

## A LEXICO-SEMANTICS ANALYSIS OF NEOLOGISM IN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the lexico-semantic features of neologisms used in social media communication. It examines how new words are formed, adapted, and assigned meanings within the dynamic linguistic environment of digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok. The study investigates the morphological processes—such as blending, clipping, compounding, and affixation—that contribute to the creation of social media neologisms. It also analyzes the semantic changes these new expressions undergo, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, and metaphorical extension. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is the Language Change Theory as posited by Labov (1994). It also adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, drawing data from recent posts and online interactions between 2020 and 2025. Findings reveal that social media has become a powerful linguistic space where creativity, identity, and culture intersect to produce novel lexical items that reflect modern communication trends. The study concludes that neologisms on social media not only enrich the English lexicon but also mirror sociocultural evolution and technological advancement in contemporary discourse.

**Keywords:** Lexico-Semantics, Digital Platforms, Neologism, Social Media, Communication

### **1.0 Introduction**

Neologisms are newly coined words or expressions that arise to name new phenomena, inventions, or ideas. Linguists generally define a neologism as a novel word or form not yet established in dictionaries or corpora, often filling a gap in vocabulary. Čilić and Plauc (2021) describe neologisms as terms useful in denominating inventions, new phenomena, or old ideas that have taken on a new cultural context. Morphologically, neologisms can be formed by coining entirely new words or by repurposing existing words with new meanings (semantic innovation).

Yule (2010) defines language as a system of symbols and rules that enables humans to communicate complex ideas and feelings. Ofoegbu (2021) posits that the human language is very unique because it has its own structure and its own system of organizing its component units into meaningful patterns. This simply means that there are rules governing the organization of sentences in a language.

Ofoegbu (2012) defines language as the human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate. Language is man and man is language. Man uses language for his everyday interaction. Ofoegbu and Usar (2018) repeat and expand this definition, stressing that language is not only a system of communication but also a fundamental tool for expressing human experiences. Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2014) define language as a set of arbitrary but conventional symbols used for communication and thought. Again according to Ofoegbu and Usar (2018), language is essentially a human system of communication that is shaped by both linguistic behaviour and extralinguistic norms across different social groups.

Every language can readily be adapted to meet changes in life and culture... the main weight of such change falls on vocabulary. According to Ofoegbu (2024) language is man and man is language. Life has no meaning without language. Language is a means of interaction among people of the same community. Ofoegbu and Ishima (2024) reaffirm earlier views, calling language “the human system of communication ... man and man is language ... man uses language for his everyday interaction.” Again Ofoegbu (2025) posits that Language is a system and this means that it is an organised human behaviour built on inherent structures and that language is purely a human attribute which, serves primarily as a means of communication.

Semantic on the other hand is defined as the study of meaning in language. It explores how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning, and how people interpret language. Neologisms are a hallmark of language change and innovation of new vocabulary items that reflect technological, social, and cultural shifts. Lyons (1995) defines semantics as the study of meaning in language; it deals with the interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences in a given context. Ofoegbu (2018), asserts that semantics deals with how meaning is encoded in language, especially in words and lexical forms, and how semantic relations or creativity are realized in communication. Yule (2010)

explains semantics as the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, and how these meanings combine in communication. Ofoegbu (2022) defines Semantics as the study and analysis of meaning and the meaning of a word is the idea a word conveys in the heart or mind of the speaker or hearer.

Lexico-semantics (or lexical semantics) is the study of word meanings and relationships between words. It examines how words structure meaning, including senses, semantic fields, and relationships (synonymy, antonymy, etc.). Ofoegbu (2011) says that some words have peculiarity of phraseology approved by usage and having a meaning other than its logical or grammatical one. Lyons (1995), explains that lexico-semantics explores the relationship between words (such as synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy) and how they structure the vocabulary of a language. He views it as a bridge between lexicology (study of words) and semantics (study of meaning). Ofoegbu and Usar (2017), demonstrate how words derive their meanings and how they are structured around lexico-semantic, choices that are carefully selected to achieve neologism in language use.

Neologism is an interesting topic of research in lexico-semantics as social media archives (Twitter/X, TikTok captions, Instagram hashtags) are public and vast. New words are created almost on daily basis, so the data will be fresh and easy to collect. Ofoegbu (2018) on euphemistic expressions in Igbo, say speakers use neologism to create new meaning in language.

### 1.1 Aims and Objectives

The aims of this research generally is to investigate the most common patterns in neologism formation on social media. For example: blending, acronyms, semantic shift, it also reflects current cultural and social trends, the semantic processes that gave words their new meanings and the extent neologism remain in popular use before fading. To achieve the aim of this study, research is directed towards the following objectives

- A. To identify and classify the structural formation process of selected social media neologism
- B. To analyze the semantic changes and meaning associated with these neologisms.
- C. To examine the cultural and contextual influences that shape their usage
- D. To evaluate the longevity and mainstream adoption of selected neologism.

### 2.0 Literature Review

Neologisms are newly created words or expressions in a language that are introduced for use by speakers. The term refers to innovations used to describe new ideas, objects, or trends that may not yet appear in dictionaries. Examples include *blog*, *unfriend*, *meme*, *emoji*, and *photobomb*.

Linguists analyze neologisms by examining both their morphological structure and their semantic properties.

Morphologically, typical word-formation processes for English neologisms include:

- **Compounding:** the joining of whole words, for example *face + book* → *Facebook*.
- **Blending:** the merging of parts of words, e.g., *Instagrammable* from *Instagram* + *-able*.
- **Affixation:** adding prefixes or suffixes, e.g., *cryptojacking*.
- **Clipping and Acronyms:** e.g., *app* from *application*, *FOMO* from *fear of missing out*.
- **Borrowing/Loanwords:** adopting terms from other languages, e.g., *emoji* from Japanese.
- **Conversion (Zero-derivation):** assigning a new grammatical function without changing form, e.g., using *Google* as a verb.
- **Semantic Shift:** existing words gaining new meanings, e.g., *viral*.

The lexico-semantic analysis also considers meaning changes and relationships dictionaries. Fischer's definition (1998) – cited by Willis (2003) asserts that neologism is a word “considered new by the majority of... speakers” even if it has appeared in niche use. Analysts categorize each neologism's sense relative to existing words (is it a new sense of an old word, or an entirely new lexeme?), map it into semantic fields (technology, and trace its word-building strategy. In practice, this means combining morphological analysis (structure) with semantic analysis (meaning) to understand how and why the neologism functions in communication.

Neologism within the Social Media Context is anchored on the understanding that language is dynamic, adaptive, and socially driven. Social media, as a technological and communicative innovation, provides an environment that accelerates linguistic creativity, leading to the rapid formation and dissemination of new words.

According to Alfred (2018), social media encourages users to create new lexical items as they navigate new experiences, digital tools, and online trends. Through constant interaction, users coin words that reflect emerging realities and cultural identities. These new words—often referred to as netspeak—are not just linguistic innovations but also markers of digital identity and community belonging. For instance, terms like emoji, tweet, and hashtag demonstrate how technology shapes linguistic expression.

The study of neologisms also involves examining how meanings evolve. Ullmann (1962) outlines four main processes of semantic change:

1. **Broadening** – when a word's meaning expands (e.g., *viral* from medical term to popular content).

2. **Narrowing** – when a word’s meaning becomes more specific.
3. **Amelioration** – when a word develops a more positive meaning.
4. **Pejoration** – when a word acquires a negative meaning.

The Sociolinguistic Theory of Language Change supports the idea that language evolves through social interaction and group identity. Šetka Čilić and IlićPlauc (2021) note that social media neologisms arise in response to cultural, social, and technological changes. These words serve as tools of self-expression and group belonging, allowing users to reflect modern realities in language. Social media thus functions as a linguistic ecosystem where users co-construct meaning through creativity, humor, and social engagement.

In addition, Shahlee and Ahmad (2022) explain that morphological and semantic processes—such as blending, compounding, and acronyming—are the linguistic mechanisms that support this evolution. These processes allow users to compress meaning, increase efficiency, and express complex digital experiences succinctly. For example, LOL (Laugh Out Loud) or Binge-watch capture new experiences in compact linguistic forms.

Finally, Ezuruike and Ibileye (2025) emphasize that neologisms emerging from Generation "Z" users reflect not only linguistic innovation but also changing social values, online behaviors, and cultural creativity. It views social media as both a driver and a mirror of language change—where neologisms embody the evolving intersection between digital culture and human communication.

### 3.0 Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Language Change, proposed in its early form by William Labov (1994) was used in this research. According to Labov (1994), language change is a systematic process influenced by both linguistic structures and social factors that shape the evolution of speech patterns over time.

Fang (2021) emphasizes that most neologisms are created through affixation, borrowing, and compounding, showing that morphology is the backbone of lexical innovation. Algeo (1991) also demonstrates that the structural properties of neologisms can be systematically categorized in dictionaries, reflecting a descriptive approach to morphology.

#### 4.0. Methodology

- The study adopts a **descriptive qualitative research design**. The population of this study comprises all English-language used in social media communication between **2020 and 2025**. A **purposive sampling technique** is employed to select a representative set of neologisms for analysis. The target sample size is **30-50 neologisms**, which is sufficient for meaningful analysis without overwhelming the scope of the study.

#### 5.0 Method of Data Analysis

The data are analyzed in two stages:

1. **Lexical Analysis** – Classify neologisms according to word formation processes such as blending, compounding, clipping, acronyms, borrowing, and reduplication.
2. **Semantic Analysis** – Examine each neologism for meaning changes, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and metaphorical extension.

Data Presentation: Lexical Classification

#### Classification of Neologisms by Word Formation Process

##### 1. Doomscrolling

Source - Twitter – 2020

Blending: Blend (doom + scrolling)

Meaning: The act of endlessly scrolling through bad news online.

“I spent hours doomscrolling COVID updates.”

##### 2. Quaranteam

Source - Instagram/Twitter – 2020

Blending: Portmanteau (quarantine + team)

Meaning: A small group of people who isolated together during lockdown.

“Our quaranteam meets every Friday for movie night.”

##### 3. Zoombombing

Source - Zoom/Twitter – 2020

Blending + Derivation Blend + Verb Formation (zoom + bombing)

Meaning: Interrupting or invading a Zoom meeting without permission.

“Our class was zoombombed by pranksters.”

##### 4. Maskne

Source - Instagram – 2020

Blending Blend (mask + acne)

Meaning: Acne or skin irritation caused by wearing a face mask.

“I switched to cotton masks to reduce maskne.”

5. Quarantini

Source - Instagram – 2020

Blending: Blend (quarantine + martini)

Meaning: A cocktail made or enjoyed during lockdown.

“Friday night quarantini with friends online!”

6. WFH (Work From Home)

Source - Twitter – 2020

Acronym: Abbreviation

Meaning: Working remotely from home rather than at the office.

“I’ve been WFH since the lockdown started.”

7. NFT (Non-Fungible Token) Twitter/Instagram – 2021

Acronym: Initialism

Meaning: A unique digital asset stored on blockchain technology. “She sold her art as an NFT for \$10,000.”

8. Metaverse

Source - Facebook/Meta – 2021

Compounding: Compound (meta + universe)

Meaning: A shared digital space combining virtual and augmented realities.

“Meta plans to expand its metaverse project.”

9. Goblin mode

Source - Twitter/Reddit – 2022

Compounding: Compound Phrase

Meaning: A state of acting lazy, messy, or unapologetically unbothered.

“I’m going full goblin mode this weekend.”

10. Quiet quitting

Source - TikTok – 2022

Compounding: Compound Phrase Doing only the bare Meaning: minimum at work without quitting.

“She’s quiet quitting, not staying late anymore.”

11. Rizz

Source - TikTok – 2023

Clipping: Clipped Form (from charisma)

Meaning: The ability to charm or attract someone, usually romantically.

“He’s got serious rizz with the ladies.”

12. Simp

Source - TikTok/Twitch – 2020

Clipping: Clipped Form (simpleton → simp)

Meaning: Someone who does too much for someone they like.

“He’s such a simp for his crush.”

13. Finfluencer

Source - Instagram/TikTok – 2021

Blending: Blend (finance + influencer)

Meaning: A social-media influencer who shares finance tips or investment advice.

“Most finfluencers talk about crypto and savings.”

14. Main-character energy

Source - TikTok – 2021

Compounding: Compound Phrase

Meaning: The confidence or attitude of acting like the hero of your own life.

“She walked into class with main-character energy.”

15. Vaccine passport

Source - Twitter/Facebook – 2021

Compounding: Compound Noun  
Meaning: Proof of vaccination required for travel or entry.  
“You’ll need your vaccine passport at the airport.”

16. Situationship

Source - TikTok/Instagram – 2023

Blending: Blend (situation + relationship)

Meaning: A romantic or sexual relationship lacking clear definition

“We’re in a situationship — no labels, just vibes.”

17. Bussin’

SourceTikTok – 2023

Semantic Shift: Reappropriation / Intensifier

Meaning: Slang for something very good, tasty, or exciting.

“This jollof rice is bussin’!”

### Classification of Neologisms by Semantic Change Type

18. Viral

Source - Instagram, 2020

Broadening:

Meaning: Related to diseases

New meaning: Extremely popular content

“The video went viral in 24 hours.”

18. Ghosting

Source - Twitter, 2021

Semantic Shift

Meaning: Literal disappearance of a ghost

New meaning: Ending communication without explanation

“She’s been ghosting me all week.”

19. Cancel

Source - TikTok, 2022

Narrowing

Meaning: To stop or terminate

New meaning: Socially reject or boycott someone

“They cancelled him after the scandal.”

20. Flex

Source - Twitter, 2021

Metaphorical Extension

Meaning: To bend muscles

New meaning: To show off

“That’s a weird flex, but okay.”

21. Tea

Source - Twitter – 2020

Metaphor / Transfer of Meaning

Meaning - A drink made by infusing leaves in hot water.

New Meaning: Gossip or interesting news.

“Spill the tea, what happened at the party?”

22. Clap back

Source - Twitter – 2020

Extension / Idiomatic Shift

Meaning - Literally to clap one’s hands back.

New Meaning: To respond sharply or wittily to criticism.

“She clapped back at the haters with one tweet.”

23. Cap / No Cap

Source - TikTok – 2021

Opposition / Antonymic Shift

Meaning: Cap – literal headgear.

New Meaning: “Cap” = lie, “No cap” = truth.

“That story’s true, no cap!”

24. Ship / Shipping

- Source - Twitter – 2020  
Narrowing / Conversion  
Meaning: Short for “relationship” or “to send goods.”  
New Meaning: To support or desire a romantic pairing of characters or people.  
“I totally ship those two actors together.”
25. Karen  
Source - Facebook – 2020  
Pejoration (degradation)  
Meaning: Common female name.  
New meaning: A term for an entitled, demanding white woman.  
“The Karen called the manager again.”
26. Snack  
Source - Twitter – 2020  
Metaphor / Amelioration  
Meaning - A small portion of food.  
New meaning: An attractive or good-looking person.  
“He’s a total snack in that outfit.”
27. Fire  
Source - Twitter – 2021  
Amelioration  
Meaning: To burn or emit flames.  
New meaning: Slang for something excellent or cool.  
“That new album is fire!”
28. Savage  
Source - TikTok – 2021  
Amelioration / Reversal  
Meaning: Brutal or uncivilized person.  
New Meaning: Bold, confident, or unapologetic attitude.  
“She handled that insult like a savage.”
29. Cringe  
Source - Instagram – 2021  
Extension / Semantic Bleaching  
Meaning: To recoil in embarrassment.  
New Meaning Used as a noun or adjective for something awkward or embarrassing.  
“That video was pure cringe.”
30. Drag  
Source - Twitter – 2020  
Extension / Figurative Shift  
Meaning: To pull or move something along.  
New Meaning: To publicly criticize or mock someone.  
“She dragged her ex in that post.”

## 6.0 Conclusion

This study examines the lexico-semantic features of neologisms in social media communication, focusing on their structural formation and semantic changes. Data were collected from three major platforms—Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram—covering the period between 2020 and 2025. The lexical analysis revealed that the most common word-formation processes were blending, compounding, and acronym/initialism formation. These processes are favored due to the need for brevity, creativity, and novelty in online interactions.

The semantic analysis indicated that broadening and metaphorical extension were the dominant types of meaning change. Social media users often adapt existing words to new contexts, giving rise to fresh connotations, as in viral (from describing disease to describing popular content) and flex (from muscle movement to showing off). The study also observed that social media neologisms are deeply connected to cultural trends, internet memes, music, political discourse, and social movements. Some neologisms fade quickly, while others achieve long-term adoption and eventually enter mainstream dictionaries.

Through the lens of lexico-semantics, this study demonstrates that the formation and evolution of online neologisms are driven by a blend of linguistic creativity and cultural forces. The speed and scale of this phenomenon highlight the importance of documenting and analyzing neologisms before they disappear from usage.

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