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THE CONCEPT OF NEOLOGISM AND ITS THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract

Neologism, as a dynamic linguistic phenomenon, plays a fundamental role in language development and adaptation. This study explores the definition, classification, and theoretical underpinnings of neologisms within the field of linguistics. It analyzes the causes and functions of neologisms, their typology, and their impact on contemporary language use. The paper also discusses various linguistic theories that explain the emergence and integration of neologisms into the lexicon. By addressing both structural and sociocultural perspectives, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of neologism.

Keywords: Neologism, language development, lexical innovation, linguistic theory, word formation, neologism typology.

Introduction

Language is inherently dynamic, reflecting the changing realities of its speakers. One of the key processes illustrating linguistic evolution is the creation and adoption of neologisms—new words or expressions emerging to fulfill novel communicative needs. Neologisms offer valuable insight into how language innovates in response to societal, cultural, technological, and cognitive developments. Understanding neologisms not only sheds light on vocabulary expansion but also reveals the interplay between language, thought, and culture.

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2. Definition of Neologism

Neologisms are typically defined as newly coined lexical items not fully assimilated into the mainstream language but used in particular contexts or communities (Crystal, 2003). Trask (2007) expands this by characterizing neologisms as lexical forms introduced recently to name new objects, ideas, or phenomena or created through word formation processes. These can be novel inventions, borrowings, or semantic shifts of existing words.

For example, the term meme itself is a neologism coined by Richard Dawkins in 1976 as a cultural analog to genes—units of cultural transmission that replicate and evolve within societies through imitation and selective pressures.

3. Classification of Neologisms

Neologisms can be categorized in several ways:

By Origin:

- Coinages: Completely new words, e.g., "Google" used as a verb.
- Borrowings: Adaptations from other languages, e.g., "karaoke" from Japanese.
- Compounds and Blends: Words formed by combining morphemes, e.g., "brunch."

By Function:

- Denotative Neologisms: Naming newly discovered objects or concepts.
- Connotative Neologisms: Words or phrases carrying new figurative or evaluative meanings.

By Duration:

- Temporary (Nonce-words): Created for a specific occasion.
- Permanent: Enter long-term standard lexicons (Algeo, 1991).

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4. Theoretical Foundations

Several linguistic frameworks explain the emergence and role of neologisms:

Structural Linguistics:

Structuralists, following Saussure (1916/2011), interpret neologisms as responses to gaps in the language system. The principle of linguistic economy drives the creation of efficient expressions for newly encountered realities.

Sociolinguistics:

Labov (2001) stresses social influences—technological innovations, shifts in cultural trends, and social dynamics—as catalysts for introducing and adapting neologisms.

Cognitive Linguistics:

Lakoff (1987) posits that neologisms mirror mental models and novel conceptualizations, often emerging through metaphors and analogies shaped by human experience.

Extending these perspectives, the concept of memes, introduced by Dawkins, treats some neologisms as cultural units that replicate and evolve similarly to genes, through variation and selective pressures within social and cognitive environments.

5. Causes of Neologism Formation

Several driving forces underlie the formation of neologisms:

Technological Advancements: Innovations necessitate new terminology, as seen with "smartphone."

Cultural Shifts: Social media and internet culture have introduced terms like "hashtag."

Scientific Discoveries: New concepts such as "quark" require linguistic representation.

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Media and Globalization: Accelerate cross-cultural borrowings and dissemination of new terms.

6. Functions of Neologisms

Neologisms are not only lexical novelties but serve important communicative and social roles:

Naming New Realities: Facilitate communication by providing labels for emerging objects or ideas.

Enriching Expressiveness: Expand the language's descriptive and evaluative capacities.

Reflecting Identity and Group Membership: Signal affiliation within social or professional communities (Eble, 1996).

Facilitating Specialized Communication: Help experts articulate domain-specific knowledge precisely.

7. Integration of Neologisms into Language

The lifecycle of a neologism encompasses several stages (Haugen, 1972):

Creation: The initial invention of the term.

Diffusion: Spread through communities.

Acceptance: Gaining recognition and consistent usage.

Institutionalization: Inclusion in dictionaries and formal language resources.

Successful integration depends on factors such as frequency of use, social acceptance, and semantic necessity.

Conclusion

Neologisms exemplify linguistic vitality and are markers of cultural evolution. Their study bridges linguistics, cognitive science, and social theory, illuminating how languages dynamically respond to human innovation and societal transformation. Future research directions should emphasize the role of digital

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communication platforms, such as social media where memes and neologisms proliferate and evolve rapidly, and their impact on accelerating linguistic change.

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