

A Morpho-Semantic Analysis of Netspeak Neologisms in Fashion and Entertainment Blogs in Nigeria

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Abstract

The focus of the study was on the morpho-semantic analysis of netspeak neologisms in fashion and entertainment blogs in Nigeria. Through online interactions, certain English words, in Nigeria, have either been coined or have acquired a new sense. In order to examine how neologisms are used in blogs to create and maintain certain social constructions, the study analysed neologisms from five Nigerian blogs: *Lindaikeji's blog*, *bellanaija.com*, *naijaloaded.com.ng*, *notjustok.com*, *pulse.ng*. The neologisms were sourced from blogs between 2015 and 2018. The analysis was based on Shuxin's (1990) opinion that a newly created word, which has achieved universal acceptance and viral use in the vocabulary system of its users could be referred to as neologism. The analysis focused on the morphological processes that characterise the neologisms as well as the meanings of such in the contexts of fashion and entertainment in Nigeria. Our findings show that some instances of neologisms have been in use before, and have only undergone semantic extension. On the other hand, it was observed that other neologisms resulted from coinages. The dominant word classes that characterise the coined neologisms are nouns, verbs and adjectives which belong to the open class. The study observed that hardly was there any neologism from the closed class of words such as pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions.

Keywords: *neologism, morpho-semantics, lexical semantics, blogs, netspeak*

Introduction

Human beings have become heavily reliant on technology and what it has to offer. From time to time, people communicate, share information, buy and sell products even when miles away from one another because technological advancements have made it possible. The computer-mediated communication has thus become a resourceful platform for linguists and language scholars. Through online interactions, language is greatly influenced as some English words now either have extended meanings or are coined to express certain attitudes (Plag, 2002). This has thus led to vocabulary expansion in Nigerian English. According to Chenyuan (2000: 209), "vocabulary is the most sensitive constitute of language." What this implies is that the vocabulary of any language is quite influential and its expansion may lead to the survival or otherwise of the language.

Weblogs, or simply blogs, have become an increasingly popular medium of interaction in the ever evolving online world. According to Marlow (2004), social networks are easily formed with blogs. In the modern world of technology in which every person desires to be heard and reacted to, blogs have become a veritable and widely known tool. In Nigeria particularly, numerous blogs have become an internet feature of utmost necessity, as well as a readily available source of information on a wide range of topics. Many blogs serve the purpose of providing news feeds, thus ranking blogging as a nearly indispensable online tool.

The word 'blog' ranked the word of the year by the Merriam Webster Dictionary, (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2004) as the most looked-up word, and the definition given as 'a website that contains an online journal with reflections, comments and often hyperlinks.' Observing most blogs, it is discovered that the language of blog posts is not defined by formality, hence innovations, styles and trendy usages are common, particularly in entertainment, fashion and personal blogs.

There are quite a number of scholarly works done on the language of blogs, just like other Computer Mediated Discourse. Nilsson (2003) examines the language used in a community of researchers' weblogs. The author observes that there is a much higher use of in-group pronouns (I, me, my, we, us and our) in comparison with out-group pronouns (they, them and their), which is to be expected of the personal nature of the texts. In addition, the author also found posts to be written in 'short, paratactic sentences' employing 'informal, non-standard constructions and slang.'

Growth in blogs has transformed the way in which people share or exchange information and ideas. The use of internet and advancement of technologies have shaped the way we communicate, revealing new trends that define fashion and entertainment blogs in Nigeria. Just as social media has evolved and grown over the decades, so has the language used in blogs. Fashion and entertainment blogs in Nigeria such as *Lindaikeji's blog (LIB)*, *naji.comnaijaloaded.com.ng*, *bellanaija.com*, *notjustok.com*, *Pulse.ng*, *yabaleftonline.com*, *ynaija.com*, *Olufamous.com*, *Lailasblog.com* have attracted millions of users. The study aims at investigating neologisms in Nigerian fashion and entertainment blogs through a morpho-semantic analysis of instances of neologisms as used in contexts. The study intends to empirically examine the collected data and categorise their patterns of formation. Neologisms play a significant role in language expansion. With communication on the internet, language changes so quickly and online communicators need to keep up with this trend else they would experience difficulties communicating or decoding messages from their online friends (Liu and Liu. 2014). In such communications, some pre-existing words likely acquire new (added) meanings while some others may be coined. As a result of frequent usage, some netizens use these netspeak neologisms even when communicating with similar age-brackets offline.

Lexical Semantics

Semantics is at the centre of the study of the human mind in that it conveys our experience of the world through language. According to Katz (1972), semantics is the study of linguistic meaning relations that are internal to the vocabulary of a language. Meanings could be studied in layers: lexical semantics (morphemic/word meaning), compositional semantics (phrasal/ sentential meaning) and pragmatics (utterance/situational meaning). The first thing anyone would want to know about a word is its meaning. The study of linguistic units and their principles of combination would not be complete without an account of what they mean and are used to communicate. All these constitute a major portion of what is known as lexical semantics which is a branch of semantics that is most relevant to this study. Lexical semantics is that part of semantics that considers the meaning of a word in relation to the form in which

such is written. According to Cruse (1996: 65), “the study of words (lexicology) and the study of meaning (semantics) make it very natural for students of linguistics to interpret the term ‘lexical semantics’ to mean a more technical term for ‘word meaning’. According to Akmajian et al (2010:228), “If a grammar describes a language, part of it must describe meaning, and thus the grammar must contain semantics. Considering this, it seems reasonable to conclude that semantic information is an integral part of grammar.”

Neologisms

Plag (2002:64) states that “part of the strength and vitality of English is its readiness to welcome new words and expressions, and to accept new meanings for old...”. Hence, the accommodating nature of the English language could be seen as responsible for its frequent occurrences of neologisms. Bussmann (1996: 324) describes neologisms as newly formed linguistic expressions that are recognized by at least part, if not all of a language community as the way to denote a new object or state of affairs”. Also, Peprnik (2006: 76) defines neologism as “a new word or a new sense of a word which could derive from any word class. Newmark (2001:140) defines neologism as “newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense”. Kerremans, Stegmayr and Schmid (2011:60) examined neologisms on the internet and tried to monitor the ongoing change, and report as follows:

... the study of new words has a number of crucial advantages. Firstly, probably the most prominent asset – especially if one focuses on material retrieved from the Internet, as we do – lies in the possibility of collecting a more or less exhaustive sample of all authentic tokens of a new form within a certain period of time subsequent to its coinage. Secondly, the monitoring of recently coined words gives us the unique opportunity to study processes of ongoing change so to speak ‘in vitro.

From the several definitions above, it becomes obvious that the term neologism is not limited to newly formed words but embraces even existing words with new or extended meanings. With the fast development of technology, the dynamic nature of any language plays out as new concepts are brought in the vocabulary of the target language in order to reflect new changes (Li-na, 2016). This view is shared by Janssen (2011), who opines that ‘neologism reflects that every language is living and dynamic and this explains the reason behind the constant language change. Although Cabre (1999) has argued that neologisms could be described in three folds: psychologically, lexico-graphologically and diachronically.

A number of scholars seem to have opposing views on what constitutes neologism. Rey (1995) believes that there is no single criterion for adjudging what word could be classified as neologism. Mostovy (1994) is of the opinion that there are no clear criteria for defining what could be termed neologism. When looking into fashion and entertainment blogs neologisms, the focus is on how the term ‘neologism’ is used to represent an idea due to the inadequacy of existing words to represent it sufficiently and effectively. This paper adopts Shuxin’s (1990) opinion that a newly created word, which has achieved universal acceptance and viral use in the vocabulary system of its users could be referred to as neologism. Thus,

our analysis would be based on the newly created words, borrowed/loan words or old English words with new senses in the fashion and entertainment blogs.

Neologisms and Word Formation Processes

Abbreviation

An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase. It is made by taken the initial letters of a group of words and leaving out the other letters in the words. In order to conserve some space and time, writers consciously or unconsciously occasionally make use of abbreviations. Abbreviations could be in the forms of initialisms and acronyms. Initialisms are abbreviations pronounced one letter at a time (for instance, FBI, CIA, CNN, HIV)while acronyms are abbreviations pronounced as words (for instance, OPEC, RADAR, DAMA).

Clipping

This refers to the subtraction of one or more syllable(s) from a word form, either at the initial, medial or final positions. Clipping is characterised by omitting one of the meaningful elements of an original word. Initial clipping, also called fore-clipping, is formed by clipping off some letters or syllables at the initial partof a word. For instance: burger (hamburger) phone (telephone). Final clipping is characterised by clipping off some letters or syllables at the final part of a word. Examples are lab (laboratory), photo (photograph).Medial clipping is the form of clipping which chops off some letters or syllables at the initial and final parts of an original word. Examples are Congrats (congratulations), hols (holidays), fridge (refrigerator), flu (influenza).

Blending

This is a process that seems to merge two word formation processes (clipping ad compounding). Thus, there some letters or syllables of at least two words are chopped off and the remnants are conjoined to produce a new word. Examples are br(eakfast + l)unch = brunch; mo(tor +ho)tel = motel; smo(ke+f)og = smog.

Affixation

This refers to the process of forming new words from the addition of morphemes to either the initial position (prefixation) or the final position (suffixation) of a root.

Counter(prefix)	+ act (root)	= counteract
A (prefix)	+ moral (root)	= amoral
Employ (root)	+ ee (suffix)	= employee
Cream (root)	+ y (suffix)	= creamy

Compounding

This is a process involving the conjoint of two or more roots or bases. Examples are as follows:

earth (noun)	+	quake (verb)	= earthquake (noun)
blood (noun)	+	stain (noun)	= bloodstain (noun)
brain (noun)	+	wash (verb)	= brainwash (verb)

Conversion

This is a word formation process that results from words being converted from a certain word class to another when used in context. This conversion process is usually represented as the addition of 'zero suffixes'. Examples are as follows:

Her laugh is insincere

I have a doubt on his story.

Borrowing

Borrowing is viewed as incorporation of certain features of a foreign language into a target language. The term is used in general to refer to all kinds of transfer or language copying processes (Haspelmath, 2008). A loanword is created when one language takes a lexeme from another language (Crystal, 1995). Loan words are not only analysed as the most common form of language contact phenomena but also occupy an important position in general linguistics due to the evidence they bring to our understanding of the grammatical structure of language. Borrowed words are pronounced according to the phonological rules of the borrowing language.

Existing Studies

Mworia (2015) examines the use of English neologisms in social media. The framework selected for the study is the lexical pragmatic theory. The study was aimed at investigating a language of wider communication, a language that is globally used and the effectiveness of the neologisms in communicating on the social media. It is observed that social media neologisms deviate from the standard usage of English. This study is based on Kenyan context and centred around 250 respondents who are active users of *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *Facebook*. Liu and Liu (2014), using the computer-mediated communication tool (CMC), examine the word formation processes of English netspeak neologisms. The study proves that there is linguistic creativity in the online context. Masoumeh and Ahmad (2012) study the translation of neologisms of technical terms. The study is an attempt to consider the most common translational norm and procedure applied in the translation of computer neologisms from English into Persian in 2000s a parallel corpus of computer texts was selected; the instances of neologisms were identified in them and compared with their Persian

counterparts. The data used were analysed using Computer Mediated Discourse as well. The authors conclude that neologisms have a wide variety in computer genre and translators apply different procedures from one language to another. Although, these previous papers seem to have a similar focus to this paper, none of the papers have however analysed neologisms in selected fashion and entertainment blogs.

Methodology

The primary data for this study consists of neologisms randomly selected from *Lindaikeji's* blog, *bellanaija.com*, *naijaloaded.com.ng*, *notjustok.com*, *pulse.ng*. Neologisms in these blogs are used as tools to create and maintain certain social constructions at the level of semantics. This research employs a qualitative approach to the analysis of the data, as it helps to respond to the demands of the research aim. In relation to this research, the qualitative approach helps to identify the meaning and word-formation process of each neologism. The meaning of each word is based on the context in which the words are used in the blogs and are further analysed to identify the pattern of formation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis proceeds systematically by highlighting the meanings of the selected neologisms as conventionally used in the fashion and entertainment blogs and giving instances of their usage from specific blogs. Also, the word class to which these neologisms belong are discussed. Furthermore, the word formation process(es) employed in deriving these terms are provided. Finally, the study concludes by observing the implications of this lexico-semantic analysis of neologisms to usage of English language in the fashion and entertainment settings.

Semantic Extension

From our collation of neologisms, it is observed that some words have been in existence before, but have recently undergone semantic extension, giving them new meanings. Hence they are still regarded as neologisms. Other words however, are newly coined terms that had no existence previously, but needed to be coined.

Words that have merely undergone semantic extension to derive their new meanings;

Dab: noun (n). A kind of sudden pose a dancer makes when he/she raises the hand to his/her face, then drops their face into the elbow of that arm while lifting their other arm up in the air. Some people describe it as 'taking a sneeze into one's elbow'. The word formation process that can be observed in deriving the neologism is a mere extension of meaning from the dictionary meaning of the word.

- *Paul Pogba's dab celebration turned into a maths question in France.*

Pulse.ng (3rd January, 2019).

Lit: adjective (adj). Something cool, attractive, exciting, and interesting, especially in relation to parties, ceremonies or appearance in the worlds of fashion and entertainment in Nigeria.

-Omotola4point0 is about to be lit! Bellanaija.com (1st February, 2018)

Melanin: noun (n). A dark-skinned, admirable individual, especially ladies or women. 'Melanin' is originally known to mean a biological pigment present in the body of humans and absent in albinos. The meaning of the term has now been extended to mean the admirable, rich, dark complexion characteristic of black ladies.

*- This little princess is the definition of melanin!
Lindaiekeji.com (24th March, 2018)*

Stay-Woke : (verb): 'Stay Woke' in the Nigerian entertainment blogs means keeping things abreast of happenings around one. It is often use to signal advice or admonition to be smart, cautious or sensitive to issues.

*- Guys, to slay goals, you need to stay woke.
Bellanaija.com (10th July, 2017).*

Slay: adjective (adj). In Nigeria, it is an expression that signals an impressive appearance or something exciting in the context of fashion.

- Nigerian Facebook Slay queen mysteriously dies, friends say she was used by Yahoo boys (photos Naijaloaded.com (16th December, 2017).

Beef: verb (v). In Nigerian entertainment industry, 'beef' means an unwarranted hatred or disapproval for a person.

-What beef? Wizkid and Davido display maturity as they reunite and were spotted together at D'banj's event. Bellanaija.com (2nd February, 2015).

Rock: verb (v). Making a fashionable appearance that is much admired by fans and the general public, as well as wearing outfits in a very classy way.

- Dear men, will you rock this? (photos) Lindaiekeji.com (11th February, 2017).

Vintage: adjective (adj). A clothing trend inspired from a previous age or era which is regarded as currently fashionable.

*- You Need To See Trish O Couture's Pretty "La Vache Vintage Magnifique" Collection!
Bellanaija.com (24th October, 2018)*

Fling (noun): In Nigerian entertainment blogs/news, 'fling' is now generally used to mean a casual, often short-lived, sexual escapade with different persons.

- All I wanted was a fling when I met him on Facebook. But I got hooked after we did IT. Now I'm frustrated. Naijaloaded.com (14th January, 2018)

Stew: noun(n). In the entertainment world, stew refers to a popular, exciting and attractive look or piece of information.

- *Finally, the real stew! Win and own your own house.*
Lindaiekeji.com (30th November, 2018).

Mad: adjective (adj) It is a positive expression in the Nigerian entertainment industry used to signal something wildly exciting or fascinating. It is used to depict awe and approval. ‘

- *The all-new mad vibes trending on every playlist.*
Naijaloaded.com (12th March, 2015)

Coinages

Fleek: adjective (adj). It is a quality of something extremely good, attractive or stylish. It is an adjective used to refer to perfectly groomed eyebrows or a perfectly done make-up. This appears to be a linguistic innovation used only in Nigerian fashion world.

- *How to get your lower eyelashes on fleek with Theodora.*
Bellanaija.com (24th October, 2016)

Peng: adjective (adj). It is a term popularly used on social media to approve of a pretty look or an impressive or attractive appearance.

- *Hottie!!! Wizkid's Babymama is peng! (see photos)*
Naijaloaded.com (24th April, 2017)

Bodycon: noun (n). This is a term in fashion which refers to a type of tight fitting dress. The word is clipped from the adjective 'body conscious' and nominalised to refer to a body-fitting dress.

- *Don't be afraid to wear bodycon dresses and feel sexy with your body. Just remember to be tasteful about it.* Bellanaija.com (17th August, 2016)

Photobomb: noun (n). This means to unexpectedly appear in a picture against the knowledge or intention of the original person(s) in the photograph. The word 'photobomb' is derived from two root words, 'photo' and 'bomb', strung as one unhyphenated word (compounding). This is known as a closed compound.

- *The photographer behind the viral cutest photobomb shares the story behind the photo.*
Lindaiekeji.com (15th December, 2017).

Influencer: noun (n.) This is used to refer to an individual who is famous for having strong influence on the social media. It is used with combination words referring to social media platforms such as *YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram*, etc. The term is very popular on social media platforms in Nigeria as it has now become a new vocation and identity for people who have a wide range of audience who are supposedly influenced by their posts. The

word 'influencer' is derived through a word formation process known as Affixation. The suffix 'er' is joined to the free morpheme 'influence'(that is, influence + er = influencer).

-Are social media influencers contributing to high rate of depression? Instagram users debate following viral video of a spoken word artiste criticizing influencers.
Lindaikjei.com (18th October, 2018)

Bromance: noun (n). This term is used to refer to a very close but non-sexual relationship shared between two straight guys who consider themselves brothers. It is an exceptionally affectionate male-bonding exceeding that of usual friendship and is distinguished by a particularly high level of emotional intimacy. Bromance results from conjoining 'bro' in 'brother' and 'mance' in 'romance '(bro + mance) which forms bromance. The resultant word is a clear evidence of the process of blending.

-. The latest bromance between Drake and Tekno has got the internet buzzing.
Lindaikjei.com (12th December, 2017)

Sunkissed: adjective (adj): This is a compound word used to refer to a reflection of the sun on a person, especially in a picture. It is formed by compounding the free morphemes 'sun' and 'kiss' and the bound morpheme 'ed'(that is, sun+ kiss+ed = sunkissed) into one word functioning as an adjective. It is a word that results from the processes of compounding and affixation.

- Victoria's secret models will wear a sunkissed makeup look inspired by supermodel Gisele Bundchen at the brand's fashion show. Pulse.ng (29th December, 2018)

Shocfused: adjective (adj.) This is an expression coined to describe a coinciding state of 'shock' and 'confusion'. The word results from joining 'shoc' in 'shock' and 'fused' in 'confused' . It results from the processes of clipping, blending and affixation.

- I was stunned when I went through my twitter timeline few hours later to find that people were ripping Bambam's dress apart. I was shocfused.
Bellanaija.com (6th December, 2018)

Facebeat: noun (n). This is a compound word formed by conjoining the free morphemes 'face' and 'beat' to form a new word. In the Nigerian fashion, the term refers to the act of getting a woman to have an elegant look as a result of the extensive use of cosmetics.

- Beauty Vlogger Omabelle talks us through two makeup looks in her new video- A simple everyday face and a full Instagram facebeat.
Bellanaija.com (30th January, 2019).

Fitfam: noun (n). This is a compound word derived from conjoining 'fit' in 'fitness' and 'fam' in family. It is used to refer to an abstract community of people who are concerned with health and body fitness, and follow trends on the topic of fitness on social media. It derived from the processes of clipping and compounding.

- It is great to see Nigerian politicians on the fitfam train.
Bellanaija.com (11th February, 2018)

Acronyms

GOAT: noun (n). It is an acronym used to mean 'Greatest Of All Time'. It is commonly used to compare individuals who have made great achievements.

- *Yung6ix agrees to being the rap GOAT in Nigeria.*
Notjustok.com (13th October, 2018)

MUA: noun (n). This is an acronym for 'Makeup Artist'.

- *Be inspired with everything: MUA Chisom Okere wows is with her 'Sponge Beauty Shoot'*
Bellanaija.com (23rd July, 2016)

Initialism

TBT: noun (n). This simply means 'Throwback Thursday'. 'TBT', in the Nigerian entertainment industry, refers to the act of bringing up old pictures and memories as a way to celebrate Thursdays on the media space. This is a convention made popular by civilization, as such a term was not in use previously. It usually appears in hash tags.

- *#Throwback Thursday: Did you ever own this telephone on your house?*
Bellanaija.com (16th August, 2018).

MVP: noun (n). It simply relates to the 'Most Valuable Player', which is a term for showing endearment to someone considered important or valuable.

- *Nigerian-American Andre Iguodala named MVP of NBA.*
Lindaiekeji.com (18th June, 2015)

TGIF: Interjection (Inj). This is another neologism which stands for Thank God It's Friday! It is an expression used to show excitement towards a work-free weekend. It also usually appears in hash tags.

- *#TGIF Thank God it's Friday!* Bellanaija.com (13th October, 2017)

ICYMI: This is an acronym for the expression, 'In Case You Missed It', used by bloggers to indicate a recap on their previous posts. It is mostly used to bring back news or trends in fashion or entertainment.

- *ICYMI : Millen Magese celebrated her 40th birthday with a majority fashion shoot*
Bellanaija.com (14th January, 2019)

FBF: noun (n). This is also another neologism which means 'Flashback Friday', which refers to a situation whereby the events of the week are briefly recapped.

- *FBF: Couple Bisola and Edward featured on Bellanaija!*
Bellanaija.com (22nd July, 2013)

Discussion of Findings

This study indicates that words in Nigeria English have very flexible nature, as these words have unlimited ability to evolve and transform in their usage. Particularly due to the influence of culture, civilisation and technology, there is an ever increasing need for new expressions to aptly describe new experiences. Also notable is the fact that the word classes ascribed to the selected neologisms are based on their contexts of usage, and they can function in other classes depending on the contexts of usage.

It was observed that certain words, which are now classified as neologisms, have been in use before, and have only undergone semantic extension. On the other hand, it was observed that other neologisms resulted from coinages. It was also observed that these neologisms largely fall into the open class items, which are nouns, verbs, and adjectives. This finding resonates with Glushkova and Voronina's (2017) finding that nouns are the most productive word class for neologisms in the Chinese language. The dominant morphological processes for the coined neologisms are clipping, compounding, blending and affixation. This also resonates with Cheng's (2018) submission that English and Chinese neologisms are characterised by compounding, affixation and shortening. One could rarely point out neologisms from the closed class where there are word classes like pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and so on. In addition, although these neologisms are informally and unconventionally created, they have become popularly accepted within their sphere of usage in the Nigerian fashion and entertainment world.

Finally, this study reveals that a linguistic study entails lexical items that are used daily and randomly but contain inherent details which, when linguistically analysed, point scholars to the features of language as well as observable patterns in language use by modern language users. Different communities of users tend to reshape language in a way that suits them best, and new expressions are constantly derived to express ideas. Also, due to technological advancement and civilisation, language users require more apt ways to describe new trends and concepts, particularly in online discourse. Therefore, one may conclude that neologisms have increased due to increase in civilisation and cultural growth.

Conclusion

The study was a research into modern day language use, specifically from Nigerian fashion and entertainment blogs. Fifty neologisms from five selected blogs were discussed. The study concluded that words function in a specific word class depending on the context of usage. Words are seen to have flexible word classes, depending on whatever meanings are ascribed to them. The study also concluded that neologisms largely fall within the open class of word classes, which are nouns, verbs and adjectives. This implies that neologisms would continue to emerge as there is no limit to the lexical items within those classes. The research cannot be said to be an exhaustive one. Scholars in the field of sociolinguistics may find this study valuable when studying the use of language in the Nigerian society, as well as the innovations used by users of English as a Second Language in deriving popular terms.

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