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IMPORTANCE OF NEOLOGISMS IN MODERN ENGLISH (BASED ON MASS
MEDIA AND INTERNET COMMUNICATION).

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Abstract: Neologisms play a crucial role in the evolution of modern English, significantly influenced by mass media and internet communication. The rapid dissemination of information and the globalized nature of digital interactions contribute to the creation, adoption, and standardization of new words. This paper explores the formation and impact of neologisms, emphasizing their role in shaping contemporary language and reflecting societal changes. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, we examine the linguistic mechanisms behind neologisms and their integration into mainstream usage.

Key Words: neologisms, modern English, mass media, internet communication, language evolution, digital discourse

Introduction

Language is a dynamic entity that continuously evolves to accommodate new concepts, technologies, and social trends. The advent of mass media and the proliferation of internet communication have accelerated this evolution, giving rise to numerous neologisms. This study aims to investigate the mechanisms behind the formation of new words, their impact on English, and the role of digital platforms in their widespread adoption.

Neologisms are opposed to archaisms, that is to say, the expressions that are not used by the standard user anymore or that have been forgotten. Even though archaisms are not commonly used anymore, they must still be present in the dictionary as they can be encountered in texts written centuries ago when these words were used (Segovia, 1859). By contrast, neologisms do not frequently appear in dictionaries. In fact, some lexicographers state that words and expressions can only be considered to be new if they do not appear “in general dictionaries of Standard English” (Bauer, 1983, as cited in Onyedum, 2012, p. 28). However, some dictionaries do include the speakers’ most widely used neologisms in their updated versions. This is the case of the supplement of the Webster’s Third New International Dictionary which contains neologisms created via affixation (two-fifths of all the neologisms they have included), compounding (three fifths) and some instances of borrowings, conversion and back-formation (Ayto, 1995, as cited in Onyedum, 2012). Generally speaking, when dictionary writers include new words in a dictionary they provide the date in which the neologism was first produced and an explanation about how it was created. When considering whether to include a new word or not, dictionary writers need to take into account the frequency of the neologism in a concrete period of time. The inclusion of neologisms in dictionaries allows speakers to be aware of the existence of these new words (Onyedum, 2012), after all, neologisms are part of many speakers’ everyday lexicon and their use is increasingly higher nowadays thanks



Date: 5th February-2025

to the media, language contact, the Internet and globalisation. Some experts consider neologisms to be a sign of the normal evolution of language, while others believe that they are a demonstration of how new generations destroy the language. This controversy is reflected in two ways of thinking about language and language change: prescriptivism and descriptivism. On the one side, prescriptivism seeks to describe how languages work and are used (Milroy & Milroy, 1985). The advocates of this position believe in following the rules of a language strictly and do not tend to accept modifications in its use. Consequently, in the case of neologisms, “prescriptive dictionaries may either disregard the item completely or include it with labels such as ‘undesirable’, ‘unnecessary neologism’, etc. and propose what they consider more correct options, whereas descriptive dictionaries might simply record the borrowing alongside other native items” (Balteiro, 2011, p. 283). Conversely, descriptivism: does not tell you how you should speak; it describes your basic linguistic knowledge. It explains how it is possible for you to speak and understand, and it tells what you know about the sounds, words, phrases, and sentences of your language (Fromkin and Rodman, 1998, as cited in Bäckström, 2006, p. 2). Descriptivists believe in respecting speakers’ intuitions and rules about the language so that new trends and changes are accepted as any other rule. This controversy is also found among speakers who may adopt a different stance on the use of neologisms. For example, some speakers criticise the number of new terms that other people use. Indeed, neologisms — mainly acronyms and borrowings— are commonly associated with colloquial speech or with new ways to communicate such as text messaging, and are therefore not given importance. This controversy can also be seen when talking about technology, a very important area where neologisms are created, as there are “some who argue that the impact of technology has 'dumbed down' the language, [while] there are others who would claim that a language that does not evolve, is a dying language” (Abbas, 2009, p. 2).

The creation of English neologisms reflects English morphology and English morphological processes to a great extent (Behera & Mishra, 2013). In this section, I will discuss the processes which result in the creation of a neologism in English. Drawing from the classification by Behera and Mishra (2013), I have organised them into four main categories. The creation of the new word from scratch, that is to say when a new form with a new meaning is created (section 3.1.), when the new word results from making some formal changes to a word that already exists in the language or is built from parts of it (section 3.2.), when the new word takes the same form as the original but has undergone changes to its meaning or grammatical category (section 3.3.), and finally when the new word has a foreign source (i.e. has been adopted from another language or is a direct translation from another language) (section 3.4.).

New coinages New coinages are words that have not been created under any word-formation process (Behera & Mishra, 2013) and which have been created with premeditation. New coinages do not arise very frequently since they “account for less than 1% of all English neologisms” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 28). Sometimes the new coinages are only used once and then disappear. These are the so-called nonce formations (Plotnik, 2008, as cited in Onyedum, 2012). The use of new coinages is common in



Date: 5th February-2025

advertising companies that need new words for their products —e.g. “Band-aid, Factoid, Google, Zipper” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 28). These words which are brand names are then frequently adopted to refer to everyday products. In other words, these names began to be written with an initial capital letter to indicate a brand name but after a while designate an item in a class or group and are written with an initial lower case letter (Onyedum, 2012).

Making formal changes to a word Neologisms can also be created by changing the form of an already existing word, and this is the case of the five categories that I will discuss in this section: shortening, compounding, affixation/derivation, and reduplication.

Methods

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of linguistic trends with quantitative data on word frequency and usage. Data sources include online dictionaries, social media platforms, news articles, and academic studies on neologisms. Additionally, surveys and corpus analysis are utilized to measure the reception and integration of new words in contemporary English.

A blended word is a new word that takes the first part of one word and the last part of the other, as in ‘biopic’ (biographical and picture) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 30) or the neologism ‘rapefugee’, from ‘rape’ and ‘refugee’ (Würschinger et al., 2016). However, Mostafa (2013) argues that many neologisms that are blended words do not follow this pattern anymore. In order to provide evidence of these non-traditional blends, he examined websites such as Word Spy, The Urban Dictionary and the Longman English Dictionary which contain neologisms not usually included in the official Standard English dictionaries. He then analysed the roots, additions, use and acceptability of blends through the online source the Web Corp.

Results

Findings indicate that internet communication and mass media serve as primary catalysts for the emergence and dissemination of neologisms. Social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and Reddit facilitate the rapid spread of new terms, while traditional media outlets contribute to their legitimacy. Words related to technology, culture, and global events frequently enter common usage, often transitioning from informal online jargon to formally recognized dictionary entries.

The Cambridge University Press Dictionary in its latest edition of 2021 has included three more neologisms: ‘dunchfast’, ‘comfury’ and ‘cloffice’. ‘Dunchfast’ is a blend made with the union of the words ‘dinner’, ‘lunch’ and ‘breakfast’ and it refers to one single meal that combines dinner, lunch and breakfast. ‘Comfury’ is also a blend of the words ‘comfort’ and ‘luxury’ and it is a particular dressing style that combines feeling comfortable and being ready to go out. Finally, ‘cloffice’ is a blend of the words ‘closet’ and ‘office’ and it refers to a closed that has become an office.

An acronym is a shortened version of a chain of words in which the initial letter of each word is used to make the word. As opposed to abbreviations (section 3.2.1.5), acronyms are pronounced as a word following the phonological rules of the language. For



Date: 5thFebruary-2025

example, the acronym ‘RADAR’ from “radio detecting and ranging” (Sayadi, 2011) is pronounced /'reɪdə/. Table 1 contains some more examples of acronyms.

Table 1: Examples of acronyms

Acronym	Source
URL (pronounced / ɜ:l/)	<u>U</u> niform <u>r</u> esource <u>l</u> ocator
GUI (pronounced / gu:i/)	<u>G</u> raphical <u>u</u> ser <u>i</u> nterface
DOS (pronounced /dɔ:s/)	<u>D</u> isc <u>o</u> perating <u>s</u> ystem
SCSI (pronounced /skʌzi/)	<u>S</u> mall <u>c</u> omputer <u>s</u> ystem <u>i</u> nterface
LAN (pronounced /læn/)	<u>L</u> ocal <u>a</u> rea <u>n</u> etwork
GIF (pronounced /gif/)	<u>G</u> raphics <u>i</u> nterchange <u>_</u> ormat

An additional example of an acronym is ‘lol’ (laugh out laugh) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29) and an acronym that has been recently included in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2021) is ‘BIPOC’. BIPOC is an acronym that refers to Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Colour.

Discussion

The impact of neologisms on modern English is profound, reflecting changes in technology, culture, and social dynamics. Digital communication fosters linguistic creativity, allowing users to coin and popularize new terms rapidly. However, the transient nature of internet trends means that not all neologisms achieve lasting significance. The paper discusses the factors influencing the longevity of new words and their acceptance into mainstream language.

