Luther: "I just know that I have rights. You have rights to feed your children and make an income and anyone that wants to take away those rights is wrong." (She didn't add "pandemic, schmandemic," but she could have.) (Taschinger, 2020)

14. […] Nunes wrapped up with a reminder that—COVID, SCHMOVID—nothing's more deadly than sitting around on one's duff: "When you have people staying at home, not taking care of themselves, you will end up with a hell of a lot more people dying by other causes then you will by the coronavirus."(Spiegelman, 2020)

Apart from these more formal contexts, a clear majority of the examples in the Google data occur in typical informal language contexts. In the following, we present each of the contexts briefly and comment on the kind of usage that is (or would seem to be, given the approximate nature of our data) prominent. One common denominator across all contexts that deserves to be highlighted is the use of *schm*-reduplications as headlines or labels of some sort. In addition to newspaper and magazine headlines like (10)-(11), we have located numerous examples of headline usage in personal blogs and other similar contexts. The *schm*-reduplications appear either on their own or together with additional content, such as a sub-heading. (15)-(16) are headlines of blog posts, while (17) is a headline of an informal magazine-article-like text where the *schm*-reduplication is followed by a sub-heading:

15. Virus Schmirus
    Fake News. It's just another seasonal flu. When the weather gets hot, it will go away. It's totally under control. It's a liberal hoax, a conservative hoax, a foreign virus. Viral terrorism. Political hype. So, don't worry your pretty little head about it.
    Except… it isn't. Covid-19 is now officially a pandemic and severe measures are being taken to try to contain it. In America we're playing catch-up. We have every reason to worry about this.
    This teeny, tiny speck of protein is now managing and organizing the lives of all of humanity. How could that be? It's simple schmimple. We are all […] (Miesem, 2020)

16. Part 27: Lockdown Schmockdown
    I can't help thinking about the amount of suicides that have happened, and will happen, due to Covid19. I don't see that in the press- the taboo of addressing the nation's state of mental health is only now coming to the forefront. Well done. Its only taken 4 weeks to begin to see those coping with a mental health disorder as a vulnerable group.
    Not only is the Depressive locked down within themselves on a bad day, but now forcibly confined within the walls of their own 'prison' or 'oasis' – you decide or does Big D? Ok, so slightly melodramatic, but for some it will be like this. You may grow to hate the 'home' that surrounds you, and even the most agrophobic of us are scratching the front door like a rabid dog to venture out. Meanwhile the OCDers of society are throwing their clean hands up in resignation- who knew? They were right all along.
    Listen, I don't mean to be glib or playful or disrespectful; it is about coping. The Big D has taught me that I need to have routines (like a child) and to treat life (when the unexpected happens) as a marathon

and not a sprint, with humour and sometimes in a marmite style of approach. I am dealing with lockdown by attacking my house with creativity. […] (Chin Up, Ginge, 2020)

17. Covid Schmovid! How To Throw An Epic Kids VIRTUAL Party In Singapore
    My husband, Navin, and I are big on birthdays.
    We love having a fun time with our family and friends, and creating different themes and exciting activities for our kids, Yugan, 5, and Avyaan, 2.
    This year, we were going to have a BBQ party at East Coast Park for my eldest son Yugan's fifth birthday.
    But with Covid-19 – and then the circuit breaker – that plan quickly went down the drain.
    Fortunately, Yugan understood the reason why we could not have a celebration as usual. And we told him we would do something after all of this was "over" (whenever that is).
    But I kept thinking of how we could make the most of this situation and celebrate it meaningfully – still with friends and family, while also practicing social distancing.
    At first, Navin and I just figured we would get a cake, cut it virtually with family and that would be that.
    Somehow, I just felt that we could do more, and not let Covid dampen the party.
    And so, the planning began! […] (…by a mum who's done it during the circuit breaker, 2020).

Besides headlines, *schm*-reduplications occur within the running text. In most cases the *schm*-reduplication is only loosely connected to the rest of the text; this means that it stands at the edge of a sentence (i.e., before or after the other sentence elements) and is separated from it by a comma, dashes, or an exclamation mark. This is very much what we would expect, based on previous work on reduplicated ideophones. Some examples of *schm*-reduplications in news reports have been provided in (13)-(14) where we also noted that the *schm*-formation is often part of material that is attributed to someone else. (18)-(19) provide more examples of this type of use in informal news and commentary sites, while (20) comes from an article-like text on a student satire site:

18. "I guess it was only a matter of time before Donald Trump would be in a Twitter feud with Twitter," Kimmel said. "But this new kick he's on, trying to stop voting-by-mail, is actually very scary, because it's pretty clear he's setting the stage to claim he was cheated if he loses the election, which could potentially result in real violence in this country. And to help him push our democracy toward the edge of a cliff, Kellyanne Conway spoke to reporters today to say: pandemic, schmandemic, real American voters wait in line." At least for cupcakes. Weber, 2020)

19. New Orleans is a city that does not heed warnings, so there were few obvious preparations made. On Saturday, Bourbon Street was packed as usual. Virus, schmirus, said the St. Patrick's weekend revelers. (Robinson, 2020)

20. An expert from the International Forum on Infectious Diseases, Brenda Royal, warned that shortages of essential commodities such as loot crates, hats and "that wicked dance the backpack kid did," would result if actions were not taken immediately to halt the spread of Covid-19.
    Head of Epic Games cosmetics division Eric Sykes dismissed the reports: "Covid-Schmovid!" he stated to correspondents from the Associated Press, "No damn dilly-dally disease is gonna stop our factories from pumping out skin!" (Bushman, 2020)

*Schm*-reduplications can also occur within the running text in blog posts. However, as shown by (21)-(22) below, they have a tendency to stand outside the rest of the text and function almost as comments on what the rest of the text says (21) or as secondary headlines to what will follow (22):

21. One of my daughters – in deadly seriousness – was talking about the future, and the fact there really wasn't one; that we would all be dead before they could have children, a thought so grim I found it hard to take it seriously. But from her point of view at 13, having lived through years of Brexit hokey cokey, if everything you've ever understood to be normal is removed, why would you not think that there is nothing you can rely on? It breaks my heart.
    Chez Guerra-Clarke we have instigated a practice of getting 'dressed' for Sunday lunch (actually held at about 630 pm). I am famously one of the world's biggest slobs and lockdown and its endless comfy clothing possibilities are something I need to boundary. During our first well-dressed lunch, I felt a very smug mummy asking what we had all enjoyed that week? What we're going to achieve the next? Getting great, engaged, answers from everyone. Look how well we (I) had done – lockdown, schmockdown! (Guerra, 2020)

22. Lockdown diary: A very happy birthday!
    Lockdown schmockdown! It was Lily's 9th birthday on Saturday and we weren't going to let pesky quarantine restrictions get in the way of having a good time. Sure, we couldn't have the big science party we'd planned to have in a hall with lots of kids and fantastic experiments (slime, sherbet, explosions), as we were restricted to our house – and of course, none of her friends could come round, only her dad (as we're effectively the same household because she moves between our houses). (Sherine, 2020)

It is also common to find corona related *schm*-reduplications in somewhat shorter diary-entry type posts that can be either personal or shared by a larger group or community. (23) is a blog post on Three Dogs Training, a website run by the professional dog trainer and behavioural consultant Lisa Edwards. The blog has a section called *Just for fun* that lists entries where different *Distract-O-Doggies* (so, different dogs) describe their daily life and activities during quarantine. The short passages of text are accompanied by a picture of the dog in question; (23) describes Lily the dog's greatest worries during quarantine:

23. If Lily could speak, she would say, "You guys got the toilet paper you need and then some. But, pandemic-schmandemic – did you stock up on my dog food, too?" (Three Dogs Training, 2020)

The Distract-O-Doggie posts are similar to postings on various interest and hobby groups' websites. Below are some typical examples of such forums: (24) comes from the website of Altamont Anglers where people interested in fly fishing can share their best tips, photos and experiences. As we can see, the *schm*-reduplication again precedes the rest of the text and has a similar secondary headline kind of function that we have already seen in (22) above. (25) comes from a discussion forum titled *Airgunforum.co.uk* where people interested in the topic can share thoughts and experiences. In this example the *schm*-reduplication is in the actual heading:

24. Quarantine Shmuarantine, let's go fishing! And so Teo, his nephew Boaz and buddy Trey snuck off to the river for some social distancing and smallmouth fishing on Sunday, May 17. (Altamont Anglers, 2020)

25. Lockdown Schmockdown..pah!
    Yet another day has passed with not even the barest of airgun fondling.
    Children. Bloomin children.
    Gardening. DIY.
    Neighbours having the nerve to be in their gardens and no background humdrum noise.
    It's a travesty I tell thee!
    I get a window before dinner time then all hope is abandoned!
    My poor compressor sits idle...
    Actually that's my fault as I've been obsessed with springoids.
    The only consolation is having a drink with and after dinner.
    Thish bloomin lockdoon ish tewibble fer shootewy fings an my boosh schtock ish gettin lo..... (Wofty, 2020)

Besides informal article-like texts, diary entries and blog posts of varying lengths, *schm*-reduplications are also frequently employed in the social media. We have located countless examples of Instagram and Facebook posts where a *schm*-reduplication occurs in a short headline-like or caption-like text together with a photo or some other visual image. Images 4 and 5 exemplify this usage on Instagram:

**Image 4:** Dave [@titiksha] (2020)

**Image 5:** Gutman (2020)

Images 6 and 7 exemplify the same headline-like or caption-like usage on Facebook. In both these examples, the short text serves to introduce or explain what we are meant to see in the photo:

**Image 6:** Spencer Blake (2020)

**Image 7:** Jackie NeJaime Compass SF (2020)

The same headline-like or caption-like usage is also found on Twitter. Even here the short text is often accompanied by an image or a link to an image or video:

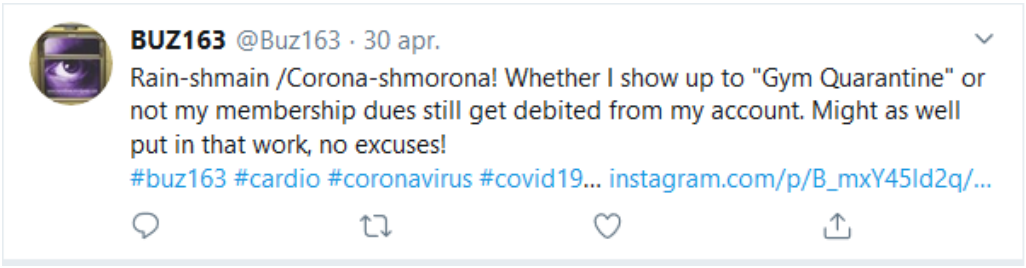


**Image 8:** @BUZ163 (2020)

**Image 9:** @BlakeRizzo24 (2020)

Further investigations of the social media show that, besides headlines and photo captions, corona related *schm*-reduplications are commonly used as hashtags. In many cases the running text—or the little running text that there can be in an Instagram post or a tweet—need not contain any reduplicated forms at all. This seems to be an entirely new way of using *schm*-reduplications in English, as we have not come across any mention of this usage in the previous

work on *schm*-reduplications or on reduplicated ideophones in general.[5] Below, we provide some representative examples of hashtag usage on Facebook (Image 10), on Instagram (Image 11), and on Twitter (Image 12):

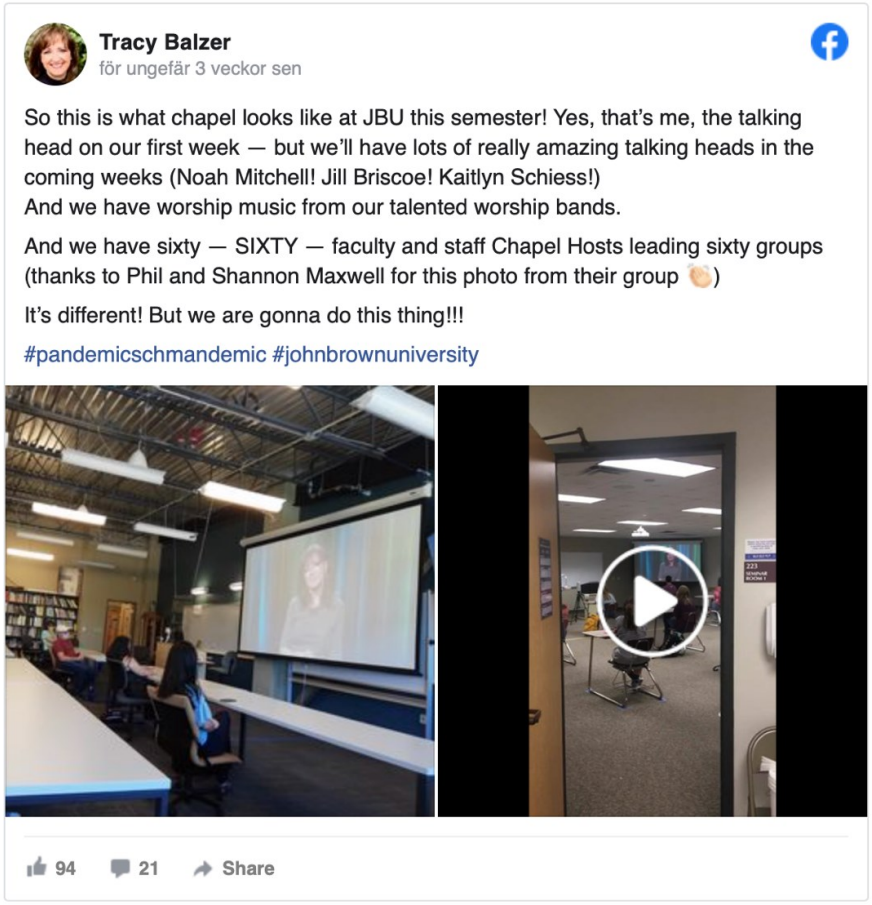


**Image 10:** Tracy Balzer (2020)

[5] As sources such as Zwicky & Pullum (1987) and Nevis & Vaugh (2003) originate from a time prior to these social media platforms, they obviously cannot have discussed such uses. The fact that the social media usage in general and the hashtag usage in particular have not been investigated and discussed in detail in the more recent accounts of reduplicated ideophones either is somewhat surprising, however, especially in view of the fact that, on the basis of our investigations of the Google data, the social media seem to be making quite frequent use of such formations. This is clearly a topic that will need further researching in the future.

**Image 11:** tattoosbymattwear (2020)

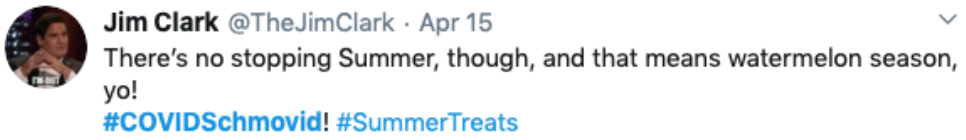


**Image 12:** @TheJimClark (2020)

As the hashtag use appears to be a new way of using *schm*-reduplications in English, we have done additional searches for these forms, to gain more insight into the phenomenon.[6] Table 3 below gives the number of posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter that contain one of our six *schm*-reduplications as a hashtag. The results shown in Table 3 are generated by searching for the respective hashtags using the web interface of each of these social media platforms. Only the Instagram search function displays the number of hits for the searches directly; the figures for both Facebook and Twitter have had to be calculated manually, by scrolling through the hits and counting them one by one. As *#covidschmovid* is the most popular tag on both Instagram and Twitter, the complete lack of hits for this specific item in Facebook may, at least at first sight, seem surprising. One explanation is that, instead of the actual search results,

[6] In this short discussion of hashtag usage, we have been inspired by a seminar presentation given by Eleni Seitanidi (Seitanidi, 2020).

Facebook has displayed a link to a covid 19 information page; this seems to be part of an official strategy that Facebook has adopted regarding the covid 19 pandemic.[7]

| *Schm-, Shm- and Sm-* combined | Facebook | Instagram | Twitter | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *#covidschmovid* | 0 | 1835 | 159 | 1994 |
| *#pandemicschmandemic* | 91 | 285 | 41 | 417 |
| *#coronaschmorona* | 129 | 650 | 24 | 803 |
| *#quarantineschmuarantine* | 23 | 74 | 12 | 109 |
| *#lockdownschmockdown* | 137 | 924 | 54 | 1115 |
| *#virusschmirus* | 135 | 508 | 51 | 694 |

**Table 3:** *Schm*-reduplications as hashtags, 20 September, 2020

Hashtags in the social media have been investigated previously (and prior to the 2020 global pandemic) by Zappavigna (2015), who proposes that hashtags can act as topic-markers and that they can also contribute interpersonal meanings (p 288). This would appear to be the case for our examples, too. The hashtags point to the current pandemic, while at the same time displaying an attitude of resistance and perseverance towards the situation. Many social media posts that contain one of the investigated hashtags share strategies for coping with the pandemic and/or show highlights from everyday life during lockdown and quarantine times. The hashtags can therefore be interpreted as having the function of "socializing and sharing experiences" in the sense of e.g. Laucuka (2018). Unsurprisingly, the current pandemic has triggered a strong need for sharing experiences and keeping up morale. Many of the uses we have identified for *schm*-reduplications, including the hashtag use, appear to be related to this need; we will return to this in section 3.2 below.

[7] According to FirstDraft (2020), Facebook has run a Coronavirus Information Center since 18 March, to counteract "scams, ads and other sources of disinformation" regarding the virus. This strategy appears to block searches for certain terms, and instead re-directs users to more reliable sources such as the WHO or a national health organization. One trigger term for this re-direction is *coronavirus*, according to FirstDraft (2020). Looking at the results in Table 3, it would seem to be the case that some corona related *schm*-reduplications have also been included in the "banned" searches. Another point that is worth mentioning is that while the numbers in Table 3 appear to show at first sight that for some of the items, the hashtag use accounts for around 15% of the total number of hits and that for other items, we land at around 10%, these numbers cannot be directly compared as the hashtag searches were completed some weeks after the initial searches for all the terms (see Table 1).

A special kind of headline use that we also should mention is the use of *schm*-reduplications as titles: as already noted above, one of our corona related terms has been used as a book title (*Covod Schmovid—19 ways to make your small business boom,* by Davis, 2020). In addition, these terms occasionally occur in titles of (Youtube) playlists or individual videos: image 14 below is the image of a video titled *Corona Schmorona FCS VIRTUAL Percussion Ensamble* (FCS Percussion, 2020). For further examples of Youtube playlists and videos where *schm*-reduplications are used as the titles, the reader is referred to e.g. Albers (2020), Marder (2020).

**Image 14**: FCS Percussion (2020)

Although previous work by e.g. Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2017) has found reduplications to be relatively common in cartoons and images as well, this does not seem to be true of our corona related *schm*-reduplications.[8] In the few examples that we did find of this usage, the *schm*-reduplication seems once more to function as a headline, caption, or title of some sort. One example of this is the meme Book Club Time (2020):

[8] Another explanation is, of course, that the text inside of cartoons and memes is not searchable using Google, in the same way as the text inside of an Instagram post or a tweet is.

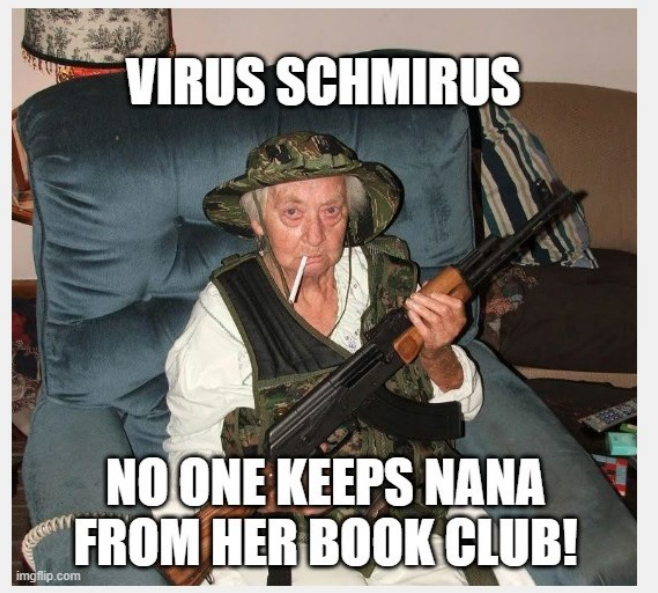


**Image 13:** Book Club Time (2020)

Furthermore, although previous work has found reduplications to be common in contexts such as advertising, brand names, and names of shops, restaurants, and other businesses, the fact that our items deal with a potentially deadly disease lead us initially to think that this would not be a common way to use them in the Google data. It turned out to be true that there are no examples where a corona related *schm*-reduplication would have appeared in a "proper" advertisement for products or services, or where the items would have been used on purpose in brand names; we have already commented on those brand names that pre-date the current pandemic, the Mexican beer being again a case in point.[9] However, what we did find to be quite common in the Google data was the use of these items in postings that many shops, restaurants and other businesses have on their social media channels. Besides providing information, these postings often serve as advertisements for home delivery of goods or for services that the company continues to provide, despite the ongoing pandemic. Below are some representative examples of this type of usage. As the reader can verify, these are further examples of the headline-like usage that has been brought up earlier, for instance in connection with example (22) and images 4 and 5. Image 15 below comes from the Facebook page of North Point Plantation, a company that arranges weddings and other social events, informing customers that they are still open for business (North Point Plantation, 2020).

[9] It might be interesting to note that, although we have not located any instances of *schm*-reduplications in actual advertisements, we have located various websites selling *fuckcorona* products, such as T-shirts, jewelry, and mugs. This can perhaps be viewed as parallel to the *#fuckcancer* movement and the various *fuckcancer* products available to buy in online and other shops.

**Image 15:** Nort Point Plantation (2020)

Image 16 comes, in turn, from the Facebook page of Cathy Burke Photography. This is where the photographer posts samples of her work, together with short comments of the type that we see here (Cathy Burke Photography, 2020).

**Image 16:** Cathy Burke Photography (2020)

Social media is an important way for businesses of all sizes to communicate and to keep in touch with their (existing and potential) customers, and postings on social medial channels such as what we see in images 15 and 16 can be viewed as a form of advertising. As we cannot go in any detail into the role that social media plays in brand marketing and advertising, the interested reader is referred to the literature, such as Ashley & Tuten (2015), Voorveld (2019), and Knoll (2016).

Besides promotional content and postings from the business owners themselves, social media channels also often contain material from the customers and other members of the general public, in the form of for example reviews and recommendations. Corona related *schm*-reduplications are often found in these environments, as well; (26) below is an example of a review for a pizzeria that offers take-away:

26. Pandemic, schmandemic, I wanted to sit outside with a friend and eat Italian on a beautiful sunny day, and I aced it! I drove to Pina's to pick up our order of a Cheesesteak Special Stromboli and a Vegetarian Calzone. (Steve B., 2020)

To conclude, in this section we have investigated the contexts of use of English corona virus related *schm*-reduplications in Google data. Apart from stating the contexts of use and noting *where* in the texts (in the headline, the caption or the title, or within the running text) the reduplications tend to appear, we have so far said very little about the interpretations that arise in connection with these forms. This will be the topic of section 3.2.

## *3.2 Function of* schm-*reduplications*

In the few accounts that focus on *schm*-reduplications (e.g. Feinsilver, 1961; Nevins & Vaux, 2003) and in the accounts that bring up *schm*-reduplications in connection with reduplicated ideophones and other expressive formations (e.g. Zwicky & Pullum, 1987; Gomeshi *et al*., 2004), the main message has been that *schm*-reduplications are deprecative formations that bring about pejorative readings and associations with aspects of irony, scorn, scepticism, disparagement, and dismissal. It seems to be taken almost for granted that the negativity is directed towards what the input word means and the associations that it has: as Zwicky & Pullum (1987, p 330) observe, a form such as *transformations schmansformations* has the intended reading along the lines of 'Who cares about transformations?' This kind of reading was also observed in examples like (1)-(5) above. The question that we now address is if this reading is present in the corona related *schm*-reduplications as well, or if these formations can be seen to serve some other purpose.

In the tsunami of Google data that we have investigated for this study, two specific readings of corona virus related *schm*-reduplications have suggested themselves. Neither of these readings is what we would have expected, in light of what has been said about *schm*-reduplications in the previous work. It is also worth noting that we have located only a few isolated examples where the *schm*-reduplication would appear to dismiss the official recommendations regarding social distancing and quarantines. One such example is (or appears to be) Image 4, repeated here for convenience. This is an Instagram post, where the couple in the picture would seem to be announcing how they, despite the ongoing pandemic, still continue go to bars and how they enjoy it. This type of usage where people (would seem to) openly defy social distancing recommendations is extremely rare in the Google data:

**Image 4:** Dave [@titiksha] (2020)

Although *schm*-reduplications have occasionally been used to mock the recommendations regarding social distancing, we have not located a single example in the Google data where the *schm*-reduplication would have been used to ridicule, dismiss or show scepticism towards the threats posed by the disease or the reported death rates. In large majority of examples, the items listed in Table 1 are also not used to show scorn towards the recommendations regarding social distancing, quarantines, and lockdowns. Nor are these items used to signal the speakers' view of these recommendation as silly, annoying and/or unnecessary overreactions. In other words, the expected 'Who cares about X?' reading simply is not there.

Instead, the by far most common reading in the Google data would appear to be the original *cancer schmancer, abi gezunt*-type of reading, where the purpose of the *schm*-reduplication—and the accompanying text in its entirety—is to present the virus and the current situation as something that can be overcome and that is not going to get us down. In other words, despite the current pandemic, for as long as you are healthy, you can still be happy. This means that the corona related *schm*-reduplications, and the texts where they occur, have a very prominent spirit-lifting function and they attempt to show that, despite the threats posed by the virus and all the restrictions on our lives, we are still able to do many of the things that we normally do, albeit in a slightly different manner. Like the label *cancer schmancer*, the corona related *schm*-

reduplications serve to diminish the topic in size and help people cope with the current situation.

The same spirit-lifting function can be observed in other forms of public discourse. Many TV presenters, for example, have initiated programmes that focus on the current situation and on the difficulties that it poses on people's lives: Jamie Oliver's cooking show *Keep Cooking and Carry On* encourages viewers to continue to prepare delicious and healthy home-cooked meals during lockdown times, using Oliver's "creative recipes tailored for the unique times we're living in" (Oliver, 2020). The programme is filmed (presumably) at Oliver's home, by his wife and young children using a less-than-perfect mobile phone camera, and the recipes are such that the ingredients can easily be swapped for other ingredients, so there is no need to go shopping and break the quarantine rules. Oliver appears unshaven and a bit scruffy—as many people probably do, when they are confined to their homes for several weeks—and he makes references to supply problems, such as the shortage of eggs in some parts of the UK in the spring 2020. In similar spirit, Trevor Noah's *The Daily Show* quickly transitioned into *The Daily Social Distancing Show* during spring 2020, a show where all interviews and discussions take place online and where—despite the references to the current situation and reports on topics that are directly related to it—the tone of the programme is kept very much the same as it has always been (Noah, 2020). The joint message of such programmes is that, despite the virus and all the complications and threats that it poses, we are all in this together and we will also get through this together; that our lives will still go on; and that we can—and in fact should—continue with our day-to-day activities as best as we can.

The vast amounts of Google examples that we have investigated, as well as these other forums just brought up, remind in many ways of the *can do* spirit on the home front during the second world war. And although, if we quote Sir Winston Churchill's famous words, we may perhaps not be fighting the corona virus on the beaches and on the landing grounds (International Churchill Society, 2020), the joint message in these various sources is very much that we shall never surrender. If the reader finds the analogy to Sir Winston Churchill a bit far-fetched, it is worth mentioning that the same analogy has also been noted by others and is made use of also in our Google data. Image 17 comes from the homepage of Innerspaice Architectural Interiors (2020), a company that offers interior design solutions for offices and workplaces:

**Image 17:** Innerspaice Architectural Interiors (2020)

So, if 'we shall never surrender' is the overall message in most of the Google data we have investigated, then what is the role of the *schm*-reduplications in this bigger whole? Like with cancer (schmancer), their role would seem to be to diminish the topic in size and help signal that the virus and its consequences can be overcome: for as long as you are healthy, you can (continue to) be happy. So, despite covid (schmovid), Bangkok's rich will still continue to get richer and children will still continue to have birthday parties. Despite lockdown (schmockdown), we can still go out and take photos of beautiful places. Despite quarantine (schmuarantine), we can still go fishing. In some of the examples we have provided above, such as image 9, covid (schmovid) is even presented in a rather positive light, as the reason why the speaker is now living their best dad life. In a number of examples we have investigated, the *schm*-reduplication occurs in combination with expressions such as *not going to stop us*

*from X; not going to prevent is from X; not going to keep us from X;* and *not going to get in the way of X,* which strengthens this impression. The progressive *-ing* form is also quite common in the examples and serves a very similar purpose. In example (10), for instance, the author declares how "no virus is going to stop the Hamptons fund-raising", even if the fund-raising now clearly takes place online. In example (22), in turn, the author announces how they "weren't going to let pesky quarantine restrictions get in the way of having a good time", even if here, too, the good time must now be had in a different way than before. Another example is the Facebook post in image 7 which pictures two people enjoying a social distancing lobster and wine night and the text announces how covid shmovid will not be stopping them from having their party. Example (20), repeated here as (27), is yet another example of this type of usage. The text brings up students' fears regarding the shortage of "Fortnite skins" and the response by the company representative Eric Sykes is (presumably) meant to calm them down, with a promise of how "no damn dilly-dally disease" is going to stop them from producing the goods:

> 27. An expert from the International Forum on Infectious Diseases, Brenda Royal, warned that shortages of essential commodities such as loot crates, hats and "that wicked dance the backpack kid did," would result if actions were not taken immediately to halt the spread of Covid-19.
> Head of Epic Games cosmetics division Eric Sykes dismissed the reports: "Covid-Schmovid!" he stated to correspondents from the Associated Press, "No damn dilly-dally disease is gonna stop our factories from pumping out skin!" (Bushman, 2020)

Besides mentions of how the virus is not going to stop one or keep one from doing things, there are several examples where people describe how they are still following their desires. In example (26) above, for instance, the author states how they just "wanted to sit outside with a friend and eat Italian on a beautiful sunny day" and how they "aced it!"—even if the rest of this post shows that the author actually picked up a take-away pizza and ate it at home. Under the current circumstances, great take-away food apparently counts as "acing it".

The way in which most of the texts are structured, in terms of where the *schm*-reduplication occurs in relation to the rest of the text (or, what little text there is), helps create this 'for as long as you're healthy, you can still be happy' interpretation. We know from previous work on reduplicated ideophones that these formations have a tendency to stand outside the sentence or text that they are associated with (i.e., they form utterances on their own, so that they are separated from the other materials by a full stop or some other punctuation mark that signals

completedness), and that in those cases where they are part of a sentence, they are only loosely connected to it. In the Google data, *schm*-reduplications that are part of a sentence tend nearly always to stand at the edges, so that they either precede the rest of the sentence (which seems to be the more usual case) or follow it, and they are separated from the other sentence elements by a comma or dashes. There are also cases where the *schm*-reduplication stands in the middle of the sentence and is separated from it by dashes; this is what happens in examples (20), (22), (23) and (25) above. That *schm*-reduplications are so commonly used in headlines is a good example of how the texts tend to be built: the headline containing the *schm*-reduplication names the "problem" and shrinks it in size, and text that follows provides a description of what people will do or have done, despite the obstacles that the virus throws in their way. The headline-like and caption-like uses have a very similar function: they also name the "problem" and shrink it in size, and the rest of the text, as well as the visuals, describe activities that people can still continue to be involved in, despite the current circumstances. The hashtag usage would seem to serve a similar function as well: the hashtag serves to reveal the speakers' attitude towards the virus as something that can be overcome and the rest of the posts describe the activities that the virus cannot stop them from completing. The fact that the hashtagged corona virus terms very often cooccur with other hashtags that are clearly positive in nature (#makingitwork; #supporteachother; #thereisbeauty; #nailedit; #stayingpositive; #cuddleswhileimworking) adds to this impression.

Another very common interpretation for the corona related *schm*-reduplications in the Google data is criticism. More specifically, the *schm*-reduplications are a way for speakers to show criticism towards other people, who are often an unnamed mass but in some cases also public figures who are mentioned by name, who are not taking the situation seriously: people who do not follow the rules and restrictions; and people who are engaged in behaviour that the speaker judges to be silly, risky, and irresponsible. This function is very clear in examples such as (13), repeated here as (28)—here Shelley Luther is accused of not taking the pandemic seriously, by adding a comment that she did not herself apparently make but that in the author's view represents her *attitude* towards the situation:

28. […] After all, they could quote Shelley Luther: "I just know that I have rights. You have rights to feed your children and make an income and anyone that wants to take away those rights is wrong." (She didn't add "pandemic, schmandemic," but she could have.) (Taschinger, 2020)

In example (29) below, President Trump's White House adviser Kellyanne Conway is portrayed as downplaying the dangers of the ongoing pandemic. Her attitude is again described by adding a *schm*-reduplication to her statement to the press, even if this was again probably not part of the original utterance:

29. "I guess it was only a matter of time before Donald Trump would be in a Twitter feud with Twitter," Kimmel said. "But this new kick he's on, trying to stop voting-by-mail, is actually very scary, because it's pretty clear he's setting the stage to claim he was cheated if he loses the election, which could potentially result in real violence in this country. And to help him push our democracy toward the edge of a cliff, Kellyanne Conway spoke to reporters today to say: pandemic, schmandemic, real American voters wait in line." At least for cupcakes. Weber, 2020)

In example (19), repeated here as (30), the author is indirectly criticizing the behaviour of St. Patrick's weekend revelers, so, an unnamed mass of people behaving irresponsibly:

30. New Orleans is a city that does not heed warnings, so there were few obvious preparations made. On Saturday, Bourbon Street was packed as usual. Virus, schmirus, said the St. Patrick's weekend revelers. (Robinson, 2020)

The same can be observed in example (12), repeated partially here as (31). The *schm*-reduplication appears in the headline of a column and the rest of the column focusses on the dangers of people starting to relax about the need to follow the recommendations regarding social distancing:

31. Lileks: Some start to think pandemic, schmandemic. (Lileks, 2020)

Looking at examples of *schm*-reduplications that have a criticizing function, one further observation that we can make is that these reduplications seem to be more firmly connected to the sentences that they are associated with than the reduplications that have the spirit-lifting 'as long as you're healthy, you can still be happy' function. The criticizing *schm*-reduplications seem also in many cases to be introduced into the sentence with an introductory verb, for example *say* or *think*; this can be observed in (29)-(31) above, for example. As the way in which our examples have been collected does not allow us to provide any figures to back up this general observation, we will leave the issue here and hope to return to it, with new and more reliable data, at a later point in time.

### *3.3. Only something that we find in English?*

While our main aim has been to investigate the contexts of use, the functions and the interpretations of corona related *schm*-reduplications in English, we have also found a number of examples of in *non*-English environments. This is surprising, as *schm*-reduplication is presented in previous work such as Feinsilver (1961), Zwicky & Pullum (1987), and Nevins & Vaux (2003) as a borrowing from Yiddish into English and there is no mention of its possible uses in other languages. Below are some examples of *schm*-formations in Swedish (32)-(33); in Norwegian (34); and in Dutch (35). The Google searches have also taken us to sources that are written in German and Spanish, to mention a few more environments where these formations seem to occur relatively often:

32. För seriöst. Corona schmorona i all ära. I vår sportiga värld är väl ändå cykling och snytning i grupp prio ett right? Just det. (Cykelkatten, 2020)

33. Corona, Morona, Torona, Vorona, Schmorona, Pandemorona, Karantänorona - okärt barn tycks också ha många namn. (Kom alla rädslor, 2020)

34. Corona, Schmorona!
    Det er nok ingen grunn til panikk, men det er lov å bruke hue.
    Vask hendene med såpe ofte. (HEIA, 2020)

35. Corona schmorona / Dankzij ons allervriend Mr. Co Rona werkten we met het hele team al thuis en we wisten dat het nog wel even zou gaan duren. Daarom was het belangrijk dat we de kleine aanpassingen ons nu echt eigen gingen maken. Er werden USB-UTP adapters besteld om thuis bekabeld internet te kunnen gebruiken, er werd een online projectmanagement-software aangeschaft (ben verliefd op Monday!) en de dagstart via Skype werd heilig. Corona is natuurlijk echt vreselijk, maar als team zijn we heel planmatig gaan werken en lijkt het ons juist goed te doen! (Blossombooks, 2020)

Although Yiddish is one of the five official minority languages in Sweden, it is very unlikely that formations such as those given in (32)-(33) would be borrowings from Yiddish. Rather, the donor language in these examples, and many others like them that can be located using Google searches, is likely to be English, on grounds that most Swedes are much more familiar with English than with Yiddish and English words and expressions are frequently inserted in otherwise all-Swedish texts even in other contexts. This is a possible explanation for the other non-English examples as well where we have located our corona related *schm*-reduplications.

Whether the corona related *schm*-reduplications are somehow special in this respect, or whether there is a more general tendency to insert or borrow reduplicated material from one language to another in this way will need to remain a topic for future research.

## 4. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper has been to provide an overview of how *schm*-reduplications are used in current corona related discourse. As *schm*-reduplications are known to have uses that serve to diminish a topic in size and make it easier for people to handle and to cope with, our initial starting point was to see if we could locate examples of this usage in the public sphere. We also set out to investigate what, exactly, the *schm*-reduplications do in the texts, and if they indeed introduce into the texts any aspects of irony, scorn, scepticism, disparagement, and dismissal; these associations have been presented as the main function of *schm*-reduplications in previous work on the topic.

On the basis of web data, collected using Google searches, we have been able to determine that the image of *schm*-reduplications in previous work is partially misleading. In our data, the most common function was a headline or headline-like function where the *schm*-reduplicated word names the "problem" and serves to diminish it in size, and the rest of the text—irrespective of how long or short it is—serves to show how people are still able to do the things they normally do, despite the treats posed by the virus and complications posed by quarantines and national lockdowns. The texts do not usually introduce any aspects of irony, scorn, scepticism, or disparagement, and they do not serve to dismiss the threats or ridicule the rules concerning social distancing and quarantines. The examples we have investigated are all very positive in tone: despite covid schmovid, we can still continue to live our lives.

Another common function that we identified for corona related *schm*-reduplications is criticism towards other people. These are often an unnamed mass who are presented as having too careless an attitude towards the virus and the threats that it poses. In some cases, a public figure is identified by name and the *schm*-reduplication serves to present that person's attitude, real or the author's view of it. In this function, the *schm*-reduplications seem to be more firmly connected to the sentence they are associated with and they are often introduced by verbs of

saying and thinking. In the first use, the *schm*-reduplications are, in turn, very often separate utterances.

Although the results of this investigation are very general and we are only able to point at tendencies that we have noted in the data, the fact that we have still investigated a very large number of examples of recent, topical material shows that *schm*-reduplications have uses and functions that are very common in language and that most previous work on the topic has not brought up at all, or has only brought them up in passing. Contrastingly, the usage and functions that *are* brought up in the previous work do not seem to be that common, at least not when we focus on the corona virus related discussion in English. These findings can hopefully serve as starting point for further studies that can show more conclusively whether these observations apply to *schm*-reduplications in more general or to just the corona related items studied here.

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