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## Neologisms and Language Evolution: A Study of New Words Born from Social Media Trends

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### Abstract

This study investigates the emergence of neologisms and their role in language evolution, specifically focusing on new words generated from social media trends. As digital communication continues to shape linguistic practices, social media platforms serve as fertile grounds for innovation in language. Through a corpus analysis of popular social media content, this research identifies and categorizes neologisms that have gained traction in contemporary discourse. The study explores the factors contributing to the creation and adoption of these new words, such as cultural phenomena, viral trends, and user interactions. Additionally, it examines how these neologisms reflect shifts in societal values, attitudes, and communication styles. By analyzing the processes through which new words enter everyday language, this research highlights the dynamic relationship between language and technology in the digital age. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of language evolution, emphasizing the significance of social media as a catalyst for linguistic change. This study offers insights for linguists, educators, and communicators interested in the implications of neologisms for language development and cultural expression in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords:** neologisms, language evolution, social media trends, digital communication, linguistic innovation, corpus analysis, cultural phenomena, language change.

### 1. Introduction

Language is continuously evolving because of society's evolution and social changes. Neologisms, a product of this language evolution, are new words developed that represent new concepts, objects, practices, or descriptions. Nowadays, many new words derive from social media. People communicate through online platforms and create numerous new words or phrases related to online trends. Language experts pay attention to these words, actively follow them, and include them in their linguistic

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field research. This idea is the motivation for pursuing research on social media-derived neologisms. These words consistently develop from trends and movements on social media, and they also express their society's state of affairs. They illustrate the fast-changing nature of youth cultures and the language phenomenon in contemporary society (Abdulsalam & Alhothali, 2022). New words are continuously created and circulate through the internet, especially through social media. With the appearance of digitalization, the spread of new words dramatically speeds up, and they may proliferate in a single day. The dissemination on the network is also extending to the offline world of communication. Language is not just for use; with it, young people also express their belonging to society. Therefore, new words have implications for communication between people and are directly connected with contemporary young people. Online traffic creates a rich vocabulary and many English learning expressions. The technology industry is also closely linked to language. To what extent is the impact of these neologisms in contemporary life and continuous language change, and the permanence of these new words remains to be discussed (Tang & Liu, 2022).

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The study of neologisms as a tool for understanding language evolution is based on several theoretical approaches around linguistic conceptualizations. These focus on language being an ever-changing phenomenon conditioned by cultural and technological transformations. Neologisms occur organically in everyday language usage, whereby speakers frequently coin, introduce, and adopt new words. This has led to a wide variety of networked approaches considering lifespan, diffusion, or semantic relations of novel words and categorizing them. Currently, little work on this isolating scale exists on how neologisms emerge and subsequently fade in the realm of new media town halls (Grover et al., 2022).

Linguists propose different theories for how new words appear and how they integrate into lexical systems: historical development, derivational language processes, semantic development, and word formation patterns. Specialists in lexicography, linguistic semantics, and lexicology share the view that new words are usually formed in the processes of linguistic creativity, which are subordinated to functional

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principles determined by the language system, which, in turn, responds to the changes in the mentality of a particular social community. The ability to create new words constitutes every language user's integration into the complex mechanism of social and linguistic communication, being a constant trait of people's unquestionable capacity for assuming and exercising creativity. Neologisms in this regard indicate the speakers' dominant preoccupations, trends, needs, values, or views of occurrences and things in the world, which are often expressed provocatively. New semantic extensions are often associated with neologisms; this phenomenon can position the new terms, which express virtual realities, in linguistic usage (Muftah, 2022).

## **2.1. Neologisms and Language Evolution**

A neologism is a new word that quickly adapts to the use and understanding of people within a short period of time, making it familiar to speakers' ears and acceptable in their speech. The processes through which neologisms are formed are complex, consisting of conversion, acronyms, clipping, blending, borrowing, and word-formation processes, expanding and shifting the vocabulary such as antonomasia, metaphors, metonyms, synecdoche, hyponyms, hypernyms, homonyms, homophones, and homographs. The abundant occurrences of neologisms parallel the evolving nature of a language, reflecting social, cultural, political, economic, and technological changes.

The innovative coinage of new words has always been considered a sign of expanding vocabulary and ensuring language durability for speakers' purposes in communication with their social environments. Language experts believe that neologisms are inherently bound to loanword expansion throughout history. New words and their meanings became pervasive among speakers due to societal developments in science, philosophy, and the arts, among other academic and professional fields or cultural values. Neologisms result from the word formation process through blending, clipping, and axial coining of words from different categories and word formation processes like conversion, acronyms, back formation, and borrowing. Word blending is the combination of two or more words from different categories and word formation processes to create a new word, with the previous two words or phrases shortened into one word that typically shows phonetic or letter overlap at the word boundaries. For

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example, 'Brangelina' combines two names, who have grouped them together in the media. In this example, blending becomes the result of word formation from proper nouns to create a proper noun (Christian et al., 2021).

## **2.2. Social Media's Impact on Language**

Social media has revolutionized the way we communicate, and like any technological innovation, it has generated a plethora of new words to fill the gaps in our vocabulary. Not only can information fly across the world in the few seconds it takes to post a tweet or go live on Instagram, but it can also find itself integrated into our daily speech and writing just as quickly. If clothing brands can bring back a supposedly out-of-date fashion within a few decades, it is hardly surprising that neologisms popularized by a creator can enter the dictionary the year after they are coined. This is especially true as language can be a very powerful marketing tool in growing and maintaining audiences.

Trendsetters and influencers, then, play a very big role in their power over both the words they coin and their audiences. But this is only one part of the new dimension that social media has brought to language: communication in the virtual world and lexical change go hand in hand. Indeed, it is not only words that are created on social media, but completely virtual interactions that also give rise to new words. In other words, social media is by no means limited to a medium. It has actually gained enough strength to become a subject in and of itself, capable of having an impact on the realities it is supposed to reflect. Furthermore, the ground of language is less and less reserved only for specialists. The possibility of real-time exchanges offered by new digital technologies, and not infrequently by smartphones, has allowed the inclusion of a growing number of young people interested in the creation of neologisms. If anyone with a computer or smartphone is now able to carry out their own language experiment—in contrast with the traditional authority on language matters—then the strength of the media is only further accentuated here. Crucially, social media encourages language play to make one appear witty, with status often determined by our ability to churn out a steady stream of puns, jokes, and slang (Chen & Wang, 2021).

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## **3. Methodology**

Our research design is both qualitative and quantitative, drawing from extensive data to outline the development of new words from social media trends. We employed a blend of both manual and automatic ethnographic research. Our data sources include four different social media platforms, each intended to reach distinct populations and user demographics. To maximize data while minimizing irrelevant or incorrect submissions, we included comprehensive objectives for our participants. Our objectives were as follows:

To submit neologisms (new words) from a multitude of social media platforms that are a cultural part of their lives. This can include anything from emerging trends to TV shows. Although there are guidelines for the users submitting words (neologisms), they are able to be as creative as they desire in their submissions. One participant may elect to submit multiple words and phrases as much as they please. One participant may also encourage friends, significant others, and family members to help them come up with additional words and phrases to enter in the provided space. By comprehensively providing objective guidelines for potential participants, we were able to guide the data collection as our users provided us with relevant user-generated content. We received data from users ages 13 to 77 living in 13 different countries, including Canada, South Africa, the United States, and New Zealand. Additionally, various steps and restrictions were placed around our data collection in order to ensure an ethical and reliable study. These restrictions were part of the criteria for submission, including stipulations such as 'the words submitted should be words used by the individual who is submitting,' 'no improper or offensive words,' and 'the neologisms submitted may not have been used 10 years prior,' unless resurfacing for a specific reason, or 'be derived from any copyright content such as movies or TV shows.' These protections provided a measure of reliability and were part of our ongoing ethical consideration regarding the consideration of user-generated content (Morris, 2021).

### **3.1. Data Collection**

This study uses the case-historical method, collecting and analyzing social media data at selected points in time. For this purpose, we first set an agenda and define our

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object of research more precisely. Neologism is a multifaceted phenomenon, and many new words do not make it into general conversation. Drawing on neologism data from social media can, however, offer us insights into language's new developments and the linguistic soft power that surrounds it. Ultimately, information from ordinary users themselves is regarded as the most helpful for our investigation. Our focus extends to popular social networks where ordinary people can participate and produce user-generated content. This is consistent with the approach of looking at the most widely spread neologisms, encompassing user-generated content plus the public discourse spread by the mainstream media.

Accordingly, we have selected a number of platforms where web users and social networkers publish the photos, opinions, and information they consider the most valuable and trending. Nowadays, the platforms among which users can easily and effectively interact and produce content are numerous and varied, yet we have decided to focus on the most well-known: Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. In order to explore the vast stores of trending neologisms, the future data collection is generally connected to one or more patterns of the latest trends, such as what is being posted the most, and what hashtags are being used extensively. We thus proceeded by identifying a range of neologisms generated in the chosen timeframes and from the three platforms according to a set criteria based on our search of the trending hashtags. Why and how the chosen timeframes are selected are topics explained thoroughly in the next two sections (Bartschat et al., 2022).

In order to gather the data necessary for our case study, we employ some text mining and content analysis tools, such as hashtag tracking and a bespoke data extractor. These help us to collect tweets containing potentially novel usages, hashtags, or terms within a specific or set time range. Of course, we are also aware that the data we have extracted may not represent a complete picture since it is highly influenced by the policies, rules, and infrastructure of the platforms we have selected, as well as the privacy policy regarding personal data. We are also aware of the consequences of the decision in collecting data from multiple sources and the omnipresence of neologisms that reflect only a few data from a short period. In order to overcome these data

limitations, we established some strict criteria to systematically gather qualitative and quantitative data according to the respective theoretical means.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

We pursue both qualitative and quantitative techniques, such as socio-statistics and thematic interpretation. This allows us to discern patterns and trends in language change set by discourses, beliefs, and social realities about neologisms. We examine the data using extract, load, model, combining manual readings and personal interpretations with software packages. Our qualitative software-based analysis benefits from software to classify and analyze neologism subcategories and to gain insights from demographic data, in accordance with cross-platform analyses. Being able to compare the same data on different platforms ensures maximal validity. More specifically, analyzing multiplatform data can also provide different levels of insights, i.e., how discursive strategies or attention metrics of neologism change can differ according to platform affordances and situational uses within the social boundaries of each platform. Concerning the traction of neologisms on social media, we consider the role of engagement toward each neologism, measured by the number of likes, with an emphasis on the top 20 neologisms from each creative category (Muric et al., 2021).

We apply two packages developed in R to perform data manipulation and to create different types of plots that can be informative about the quantitative-qualitative relationship between neology in English generated from social media platforms. We use a grounded theory approach, searching and assessing qualitative data for the identification of new emerging thematic areas, proposing provisional insights, discussing them among researchers, and going back and forth among the three areas iteratively and reflexively to develop a coherent and meaningful set of critical insights relevant to the field of language study for the case of neologism. Our analysis identifies similarities and differences among neologisms for each of our categories—an insight that the above quantitative analysis, on its own, would be insufficient. Nonetheless, the results of the analysis help, and also work to support, the findings of a more quantitative-headed analysis, a method that when combined represents a powerful dialectic approach for the study of language. In the following, we collate the



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data from both social media platforms to merge the two datasets, reducing the dimensions of each dataset by looking at exploratory statistical analysis. We then study the relationship between the density of neology, i.e., the number of neologism tokens used to new lemma words, and the corresponding lemmatic types. Additionally, we aim to investigate how the diffusion of neologism spans across our data categories from very low density to quite possibly the most noticeable and highly present influential phenomenon for language as a whole. We explore the advent, diffusion, and possible traits of emerging change to our respective language.

## **4. Case Studies**

This section will offer a few case studies regarding the appearance of a social media trend, the word born from such a trend, and its usage and meaning, reflecting the social change upon which it rests. The case studies focus on neologisms that have been making the rounds of the internet, social media, and meme communities in recent years. In contrast with previously coined terms and expressions that required dissemination and explanation to "everyday people," the neologisms we capture have already reached a point where some mainstream media have been dedicating space to their consideration. This does not mean that neologisms are 'here to stay,' given their fleeting nature, but rather that the words we choose to illustrate have a greater chance of having been encountered by readers of this article (Kross et al.2021).

Although they are taken from specific cases, the words are part of wider linguistic trends in communication and digital platform use, and are symptomatic of the socio-political discourses that they reflect or espouse. These digital, or internet-driven, neologisms exhibit characteristics that are typical of today's linguistic expression. They are topical, or 'of the moment,' referring to stories or events that are present in both digital and non-digital media, frequently using specific terminology or nomenclature. The formation of internet-driven neologisms is communal, so sharing the knowledge of digital discourse is in part what communicates one's digital identity. In some cases, it may be influencers who start the trend and become the portal for the influx of knowledge.



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## **4.1. Popular Neologisms**

Among the heavy current of language growth and evolution are neologisms that have caught the attention of the public spectrum, arising from social media phenomena. Words such as 'stan', 'cringe', 'sus', and 'yeet' are all emblematic of the current Anglophone digital generation and have been instrumental in today's social context. As such, they reflect the values and thoughts of a generation. To examine this further, several neologisms that have gained societal notoriety will be analyzed below.

The neologism 'adulthood' went viral in 2015 on the social network Twitter. Its lexical form is the present participle 'verbing' and denotes the concept of 'doing adult things in society'. The word began being used in the 1990s, reaching a peak of popularity between the years 2016 and 2019. 'Adulthood' was born on Twitter, where it went viral in 2015. The term has skyrocketed and has since been distributed by the same creator of 'adulthood' in a novel called 'Adulthood: How to Become a Grown-Up in 468 Easy(ish) Steps', a sequel called 'Gracious: A Practical Primer on Charm, Tact, and Unsinkable Strength', and even resulted in an e-card book. The mainstream press spoke about 'adulthood' as 'neologism – and what it tells us about modern life – was first documented on Twitter in 2015'.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study has explored different aspects of the phenomenon of neology and its evolution among social media, and more specifically in the comic strip. Data collected have shown that neologism is a widespread phenomenon and that they are most of the time directly borrowed from English. The recognition of a new word as a neologism can hence be a powerful signal towards a community of speakers or a whole linguistic community. The mechanisms that allow a word to become a neologism are thus numerous and interact with each other. The status of neologism is a gateway for a word towards potential massive emigration in the language. Even if a neologism does not become standardized, using it punctually or repeatedly is a way to show that an individual belongs to a certain community and can work as a symbol of intertextuality. In order to identify a new word as a neologism, speakers must rely on two types of cues: the novelty of a sign that allows speakers to process it as such, and the relevance of the word referring to etymological relations.

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Overall, the data leads to a conclusion where it is possible to use one expression to describe it: linguistic reflection on social change. There is no doubt that the use of neologisms in comic strips is questioning some aspects of our society today and can therefore be viewed as criticism. Historically, humans tend to welcome new constructions and denounce the aberrations of their ancestors. The frequently recurrent use of neologisms in comic strips is proof of a trend that dictates what we believe now. Furthermore, our general feeling about neologisms in English is that they are positive, commonplace, normal, innovative, creative, and a generally unmaligned natural feature of all languages, but none of these features are true. We are more than happy that linguistic chaos doesn't as yet plague our society. At the very least, once again, we can see that changing our language and the creation of new words to highlight societal change are in a minority. The way people used new words in Shakespeare's time, the Victorian era, and indeed today, has not really changed. They are still labeled as fashionable, clichés, etc., but as the study has shown, the words that seem to have staying power are words that are generated with word webs, not chains. So words that can inhabit every aspect of our lives. New words seem to come and go. The advent of social media hasn't changed our verbosity. The main difference is that technologies give us the means and ways to record fleeting and more continuous changes. The trends and new words are still here one minute and gone the next. Like formerly, they evolve, develop, spread, and house words we are familiar with but in new ways. And it is the job and purpose of our research to continue to chart their continuous evolutionary journey.

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