

# *Sources of English Neologisms*

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**Abstract:** With the social changes and technological development since the 20th century, many new things have emerged, and with them, the language has also changed. Neologism is a linguistic phenomenon, which is the product and reflection of the development and change of language. According to statistics, there are currently more than 600 million native English speakers in the world, and one-third of the world's population speaks English as a second language. This shows the importance of English as a universal language. Consequently, English inevitably produces many new words with the rapid changes in social life. This paper delves into the origins and mechanisms behind neologisms in the English language. This study aims to explore the dynamic processes that drive vocabulary expansion by examining vocabulary innovation, borrowing, and integration. Based on grasping the concept of English neologisms, this paper discusses the origin and derivation of English neologisms through the study of dictionaries and monographs, and a large number of examples of neologisms. The study found that the sources of English neologisms are mainly divided into three aspects, namely, traditional word formation, new meanings of old words in modern English, and the fusion of foreign words and native words.

**keywords:** English Neologisms, Source, Vocabulary, Motivation of Word-making

## **1. Introduction**

Language never stops changing. The change of language can be seen directly in the vocabulary. The first aspect is what the new words are, and the second aspect is when they appear and enter the dictionary. From the above aspects, neologism refers to the new words or words that give new meaning to human society in a certain period due to the changes in society, economy, politics, and culture, especially science and technology, to adapt to the new situation and new needs. English is constantly evolving, and the emergence of new words proves its adaptability. The significance of English neologisms in understanding language evolution lies in the fact that they reflect the process of language adaptation, cultural and social change, and language innovation. This paper focuses on how new words come into being and the reasons behind their creation, through which we can gain a deeper understanding of how language develops and adapts to the changing environment.

## **2. The Connotation of Neologisms**

For a time, linguists once despised the phenomenon of neologisms in language. Merriam-Webster's New International Dictionary (3rd Edition) defines neologism as “irrational, alternative words” or

“meaningless words invented by the deranged”, and most dictionaries are reluctant to include neologisms. Over time, people have adjusted their prejudices about neologisms and begun to accept and study neologisms calmly, but there is no consensus on the definition of neologisms.

A neologism is a newly coined word or phrase. According to Rondeau and Guibert, neologisms are new linguistic phenomena that appear at a specific time in the course of the development of linguistic applications and long literature and are quite common in the disciplines of phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexicology. Since any neologism contains many factors, it should be looked at from different perspectives before it can be defined. From a diachronic perspective, neologisms are words that have recently emerged. From the perspective of lexicography, neologisms are words that have not been included in the dictionary. From the perspective of system stability, neologisms are words with formal instability (such as morphology, writing, and phonetics) or semantic instability. From a psychological point of view, a neologism is a word that the speaker considers to be a new linguistic unit. In a word, neologisms are words that are not found in the dictionary and are not formally or semantically unstable [1] [2].

### **3. The Origin of Neologisms**

#### **3.1. Traditional Word Formation**

Traditional word formation is an important way to form new words in English, which mainly includes the following four kinds of word formation.

Union method: The combination method refers to the method of combining two or more words to form a new word. It is the most commonly used word formation in English, such as baby-sit, pain-killer, test-tube baby, voice prompt, etc.

Affix method: It refers to the method of forming new words by adding or changing prefixes or suffixes. For example, the word “use”, with the addition of different affixes, can produce different words, such as misuse, disuse, and abuse. Another example is the word people through the cyber add affix created many new words: cyberspace, cyberromance, cybercrime, etc.

Abbreviation method: There are two methods of word formation. Clipping, that is, cutting out some letters of a word to form a new word. For example, copter (helicopter), flu (influenza), and auto (automobile). The other is an acronym, such as Radar (radio detecting and apparatus), Aids(acquired immune deficiency syndrome), and so on.

Hybrid method: Blending is actually combining parts of two words or adding parts of another word to one word to form a new word. The new words formed by this method are concise and vivid and have become a common way of word formation in modern English. For example, smog (smoke+fog), motel (motor +hotel), travelogue (travel+dialogue), comsat (communication+satellite), etc.

#### **3.2. Neology**

The creation of a new word does not mean that the word must appear in a completely new form. It can develop based on the original form and be endowed with new meaning. New meaning means that a word has acquired a new range of meanings, and the original expression form has differentiated into a new lexeme. In this sense, when an old word acquires a new meaning, it adds a new “lexeme” to the vocabulary. As an important way of vocabulary development, its appearance enriches people's linguistic and cultural lives. Again, there are three main areas here, including the enlargement and contraction of the meaning of words, the rise and fall of word meaning, and the interconversion of proper nouns and common nouns. For example, the killer used to mean “killer”, but now it can mean “beautiful woman”. In computer parlance, the word “mouse” has now become “mouse”. In addition, some proper nouns such as personal names and place names in English can also be transformed into common nouns and given new meanings. The word “Shrapnel” comes from the name of a British

general who invented the missile. Waterloo is actually the name of a town in Belgium where Napoleon once led his army and suffered a heavy defeat, which means “heavy defeat”.

### **3.3. Integration of Mother Tongue and Loanwords**

In the era of rapid development of communication technology, cross-border cultural integration has reached an unprecedented peak. In the historical process of English development, due to social history, culture, and other reasons, English has introduced and borrowed a large number of foreign words. The opportunities for cross-cultural communication are increasing, and the differences in time and space cannot stop the diversification and multi-level mutual penetration and interaction of words. There are at least 400 words in English that come from Latin, such as tumor, abbot, pope, etc. With the wide promotion and global integration of English in the world, different politics, economy, culture, local customs, and so on promote a large number of loanwords into English and appear in the form of new words. Many Chinese words have been incorporated into English vocabulary through transliteration or free translation. For example, the words representing Chinese food culture have become famous all over the world, such as Dumplings, wontons, and baozi. These Chinese pinyin has been directly introduced into the English vocabulary and has become a new English word known by people in English-speaking countries, carrying Chinese food culture [3].

## **4. Word Formation Motivation**

Most words are not fabricated out of thin air but have a certain motivation for creating words. Jia Hong put forward that the motivation of word formation refers to the interpretability of word meaning formation, that is, to express the cause or basis of a certain meaning content in a certain phonetic form [4]. There are four kinds of motivation for the creation of English words.

### **4.1. Phonetic Motivation**

Phonological motivation refers to a definite relationship between the pronunciation of a word and its meaning. English onomatopoeic words that mimic animal sounds: meow- the meow of a cat, quack- the sound of a duck, croak- the croak of a frog; woof- an onomatopoeia that mimics the sound of human speech: giggle- giggle, murmur- hooray- cheer; The sound of imitating things, such as bang-bang, ringing- ringing, etc., has a phonetic motivation.

### **4.2. Morphological Rationale**

Morphological motivation refers to the direct relationship between word form and word meaning. Many words in Chinese and English can be produced according to morphological motivation. The BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia Russia, India, and China) got their name because their initials sound like brick. In 2010, South Africa joined the group and became BRICS with the initials. Most compound words in English can be inferred from the form of the two words, such as flowerpot. However, some compound words do not have a “morphological justification”, such as egghead, which has nothing to do with the sense of egg, but instead means “bookworm”. Therefore, the morphological rationale can not be generalized, and it needs to be analyzed concretely.

### **4.3. Semantic Motivation**

Semantic motivation is related to word meaning. The new meaning of old words refers to the new meaning or new usage of words that are different from the original meaning after the development of The Times and the changes over the years [5]. For example, “old driver” originally refers to a person who is skilled in driving technology, but now refers to a person who is familiar with a certain routine

and has a deep understanding of its ways and practices. In English, the word “stonyheart” makes people think of “stone”, so the phrase can be translated by extension as “stonyheart”. Therefore, words have a certain semantic motivation.

#### **4.4. Etymological Motivation**

Etymological motivation refers to the source of the word as the basis for the creation of the word. For example, Brexit is a collage of British Exit, which comes from the Brexit plan proposed by the United Kingdom in January 2013, and the new word Megxit announced by Meghan and her husband in 2020 is created by the analogy of Brexit. When Trump took office in 2016, the political views and personal statements he advocated were called Trumpism, and new words named after politicians have appeared in American history: Jeffersonianism, Clintonism, Bushism, etc [6].

### **5. An analysis of the Different Sources of Neologisms**

#### **5.1. Neologisms from Political and Economics**

In the past two or three decades, the world political landscape has changed dramatically. This change undoubtedly gave rise to many new English words related to politics. In 1937, for example, the term “sit-in” came to mean “the organized occupation of seats in a segregated institution to protest discrimination”. In addition, special policies adopted by some American or British leaders have added new words to the English language, such as Thatcherism and Clinton’s policy. With the emergence of the women’s movement, the new word “liberation” was coined in 1970, meaning “the movement for equal rights and status for women”. Another new word, feminism, appeared in 1984, it refers to a kind of feminism that is particularly concerned with the condition and concerns of black women.

In 1972, the first impeachment of a president in American history became known as Watergate which became a common noun in English to refer to a similar political event or major political scandal. Since then, “gate” has served as an afterword to the scandals that have greatly enriched the English vocabulary: debategate, zipgate, irangate, mediate, motogate.

Language is a social phenomenon. With the development of society and the formation of global economic integration, contact between people in various forms such as trade and cultural exchanges will inevitably lead to language contact. Therefore, a large number of new words appear in English. For example, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of Petrol Exporting Countries, and Automatic Teller machines are closely related to our lives [7].

#### **5.2. Neologisms from Social Culture**

The interaction between language and culture is not only restricted by culture but also strengthens culture. As one of the most active parts of the language, new words are naturally inseparable from the influence of culture. In modern society, cross-cultural communication is becoming more and more frequent. In order to eliminate the barriers between different cultural backgrounds, different social levels, and groups, reduce social friction, or relieve psychological anxiety, people often use some new words to euphemistically express and describe things to meet the needs of people’s cultural psychology.

A flash mob is a large group of people organized by means of the Internet, mobile phones, or other wireless devices, who assemble together in public to perform a prearranged action and then quickly disperse.

Geekery: Anyone who has watched The Big Bang Theory should be familiar with the term “geekery”. The term was used to refer to “weird circus acts”, but it was not commonly used. Now it means to have a keen interest in studying a subject or having a great deal of knowledge in a certain

field. It also refers to the state of being a geek.

**Freegan:** The more and more low-carbon, environmentally friendly lifestyle has slowly changed People's Daily life behavior. Freegan is a compound word made from free and vegan. Freegans are a group of people who do not shop (including food), drive cars, buy houses, or even go to work, use as few resources as possible, and live on extremely limited resources.

**Vaping:** A healthy lifestyle has led many smokers to give up their traditional cigarettes. Instead, Vaping originated as an abbreviation of vapour or vaporizer, and was added to Oxford Dictionaries in August 2014 to mean "to inhale or exhale the vapour of an electronic cigarette or similar device", and the device and action can also be called a vape. With the increasingly frequent international economic and cultural exchanges, due to the different customs and habits between different cultures, it may lead to some unnecessary friction. Therefore, some words in the English vocabulary are reformed to make their application more extensive. For example, to show respect, the hairdresser is called a beautician, the servant is called a domestic engineer, and the garbage collector is called a sanitation engineer [8].

### 5.3. Neologism from Technological Development

In the second half of the 20th century, with the rapid development of science and technology in the world, there were countless new English words derived from technology.

The most typical technological neologisms are those beginning with "e-". "E-" is the first letter of the electron. With the rapid development of electronic technology, "e-" has a strong word-formation function, which produces a large number of new words. Such as e-AD, e-banking, e-commerce, e-cash, e-center, e-education, e-government, e-learning, e-library, e-life, e-market, e-conference, e-money, e-office, e-school, e-store, e-text, e-transaction, e-transaction, etc [2] [7].

There are words related to space technology: astronaut, cosmonaut, blast off, countdown, spacesuit, space shuttle [9].

Computer-related words, such as software, hardware, input, output, memory, monitor, etc. It can be seen that the development of science and technology has injected fresh blood into the development of new words.

## 6. The Influence and Role of Neologism

Neologisms play an important role in expanding vocabulary and adapting to new concepts, contributing to the richness and adaptability of language.

Firstly, the introduction of new words adds new elements to the language, which enriches the vocabulary. This helps to express more precise and specific concepts, making the language more flexible and lively.

Secondly, new technologies and concepts emerge one after another. In order to accurately describe these new things, new vocabularies need to be introduced creatively. This helps to ensure that the language keeps pace with society and technology, allowing people to communicate and communicate more effectively. Thirdly, new words are often a reflection of social change, and they may refer to new social ideas, values, or cultural phenomena. Through neologisms, language can better capture and convey the dynamics of society, reflecting people's perception and acceptance of emerging concepts. Fourthly, Some new concepts may be complex and difficult to express accurately with existing vocabulary. The creation of new words can make expressions easier and more accurate, helping people to convey complex ideas and ideas more clearly. Fifthly, the creation of new words is often accompanied by cultural innovation. Through the creative use of language, people can shape new cultural symbols and signs, contributing to the development and evolution of culture. Sixthly, young people are generally more active in language innovation, and the use of neologisms is often a



social marker among groups of young people. This helps build a social identity and a sense of group identity.

Finally, in academic and professional fields, new discoveries and theories often require new terms and concepts. By introducing specialized vocabulary, it is possible to promote a more specialized discipline and facilitate effective communication between professionals.

Overall, the introduction of neologisms into the language not only enriches the vocabulary but also makes the language more adaptable and able to respond to social, technological, and cultural changes. They are an important driver of language development and evolution.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper mainly studies the ways of producing English neologisms, the factors that affect the generation of new words, and the influence of new words. People think that there are three ways to produce new words and three factors that affect the generation of new words. The generation of new words is an important part of language evolution and social change. Language is a dynamic system that evolves with time and social change. From the perspective of word formation, most new words focus on social, technological, cultural, and political aspects. From the perspective of word formation motivation, they are mainly divided into four aspects, respectively phonetics, morphology, semantics, and etymology. All these reflect the changes and development of society. Understanding the origin of new words is helpful for a profound understanding of social changes and cultural evolution. In this paper, the study of English neologisms only focuses on the source and the motivation for coinage, with little reference to the formation and influence of new words. Future studies will focus on how English neologisms develop around traditional English word formation and their effects on social life.

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