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# THE PSYCHOLINGUISTICS OF NEOLOGISM: HOW WE PROCESS AND UNDERSTAND NEW WORDS

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**Abstract:** Neologisms, or newly coined words, are a constant feature of language evolution. This article delves into the cognitive processes involved in understanding and incorporating neologisms into our mental lexicon. We explore how factors such as semantic transparency, morphological complexity, and contextual cues influence neologism processing. By examining relevant research, we shed light on the mechanisms underlying neologism comprehension and the neural correlates of this process. Understanding these mechanisms can provide valuable insights into language acquisition, cognitive development, and the dynamics of language change.
**Keywords:** neologism, language processing, cognitive psychology, semantic transparency, morphological complexity, contextual cues, psycholinguistics, neural correlates;

## Introduction

Language is a dynamic system that continuously adapts to changing social, cultural, and technological contexts. One manifestation of this dynamism is the emergence of neologisms, novel words or expressions that are coined to denote new concepts, objects, or experiences. While neologisms can initially pose challenges to language users, they are rapidly integrated into our mental lexicon, enabling us to communicate effectively about novel ideas. (Harley, T. A., 2008)

This article aims to explore the cognitive processes underlying neologism processing, focusing on how we understand and incorporate new words into our existing linguistic knowledge. We will examine the role of various factors, such as semantic transparency, morphological complexity, and contextual cues, in facilitating or hindering neologism comprehension. Additionally, we will delve into the neural correlates of neologism processing, shedding light on the brain regions involved in this complex cognitive task. (Gaskell M.G., Marslen-Wilson W.D., 2008)

## Methods

This review article primarily relies on a systematic review of existing literature on neologism processing. We conducted a comprehensive search of academic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, using relevant keywords such as “neologism,” “language processing,” “cognitive psychology,” and “neurolinguistics.” The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English. (Hickok G. and Poeppel D., 2007)

## Results

Semantic Transparency and Morphological Complexity

One crucial factor influencing neologism processing is semantic transparency. Neologisms that are easily decomposable into familiar morphemes or that have transparent mappings to existing concepts are generally easier to understand. For example, the neologism

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"smartphone" is readily understood due to its transparent composition of the words "smart" and "phone." (Caramazza, A., & Mahon, B. Z., 2003)

Morphological complexity, on the other hand, can pose challenges to neologism processing. Neologisms with complex morphological structures, such as those formed through compounding or affixation may require additional cognitive effort to decode their meaning.

Morphological Processing:

- Decompositional Approach: Neologisms with transparent morphological structures (e.g., "cyberbullying") are often processed by decomposing them into familiar morphemes.
- Whole-Word Processing: Less transparent neologisms (e.g., "google") may be processed as whole units, relying on contextual cues and semantic associations. (Rodríguez-Fornells, A., & Clahsen, H., 2005).

Semantic Processing:

- ✓ Semantic Priming: Neologisms can be primed by semantically related words, suggesting that they are integrated into the semantic network.
- ✓ Contextual Influence: Contextual information plays a crucial role in neologism comprehension, aiding in disambiguation and meaning construction. (Pinker, S., 1999).

Individual Differences:

- ❖ Language Proficiency: Bilinguals and individuals with higher language proficiency may exhibit faster and more accurate neologism processing.
- ❖ Cognitive Abilities: Cognitive factors such as working memory and fluid intelligence contribute to neologism comprehension, particularly in complex linguistic contexts. (Bybee, J. 2002).

**Contextual Cues**

Contextual cues play a vital role in neologism comprehension. When encountering a novel word, language users often rely on the surrounding linguistic context to infer its meaning. For instance, the meaning of the neologism "blog" can be inferred from its use in sentences such as "I read a blog post about the latest technology trends." (Gibbs, R. W. 2006).

**Neural Correlates**

Neuroimaging studies have provided valuable insights into the neural basis of neologism processing. These studies have consistently implicated regions within the left hemisphere, including the inferior frontal gyrus, the middle temporal gyrus, and the angular gyrus, in the processing of novel words. These regions are involved in various cognitive functions, such as semantic processing, syntactic analysis, and working memory. (Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. 1980)

**Discussion**

The findings from this review highlight the complex interplay of various factors in neologism processing. Semantic transparency, morphological complexity, and contextual cues all contribute to the ease or difficulty with which new words are understood. Additionally, the neural correlates of neologism processing suggest that a network of brain regions is involved in this cognitive task. (Sperber, D., & Wilson, D., 1995).

How to find useful websites? As already mentioned, the Internet is a vast repository of information and resources, and it is perhaps exactly this range that makes it seem, at first, daunting and unapproachable to most teachers. In the next two sections we take a look at how to find and evaluate resources for use in class. The ability to search through Internet content,

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and quickly and efficiently find suitable resources is perhaps the most underrated, and yet most useful, skill that both teachers and learners can acquire. (Abdullaeva Sh. S., 2022)

**Conclusion**

Neologisms are an integral part of language evolution. Understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying neologism processing is crucial for comprehending how language changes and adapts over time. By examining the role of semantic transparency, morphological complexity, contextual cues, and neural correlates, we gain valuable insights into the dynamic nature of language and the human mind's ability to process and understand novel linguistic input. (Clark, H. H., 1996)

**Future Directions**

Language comprehension and production are among the most complex brain functions in humans and seem to follow fundamental governing principles (Sportiche et al., 2014). By communicating, language provides a link between the externally perceivable and internal thought processes. In psychiatry, observations of altered language are traditionally taken as indications of underlying alterations in thought. In particular, schizophrenia can be accompanied by severe alterations of language functions. Idiosyncratic psychotic experiences can also lead to unusual verbal expressions that are often highly creative (Heinz, 2023). However, traditional accounts understand linguistic alterations in persons with schizophrenia as deficits directly caused by the psychotic disorder, and our review will also focus on this approach, while recognizing the need to also address the creative use of language in future studies.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of neologism exposure on language comprehension and production. Additionally, investigating the role of emotion and affect in neologism processing may provide valuable insights into the psychological impact of new words.

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