Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review
www.plhr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

Semantic Change in English Language: Social Media Neologisms

Jahanzeb Jahan¹   Dr. Humaira Irfan²*

1. Lecturer, Department of English, University of Education, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Education, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Introduction

We often realize that our habits, interests and topics of discussion change during different stages of our lives. Everything that is living goes through a process of change or evolution. In the same way, our principal communicative strength, language, undergoes the same procedure. Every living language has a common feature of change. We may not be consciously monitoring this fact but every other day we come across unique words, phrases and terminologies. These novel terms, that are steadily practiced by speakers, and acknowledged as specific lexemes, are known as neologisms (Pavol, 2002). Malec & Rusinek (2015) are of the view that the language change results in neologisms and Jean Aitchison divides them into two groups:

Firstly, the external factors predominantly the sociolinguistic factors that are societal factors outside the language system. Secondly, the internal psycholinguistic

factorsi.e., psychological and linguistic factors which exist in mind of the speakers and in the structure of the language itself.

Katamba (2005) considers technology and digitalization as one of the external sociolinguistic factors for language change. Technology has rapidly developed in past few decades and has affected all the societal spheres especially language. The existence of technology in form of social media has been through immense escalation. The social media is ubiquitous in form of many different web sites, and mobile applications. The users of social media have used English language predominantly all over the world and brought novel inventions in language. Since so many users use social media all over the globe, the newly coined terms and words also have optimum prospects for a concentrated dissemination beyond the boundaries of the original speech community. This makes the fact clear that there is not only a vocabulary expansion in English language only but also the other languages are enjoying these coined terms as new addition in their lexicon.

Along with the progress in technology and evolution of language in the present era, Computer-mediated-communication (CMC) is also ubiquitous. Linguistic change is rapid and abundant which was a unique phenomenon in the past. There is a possibility that CMC, in short span of time, may create massive influence on the language. Crystal (2005) expressed his belief that 21st century English language will be highly influenced by CMC. The usage of internet has undoubtedly changed the mode we use for communication, contributing towards the creation of a unique features of online discourse. These features, in online discourse, are prevalent in present era what Crystal (2006) mentions as, 'Netspeak', or 'Cyberspeak'. This study focuses on social media and the effect of 'Netspeak' in creating neologisms in English vocabulary.

According to Fowler (1983), A good language group depends upon the gift of speech as well as a good vocabulary. The English vocabulary holds a dynamic landscape. It has a remarkable flexibility, range and adaptability. It is because of the language contact with foreign languages as well as the readiness of English language to coin new words (McCarthy & Dell, 1994). In 17th and 18th centuries, a group of scholars believed that language and its rules should be fixed and there should be no change in it. This happened to be a misguided approach towards language. Change has always been essential part of any language that is living. The change under discussion is not only limited to the structure of the language but also to each and every aspect of the language e.g. there has been much addition in English registers since the advent of English language. Many Words are created or used in different sense. Multiple meanings of a word are used in context differently everywhere (Lyons, 1995).Algeo (1993) in this book "Among the New Words" has tried to state the origin and initial use of many expressions and the change brought in them in social climate. Pranjić (2016) in his research states that neologisms are newly coined words which

may be generated for numerous reasons and in numerous contexts. Neologisms are found and used all around. Moreover, with the proliferation of CMC, the number of coinage is escalating. Social media neologisms have assimilated in our language and has sharpened our communication that is all the time evolving.

Social media neologism has contributed, to a large extent, in ESP (English for Specific Purposes). The words used on social media have become a part of social media register. According to Crystal (2006), internet has largely influenced the English language and has made it a new register. It is so because many old words are being used in different sense. In a review of Crystal's *Language and Internet*, Thorne &State (2003) write that the cyber communication gives birth to abbreviations, emoticons and neologisms. It happens because new technology brings new features and most of the old words are used to present some different meanings i.e. *wall, poke, tag*, and *share* are some examples from popular social network Facebook which issue fourth changed meanings. Stern (1975) believes that meanings are changed because of certain factors i.e., psychological ones. Hence his opinion seconds this study because the psychology of the chatters in CMC is prone towards creativity. People like to coin new words or give new meanings or expressions to existing words. The prevalent word on social media, *tweet*, is the example of the change in meaning. The neologism *tweet* is quite different from its initial meanings. This will be correct to say that such neologisms have become more popular than the initial meanings they contained or expressed. This is because of the capacity of English language to change in various aspects. There have always been changes in English throughout its history and social meanings used in English language have also changed.(Graddol, Leith, & Swann, 1996).This change in social meanings is often unconscious/change from above. Change in language, particularly in meaning, happens unconsciously to the speakers i.e. above their conscious level. Speaker change the meaning of some word with new trends (Wenz, 2013). CMC itself is issuing fourth new trends online which have resulted in creation of many neologisms. The communication was never so rapid in the past as it has become in present era. Millions of the online people use various social networks. Each of these networks contain its specific layout and terms. The cyber conversation as well as the layout of the social networks help creating neologisms. Jackson & Amvela (2000), while investigating the vocabulary, are of the view that the meaning of a word is combination of many of relations: relation with words having opposite or similar meanings etc. Hence words do change their meaning in contexts and certain situations so have they changed in online discourse. This change has been diachronic nature. Many English words have been changed in meanings under Latin influence (Stehling, 2014). Küpper (2011) seconds this statement saying in his conference paper that meanings have had regular changed in the history of English language. This suggests that change in meaning is not something new. Moreover CMC, just like the Latin influence, has given a proliferation to the change in meanings of many words. Fischer

(1998) defines a nonce formation as a neologism created by a writer/speaker immediately to shelter some instantaneous requirement. This is one of the strongest arguments in favour of the creation of neologisms. The conversation in CMC has become quite rapid and people are coining new words and neologisms in their daily online interaction.

Material and Methods

This is qualitative and descriptive research. In this study, the researchers have delimited the study to *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube* in order to collect frequently used neologisms. The data was collected from these 3 websites and is presented in shape of various words and their old and new meanings. Selected neologisms on these social media are also displayed in data analysis to show that the online use of these neologisms has great escalation. These neologisms are used everywhere in spoken and written forms. We find the use of these neologisms in newspapers and TV News as well. Purposive sampling method is used to select these social media websites. These websites may be considered representatives of rest of all the social media networks because they are ubiquitous in Pakistan. Most of the online community is Pakistan is expected to be active member of these websites. All the celebrities in Pakistan (politicians, crickets, singers and actors etc.) use *Twitter*. All of these have their *Facebook* accounts as well. Moreover, online business especially amid COVID-19, is carried though *Facebook* pages. The activities/business activities of all the mentioned people as well as of the general public is available on *YouTube.* Hence these social media networks are daily accessed and used. People are also Using *Facebook* and *YouTube* for earning money. On a small-scale study, the main pages/home pages of these social media networks were selected which are replete with neologisms. Some on these are entirely new words, some are blends but most of them are old words used in entirely new sense. Hence this study focuses on the neologisms used on three dominant social media networks.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Examples of Neologism from Facebook

Neologisms	Old Use	New Use
Facebook	None	A social media
Facebook Friend	None	Someone added on Fb profile

Like	To regard	To find some post good
Tag	To Touch or Hit	To ask/signal someone to read your post
Share	To use something with others	To public some post for friends
Wall	A structure of brick or stones	A personal homepage of the user
Check in	To report one's presence	To share your location with maps
Story	A Tale	Sharing pictures for others
Follow	To go after	To see the posts first
Post	To publish	To publish pictures or feelings
Profile	To give a brief description	The homepage of the user
DP	None	Display Picture
Cover	The outer part of a book	A picture of the user on the wall
Status	Position or rank of someone	Anything you write to express your feelings
Activi	Something that one does	Anything performed by the user on FB

Table 2
Examples of Neologism from YouTube

Neologisms	Old Use	New Use
YouTube	None	To post some video
Channel	Band of frequencies used in radio or television	A division designed to display the users' videos
Like	To regard	To find some post good
Home	The place where you live	The main page of website
Share	To use something with others	To share your videos with people
Trending	Prevailing tendency	Popular videos
Upload	To move to a larger network	To share your videos online
Story	A structure of brick or stones	Sharing pictures for others
Follow	To report one's presence	To see the posts first
Post	To publish	To publish videos
Subscribe	To pay to get publication regularly	Free following of a video channel
Channel Art	None	Display Pictures
Library	A place from where people can borrow books, music or videos	A collection of online videos
Dashboard	The parts of the inside of the car and has controls on it	Something that provides a high-level overview of recent activity
Community	A group of people that lives in same area	The YouTube users who can watch your videos

Table 3
Examples of Neologism from Twitter

Neologisms	Old Use	New Use
Twitter	To make fast and loud sounds	To post some message or video

Tweetdeck	None	A social media application for management of Twitter accounts
Tweet	A short loud sound	To post some message on Twitter
Tweetup	None	a meeting organized by means of posts on Twitter
Twitterature	None	Literary use of the microblogging service on Twitter
Media	Means of mass communication	To share your messages/videos
Twitterholic	None	A site that shows stats about how many friends, followers and updates you have on Twitter
Follow	To move behind	To connect with someone on Twitter
Follower	Someone who comes behind	Someone who likes you and your posts on Twitter
Twittersphere	None	Users of Twitter collectively
Twittionary	None	Dictionary of Twitter related words

Conclusion

The results show that a great semantic change is visible in CMC. Both the factors that help in creation of neologisms as discussed above i.e. Sociolinguistic factors (external) and psycholinguistic factors and internal language system (internal). As Stern (1975) believes that there are many factors of this semantic change and believes psychological ones to be more dominant. The study seconds his opinion because for many purposes people use neologisms. Sometimes the neologisms are creator by the general public online and sometimes by the social networks themselves. These neologisms get popular in a very short span of time because the communication in present day has become quite rapid. Pranjić (2016) acknowledges the role of social media and CMC in the rapid development and prevalence of these neologisms. The data presented above is merely a representative of the bulk of the neologisms that have been developed in past some years. The change in English language especially in the meaning was never so rapid. It is true that English language, like any other living language, has been changing since its inception but those changes seldom took place. CMC has revolutionized the lexical world. It has overwhelmingly influenced the language. Crystal (2006) believes that English language is extensively influenced by CMC. There are so many other examples in favour of this study which are in fashion i.e.*Selfie* (Capturing or drawing one's own picture) is ubiquitous. This word and activity has become so popular that mobile phones with better selfie cameras are developed. Hence technology is affecting language and new words are affecting the creation of better technology. In coming time, which seems quite apparent, more words may be coined with the advent of CMC. Presently COVID-19 is a buzz word along. The morphological process of blending is used in the creation of this word

which is ubiquitous. Poh (2017) provides a list of words which have been created by social media networks:

Like: (*verb*) joining a page on *Facebook* or appreciating someone's comment or share.

unlike: (*verb*) withdrawing one's liking from a page on *Facebook* or a video on *YouTube.*

GIF: (*verb*) a file format that supports static and animated pictures

inbox: (*verb*) sending private messages to someone in his/her virtual mailbox

sext: (*verb*) indulge in sex chat through internet or mobile

OMG: (*exclamation*) Oh My God. Used for expressing fear or surprise

LOL: laughing out loud; used to show that you are laughing a lot

hashtag: (*noun*) a word or phrase followed by a (#) sign, used to stress on a message or specify the message

unfriend: (*verb*) removing someone from a friend list on social networks.

Oxford online dictionary also accepts and explains a number of internet neologisms which used to be non-existent before the proliferation of CMC. Hence there is a visible change in semantics of English language after the proliferation of CMC. This process will be even quicker in future and many more words will be added in dictionary. The influence of CMC has yet to develop English language in a unique and interesting language. The creation of better technology is coming with novel words. Google, the famous search engine, has been used as a verb. The same word has been a part of many other technological inventions such as Google Plus, Google Home, Google Mini, Google Drive, Google Phones etc. In the coming years, some of these words may become part of English language because of their worldwide proliferation. Hence CMC is contributing in development of new words, terms and phrases which was slow or non-existent before CMC.

References

Crystal, D. (2005). *How Language Works*. USA: Penguin Books Limited.

Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the internet (2nd ed.).* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Algeo, J. (1993). *Fifty Years Among the New Words: A Dictionary of Neologisms.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fischer, R. (1998). *Lexical Change in Present-day English: A Corpus-based Study of the Motivation, Institutionalization, and Productivity of Creative Neologisms.* Italy: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Fowler, H. (1983). *Modern English Usage.* London: Oxford Publications.

Graddol, D., Leith, D., & Swann, J. (1996). *English: History, Diversity, and Change.* London: Psychology Press.

Jackson, H., & Amvela, E. Z. (2000). *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary: An Introduction to Modern English Lexicology.* UK: A & C Black.

Katamba, F. (2005). English Words. USA: Routledge Publishers.

Küpper, T. (2011). *Neologism in Early Modern English.* Cologne: GRIN Publishing.

Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy, M., & Dell, F. O. (1994). *English Vocabulary in Use.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Malec, W., & Rusinek, M. (2015).*Within Language, Beyond Theories: Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Corpus-based Studies.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing; 1st Unabridged edition.

Pranjić, I. (2016). *Online Neologisms: The Study of Word-formation Processes.* I. Pranjić.

Stehling, D. (2014). *Semantic Change in the Early Modern English Period: Latin Influences on the English Language.* Jena: Anchor Academic Publishing.

Stekauer, Pavol. (2002). On the Theory of Neologisms and Nonce-formations. Australian Journal of Linguistics - AUST J LINGUIST. 22. 97-112. 10.1080/07268600120122571

Stern, G. (1975). *Meaning and Change of Meaning: With Special Reference to the English Language.* USA: Greenwood Press.

Thorne, S. L., & State, P. (2003). Review of Language and The Internet. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24-27.

Wenz, F. (2013). *An Insight on Semantic Change.*GRIN Verlag