

# The Impact of Neologisms on English Language Users in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The issue of neologisms had come to the fore. Words are continually evolving and new notions are formed, and a new notion demands a new word. This is based on the fact that words do not have meaning in isolation. In general, the meaning of the word is related to the meaning of other words in ways that may be simple or complex on old and existing ones to make meaning. Language as any other area of human development and behavior can be affected by disability. People who suffer from delayed language development or language disorder can influence the creation of new words. This goes to agree with the language behavior of some stroke patients. People who suffered a stroke or even a small brain hemorrhage can create new words. It has also become obvious that the most productive way of extending our vocabulary and word view is creating new words out of the parts of old ones. So, through neologisms our word view and vocabulary are extended. This extension creates variety which is the spice of interest. Once we have learned the power of prefix, we can use it to coin new words and achieve interesting, humorous, dramatic or literary effects.

**Keywords:** *Neologisms, Impact, English Language.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term Neologisms originated from Greek. As a newly coined word it is still on the process of entering into mainstream language. It is not traceable to any particular individual but it came into print in 1483.

In psychiatry, the term neologisms is used to describe the use of words that only have meaning to the person or group of persons who use them independent of their common meaning. Generally, neologisms are often created by combining existing words or by giving words new unique suffixes or prefixes. It is often created by patients with stroke, aphasia, autism, mental disorder, hemorrhage, imbecility, madness, loss of memory.

According to Crystal (2006:17) "the immediate situation in which people communicate can influence the kind of language they use" He identified and distinguished three main features of context – "the setting, the participant and the type of activity in which they engage" as having major role to play in their communication strive. He further posits that neologisms "can become, in varying degrees, a source of pleasure, pride, anxiety, offence, anger and even violence". This work is therefore based on this premise that new words and expressions amongst people in the society have become popular through memetics, mass media, the internet and the word of mouth. Many people within this speech community are using the words, although such words have not gained recognition outside the environment as a word. However, language is not static: it expands or shrinks at all times and word use in general populace doesn't remain the same. There is ease of expression and understanding among the people in the society as a result of the impact of neologisms.

McGregor (2010:86) believes that "... new words are regularly added while old words may be lost. New Lexemes can be

constructed by inventing novel forms via processes such as clipping, acronym, blending, borrowing and coinage". This process he calls neologism. He further argues that neologisms are concerned with ways of expanding the Lexicon by making new word forms, "... sometimes to express new meanings, sometimes to express existing meanings". He however, recognises that the meaning must be one that speakers or users are likely to want to make. By this view he sees neologisms as a way of using old forms of words to get new meanings or expressions. He identified these methods: Derivation, Compounding, Reduplication, Backformation, Meaning extension, Narrowing.

McGregor further projects that fixed expressions also help words grow and expand. This, according to him, is because they allow some grammatical modifications according to time, purpose of the utterance and the persons involved. He gives credence to binominals as examples of collocations that can help neologisms to sustain. In addition, he opines that through euphemism, dysphemisms and taboo words new expressions can easily flow into our daily utterances.

He sees borrowing as the most common source of new words or expressions from one language into another. In fact, English, French, German, Spanish have all borrowed from each other and from other sources including local coinages. Crystal (2006:69) agrees that new words are regularly created out of old ones. And that a new word depends on old ones for its meaning. He further holds that "Creating new words out of the parts of old ones is certainly one of the most productive ways of extending the vocabulary of English Language. Picking out some of the ways neologisms do operate, he pointed out conversion, loan words, coinages, abbreviation. He states that conversion is a way of "creating new words without changing their structure" but changing the way they are used in a sentence.

In the view of Crystal (2006:62) concerning the role of loan words in neologisms, he opines that "The majority of a language's loan words do not replace anything. Rather, they gently elbow their way in nudging aside already existing words and adding an extra sense or nuance to what was there before". He also suggests that we can make words bigger or smaller by shortening them. Hence abbreviation is the extreme process of shortening.

Crystal also identifies coinage as a way of creating new words. He asserts that there are innumerable coinages. And that coined words help us to achieve interesting humorous, dramatic, or literary effects.

Another way of creating new expressions is through delayed language development or patients with language disorder. This view makes Crystal to state that a "Language has no life of its own. But that it only exists in the mouths, ears, hands, eyes and brains of its users" Therefore people with delayed language development or language disorder of any sort can be a source of new words or expressions. This study also shows that

neologisms help to control the over use of a word that may result in irritation.

Crystal (2006:161) also agrees with this and hence declares that: “when a word enters the language, it comes in at a certain stylistic level, with a meaning and range of use that makes it fit within a particular variety. It develops new nuances, word connections, and stylistic resonances” This implies that neologisms bring about changes in language use and application. Sometimes the changes are simply a reflection of development in culture or technology. However, in the case of the listening audience in Omoku, the changes are simply the result of technologies, location, associations and relationships. Therefore, the influence of neologisms on the listening audience in Omoku is positive and developmental, making the people to adjust to the changing times. It also enables them to live in harmony through the medium of communication.

He concludes that new expressions come from contact among peoples. This is because it does not take long before new words come into a language. Crystal (2006:90) views neologism from the angle of Morphology. As part of Deviational Morphology he holds the opinion that it has to do with “the principles governing the construction of new words, without reference to the specific grammatical role a word might play in a sentence”. This opinion supports the fact that words or novel expressions can flow into a language without necessarily considering its grammatical roles. So long it conveys meaning and is understood by the users, it is acceptable.

### III. PROCESSES OF WORD FORMATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Crystal recommends four “normal processes of word formation in English” which are: Prefixation, Suffixation, Conversion and Compounding.

**Prefixation;** here a prefix is added to the base of the word. Some examples are: social – asocial, ability – inability, decent – indecent.

**Suffixation:** a prefix is added after the base of the word. For example, good – goodness, kind – kindly, love – loved.

**Conversion:** a word changes its class without any change in form. That is, changes from noun to verb or adjective.

**Compounding:** This process allows two base forms to be put together to form one. For example, hand and bag – handbag, break and fast- breakfast; class and room -classroom

He also recognises some “less usual ways of creating new words” which are: reduplication, acronyms, blends, clippings. From this view it becomes obvious that new expressions can also be created or formed in “abnormal ways” during interactions or as a result of coexistence. This goes to agree with the arbitrary and unconventional ways new meanings have been given to words among the people. Neologism is therefore relevant as it encourages coexistence among a people with different and varying ways of communication. To this extent, Akmajian (2007:24) and others believe that speakers all over the world continually create new words in their daily relationship cum interaction. They identify some of the following ways of creating new expressions:

**Abbreviation/Shortening Process:** when letters that begin a word are put together and pronounced differently for example, LAN – Local Area Network, DOS – Disk Operating System, RAM – Random Access Memory, PUSH – PrayUntil Something Happens.

**Clippings** – when the spelling of a word has been shortened but pronounced as if it is not altered for example, Dr. – Doctor, Prof. – Professor, Mr. – Mister.

**Blends** – when two independent words are joined and taken as one, for example: brunch from breakfast and lunch.

**Generified Words:** when brand names of products are used as names for the product, for example, XEROX, Maclean, Sheltox.

**Borrowings:** When words are borrowed from other languages. This is common among most multilingual societies.

**Compounding:** When two individual words are joined together to form a compound word for example, land and Lord – landlord, hand and bag – handbag, black and board – blackboard.

Change in the meaning of a word; this includes change in parts of speech, metaphorical extension, broadening, narrowing, semantic drift, reversals.

Martha (2007:261) defines neologism as “any new word which is introduced into a language, by whatever means”. The view of Martha did not restrict language users to any particular way of expanding their vocabularies. Language users can therefore blend, clip, coin, convert, and affix any new expressions, including jargons, patois, slang, pidgin, Creole, local coinages and transliterations into their daily use. This view also implies that a new word may not have similar meaning to all the people within the language environment. But as time goes by, those new words begin to enjoy some form of popularity. For instance, the jargons and slang adopted by cultists in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria are not understood by all members on inception. There is usually a time of association and unconscious learning.

Martha’s idea also opens the argument that the transactions among traders, sportsmen, drivers and passengers, touts, musicians, politician are yet some of the ways new words can be introduced into a language. She asserts that Nigerian English is highly influenced by transfer of  $L_1$  to  $L_2$  transliteration. Lyons (2006:328) deviates a little from the common definitions of neologisms. she did not see any difference between “loan transaction of words and the use that a native speaker makes of his language as he extends the meaning of words beyond their prototypical sense in new situations”

She states that English Language has been enlarged and modified by loan – transaction in almost every area of its vocabulary. she is also of the opinion that local words can be borrowed and adopted within a speech community. This implies that new expressions or words have entered the vocabulary of English Language through borrowing. And that this act of borrowing has really expanded meanings of our everyday word usage.

Lyons is, therefore, relevant in that his views allow the language user to add any new word or expressions that will enhance the understanding of his/her message. That local modification will one day become a cliché. This is also because language expansion and alteration is a continuous one. Drawing conclusion from the above views, it becomes obvious to state that neologisms help the growth and development of new expressions. That neologism is basically interested in how our vocabularies expand to accommodate our infinite world. Again, that a neologistic jargon today can become cliché tomorrow. Above all, that neologism helps multilingual

societies to coexist and hence share in their everyday challenges in vocabulary development.

Analysing neologisms, Redfern (2010:252) holds that “Words (archaism, slang, dialectisms, blends) can be reformulated, just as ideas can be recycled or clichés twisted productively. Just as quotations can profitably be used out of context”

### CONCLUSION

Redfern (2010:26) in his conclusion of neologisms holds that neologisms are crucial and concludes as below:

“Listening and communicating would be exhausting if speech were packed only with essentials. As our attention flags or extraneous sounds interfere, we need extra help to understand each other”

This shows that neologisms do not only create harmony with the existing language but also condense information. This accounts for the use of some short expressions within our environment. The numerous acronyms and abbreviations are attributed to the above assertion. Although countless neologisms drop out of usage and become archaisms but by and large, they enhance communication.

### RECOMMENDATION

Neologisms should be recorded and written down under dialects for future studies. Expressions and words can be borrowed from them at the appropriate time. Other languages

can still use them just as English language adopted words from other languages. Neologisms should be recorded and written down under dialects for future studies. Expressions and words can be borrowed from them at the appropriate time. Other languages can still use them just as English language adopted words from other languages. Neologisms can create in the people a sense of belonging and draw them closer to understanding languages. Readers and writers will likely get attracted to words that are drawn from their local dialects. This will help the growth and expansion of English language.

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