

Lexical Innovation: A Morphosemantic Study of Gen-Z Neologisms

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INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with the English neologisms of Generation Z Language users (popularly called Gen-Z), whose linguistic norm is gaining entry into the English language used in social media, thus influencing the language of four generations which are categorised based on birth years and shared cultural experiences. The four generations include Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z and Generation Alpha, and these categories of people form a set of active users of English Language, especially on social media. This language norm makes a remarkable impression on the vocabulary of English with the existence of social media since there is often an explosion in the frequency with which speakers make use of such innovation or construction in the target language. What is unique about the neologisms of the Generation Z English users is first, the pace with which they are formed and used and second, the ease with which they gain traction among diverse users. Although this speed is an unusual feature of language change which its process is measured, it is imperative to note that language innovation is ceaseless and remorseless. Every language that is spoken continues to change, not just century by century, but day by day.

The aim of this study is to examine the neologisms formed by Generation Z users of English and establish the morphosemantic features peculiar to the formation of those words. The objectives are to i. identify Gen-Z neologisms, ii. analyse the possible sources and morphological processes used in the formation, and iii. ascertain the relationship between the new words and the corresponding old words (if any). In this study, some of the neologisms formulated in the last 15 years were accessed, the sources and origins of the words were investigated and finally the morphological processes used to achieve the words and their attendant meanings as well were examined. This study acknowledges the existence of Generation Z who exhibit unique characteristics that distinguish them from other past generations. Their distinctiveness is a product of their childhood and life in the technological, culturally diverse, digitally connected and socially conscious world. Being the core of the active population in this age, they influence various aspects of the society from technology and media to business, fashion and learning which indeed cause fundamental changes in the present world and initiate future directions. The evident rapid and profound changes in the English lexis in the last few decades require systematic linguistic investigation.

Lexical innovation versus lexical change

Lexical Innovation is a psychological drift from the existing concept, Lexical Change. In the words of Booij (2012), "Change is not the appropriate word for what happens when a language acquires new words through the activities of its users." Language change is metaphorical since it presents language as an organism which exists, grows, changes and sometimes dies (p.258-9). He argues that what changes when new words or meanings get established is the lexical "norm" of that language and not the language system itself. Thus, it is more appropriate to refer to the linguistic phenomenon as language innovation or construction. In this case, this study examines the lexical innovation by Gen-Z English users within the last fifteen years. By lexical norm, we look at the derivative forms which a language users reconstruct from the existing language system and that which they can share with other users. This therefore affirms the Saussurean paradox (Saussure, 1916) that language is both individual and social in nature since sharing our language with other people is a feature of being a language user. Thus, we experience language change from two perspectives: (i) the psychological perspective, where the innovation arises in the mind of one or more individual language user, and (ii) social perspective which establishes that the new language has made impression in the language community.

Furthermore, when these lexical innovations remain in the minds of the users, there is no linguistic change. In essence, lexical innovation is evident if and only if there are outputs of the language system and concrete cases of their use. This indication supports that language user manipulates the existing system through a reanalysis of the previous language to produce a novel language in order to solve linguistic needs. The type of lexical change often experienced is known as internal change (Booij, 2012). Here, change is caused by internal dynamics of language usage unlike in external change where it is caused by language contact. In internal change, neologisms are almost not recognised because productive rules are used in the innovation. For instance, it may not appear novel when a given productive affix is used on an existing word if that affix is familiar to language users. Take *-hood* for instance: *childhood*, *motherhood*, *parenthood*, **studenthood**. 'Studenthood' in the examples is a new coinage because there is no semantic or morphological restriction on this type of formation. In another example, we have *-scape* as a suffix in *landscape*, *cityscape*, *townscape*, **villagescape**, where the last one is an innovation as well which corresponds in shape and meaning to the other familiar words in the examples. Both *studenthood* and *villagescape* may pass unnoticed to most language users even when they are experiencing the words for the first time. Thus, Shigemoto (1996:1) notes that "We are so intimately connected to our language that we may fail to see its changes, in much the same way that our closeness to our children obscures perception of their development." This affirms that language is not static but changes over time. The change is gradual in the sense that individuals of two subsequent generations can understand each other and can communicate without any constraints.

Generally, lexical change relates to the advancement of a language's vocabulary over time. It relates to a change in the structure of a language's lexicon, primarily, either by adding a new lexical item (word-formation) or by a loss of a lexical item, often referred to as "word death" (Mckay and Hernberger, 1996). This aspect of study does not require a great deal of explanation since a lot of researches have been carried out on this topic on English and other languages. The change in the language is not easily perceptible or obvious in day-to-day communication since people are not conscious about it. Mckay and Hernberger (1996:4) clearly observe that the varieties of English and neologisms used emerge in response to the communication needs of the users. In essence, a variety of a language does not develop in isolation; its development is dependent on the communicative needs of the users (Platt, Weber and Lian 1984: 87). This gives rise to the need to study the forms of a variety of English in consideration of their functions in the society (Jowitt, 1991; Millar and Trask, 2015).

Studies have shown that in lexical change, 1. new words are formed to accommodate new ideas, concepts or inventions, 2. existing words may acquire partial or total new meanings, 3. existing words may give way to new words with either extended or narrowed meanings, and 4. Existing words may go extinct (Saeed, 2003; Booij, 2012; Aronoff and Fudeman, 2011). The neologisms under study are formulated using existing rules of morphology which include conversions, coinages, hybridization, analogization, clipping, blending, compounding, affixation and acronymization (Haspelmath and Sims, 2010). Scholars note that language (lexical) change occurs in three situations: spontaneous change, borrowing and imposition. Spontaneity here explains the change over time, not on purpose but rather through interaction because "no two people speak exactly the same" (Jones and Esch, 2002: 123), and because people tend to adopt new words and utterances. Borrowing is the adoption of foreign features and new concepts in one's language, while imposition occurs either through colonisation or invasion by forcing the weaker communities to adopt another language, one aim being to eradicate their cultures. In this case, the youth and popular culture, social trends, technological advancement and globalization of the present time impose the new language on Gen-Z which inversely affects the language of other English speakers who directly or indirectly interact with them.

The vocabulary of a language has a strong impact on the language itself because it affects meaning directly and influences the social status of the speakers in a given speech community. Different terms may exist for a given item or concept within a given speech community but one main factor which may affect one's choice is age. For instance, Carver (1987) notes that 'a carbonated soft drink' might be called 'pop' in the inland North and West of the United States, 'soda' in the Northeast, 'tonic' in Eastern New England, and 'cold drink', 'drink' or 'dope' in various parts of the South, yet a generation chooses a particular term irrespective of their location (p.268). Although some sociolinguists argue that lexical differences do not strongly distinguish the socioeconomic classes of speakers but phonology and grammar, it is worth noting that language distinctness of social groups reflects strongly on their lexicon. This level of change spreads rapidly and regularly, therefo-

-re making the evolution the easiest to observe.

Generation Z and Language Use

Categorisation is a natural phenomenon; an automatic and unconscious human mental process of classifying events, actions, emotions, spatial relationships, social relationships and abstract entities. People also make categories of animals, objects and people (Lakoff, 1987:6). In essence, people are categorised based on age and period of birth, thus, people belong to a generation if they were born within a particular period. There is no fixed period of time; however, it is estimated that a generation lasts between a period of 15 and 20 years. The idea of generation is as old as life itself, however, in the recent time, philosophers, sociologists, linguists and psychologists developed modern framework around this concept. Renan (1882) discussed the concept of generation which over time was developed by authors such as Coupland (2009) in “Generation X” and Howe and Strauss (1996) in “The Fourth Turning” redefined and popularized the ideology of generation distinction. From 2000 to the present day, researchers keep refining and expanding the generational categories while adding new labels to it.

As an established generational category, Generation Z (1997-2012) is preceded by Generation X (1965-1980) and Millennials (1981-1996) while it precedes Generation Alpha (2013-2025) and an upcoming generation, Generation Beta (2026-2040). The exact year boundaries are not universally agreed upon since some researchers give slightly different year boundaries and labels. A number of life changing events came with the Generation Z individuals who grew up with the establishment of the internet, social media and smart phones which have shaped their behaviour, conceptualisation and most importantly, language. In a short period of time, the language of Generation Z has permeated the lexicon of other language users and the speed with which it spreads is what raises a concern for this study. The unique traits of this group of language users have impelled lexical innovation around diverse discourses and topics. Such traits include pragmatism, diversity, tech-savviness, entrepreneurial spirit and shorter attention span to taking in information. These and other qualities prompt the need for neologisms in order to address new perceived experiences and also replace fading concepts and experiences as well.

The remarkable feature of Gen-Z language is that some of the words come unnoticed and assume the form of an existing word or expression in English Language. In essence, they unconsciously use productive morphological rules to form neologisms and where morphological creativity is used to form neologisms, some features of morphological productivity such as unintentionality and rule-governed process are evident. One instance is the word, *steeze*. It is a fairly recent word which became a trend through social media in the last one year. *Steeze* was formed using a complex formation process of clipping and compounding, where the words *style* and *ease* are clipped to form a phonologically modified compound. This is a highly innovative process which achieves a morphophonological and morphosemantic word form that resonates with English speakers' lexicon. Furthermore, the sources of these neologisms make it easier for the words to trend and gain acceptance among users who in turn receive and use the words in order to display their sophistication and currency in terms of social trends. Some of these neologisms often emanate from existing words and phrases whose meanings are modified in distinctive ways, while some others emerge from music and rap lyrics, memes, social media platforms and chat forums, content creators, African American Vernacular English and other dialects, pop culture and shows as well as slang and colloquialisms. It is evident that most of the sources come from the Gen-Z interaction with technology and the global world.

Neologisms: Word Formation Processes in English

Morphological rules are universal although one may find some rules highly productive in one language than in another. One main goal of this research is to find out new morphological rule(s) or process(es) which Generation Z English speakers use in forming neologisms. Nevertheless, scholars such as Haspelmath and Sims (2010:33-39) identify affixation, compounding, base modification, reduplication and conversion as morphological patterns or rules, while Booij (2012:53-98) discusses derivation and compounding as word formation processes. However, other scholars such as Campbell (1999) and Aronoff and Fudeman (2010) discuss not just the derivational process but other examples of derivational processes such as conversions, coinages, hybridization, folk etymology (or reanalysis), clipping, calquing, blending, backformation,

compounding, affixation and acronymization. There are a few other word formation processes which are quite rare and uncommon, yet such forms exist in the language. These rules include:

Creations from nothing (Root creations)

Some words were created from nothing. Although it is a rare phenomenon, they are still recognized as words in the language they exist. Examples include *blurb* coined by Gelett Burgess. An American humorist, in 1907 and *gas* coined by a Dutch chemist, Helmont in 1632. *Paraffin* was invented by Reichenbach in 1830, *Pandemonium* from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 1667 and *yahoo* by Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, the name created for an imaginary race of brutes with human form.

Creations from personal names of individuals

Notable words are created from names of individuals who invented or formed them and this process, though not as productive, is an acceptable word formation process in human languages. Examples include: *macadam* named after John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836), *Sandwich* is named after John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich (1718-92) and *Volt* is named after Alessandro Volta, an Italian scientist and physician (1745-1827).

Creations from names of places

Some words are derived from names of places such as *canary* from Canary Islands, *currant* from Corinth, known for the old French raisins, *denim* from French serge (a woolen fabric) de Nîmes (a manufacturing town in southern France), *jeans* is named after Genoa, *peach* is formed from Persia and *tangerine* from Tangier, Morocco.

Other Word Formation Processes: Derivation

Derivation and compounding are the most prevalent word formation processes or morphological rules as described by Aronoff and Fudeman (2010), Booij (2012) and Haspelmath and Sims (2010). Derivation, as the name implies is a word formation process of forming a new word by modifying the root of an existing word in the language. The modification includes addition of morphemes, deletion of morphemes or altering of the shape of the root word. As listed below, each of the processes are used in forming neologisms based on their frequency of productivity. A rule is either more or less productive based on certain linguistic factors (Bauer, 2001). Affixation rule, for example, is more productive in English than reduplication, and within the affixation rule, some affixes tend to be more productive than others. Morphological productivity is not solely determined by language users, rather there are a number of types of constraints that limit productivity and may determine to what degree a particular rule is productive. These constraints can be phonological, semantic, syntactic or morphological. Aronoff and Fudeman (2010) and Haspelmath and Sims (2010) identify blocking as another type of constraint on productivity. They explain that when two expressions that are semantically related exist in a language, one is potential while the other is actual word. There is a restriction when the actual word prevents (or blocks) the potential word from existing or functioning. However, based on the productivity factor, neologisms are formed using the following derivative processes:

Affixation: This is the process of adding affixes (prefix or suffix) to words to form new words. Ex. Dis + able = Disable.

Compounding: This is the process of combining two or more words to form a new word. Ex. Screw + driver = screwdriver.

Blending: This involves combining parts of two words to form a new word. Motor + Hotel = Motel.

Conversion: This is also called Zero derivation. This process changes a word from one class to another without changing its form or meaning. Ex. Heart (Noun) to Heart (Verb)

Clipping: This is done by shortening a word to create a new word. Ex. Gymnasium = gym.

Back-formation: This rule involves removal of affixes in a word to form a new word. Ex. Driver and drive

Acronym: This process realizes a new word from the initials of a phrase. Ex. Portable Document Format = PDF

Calquing: Calquing (also known as loan translation) is a source of new words formation through direct translation of words in an existing language. Ex. Sweet tongue – flattery

Semantic shift: This process changes word meaning over time without changing its form. This change in meaning occurs in various ways: broadening, narrowing, metaphorical extension, metonymy, perjoration (word assumes a negative meaning) or semantic bleaching (word assumes weaker or less intense meaning).

Neologism and Creativity

In principle, inasmuch as flexibility is allowed in language use, language is not used outside of the grammar of the target language. In essence, every word formation in English is done within the grammar of English, thus the speakers use available morphological rules specific to the language to form neologisms. We have mentioned that some of these rules are used more than others in forming new words, where the most used rule is said to be more productive than the less used rules. When a rule is highly productive, neologisms formed using that rule go almost unnoticed by language users (Haspelmath and Sims, 2010:116). *-less*, for example is highly productive and has less constraints in combining with words, for example, *hopeless*, *armless*, *koboless*, *commaleless*, where the last two words are possible/potential words which are formed unconsciously and unintentionally.

On the contrary, creative neologisms are always intentional formations using unproductive patterns (ibid, 2010:116). It is fundamental to note that although creative forms are intentional and conscious, it is rule-governed. Haspelmath and Sims (2010) cite an example of a creative formation, *mentalese*, where the user makes use of an unproductive rule (*-ese in motherese, computerese*), considered the phonological constraint (a conscious effort) which excludes other possible formations such as *thoughtese* or *mindese*, thus leading to an intentional word form, *mentalese*. By implication, we have established a clear difference between productivity and creativity, where on the one hand, productive neologisms are often formed unintentionally and unconsciously and consequently, the words formed tend to be transparent. On the other hand, creative neologisms most of the time are opaque and are consciously and intentionally created.

Factors that promote Gen-Z lexical innovation

Numerous neologisms are attributed to Generation Z English users and the curiosity led to this study. In essence, copious new words are accredited to the innovations of this generation of language users and the rate at which the words spread across speakers of diverse generations are also the concern of this research. This section discusses issues that prompt the explosion of lexical items and the enabling factors which help in the spread of these neologisms.

The pre industrial age and the 19th century experienced language change and the factors that influenced language change include industrialization, urbanization, colonialism and imperialism, migration and immigration, language contact, language purification and transportation revolution among others. These factors are dissimilar from the factors of lexical change and innovation in the information age, thus affirming the validity of Gen-Z neologisms. Major factors that influenced the 21st century lexical innovation include globalization due to increased international communication, technology which has given birth to a world of internet and mobile devices, social media where the language of communication is heavily reformed with abbreviations, emojis and informality. Another factor centers on culture shift where language needs to express the new and reformed culture of the new generation. Last is social power and identity. Today's language is a reflection of one's social status and social identity. A survey carried out on the neologisms of Gen-Z showed that older English speakers either have not encountered those words or are not in tune with the new meaning of the words.

Furthermore, in the aspect of dispersing these neologisms, social media platforms and features have played

substantial role in making these neologisms available to users over a short period of time. Features such as hashtag (#), mention (@), tags, memes and platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat shape communication styles. These make words viral trends which quickly spread among social media users. These features break geographical and social barriers, thus connecting every user to a given subject. More so, the virtual world has strong communication networks that enable trends such as new language or neologisms, in this case. This is corroborative evidence for Gen-Z neologisms since people with similar interest in terms of social media contents are likely to have access to common subjects.

Theoretical framework: Lexical Diffusion Theory

Lexical Diffusion Theory followed the lead of Wang (1969) where he explains the gradual spread of new words within the social side of language (Joseph, 2012). Following his footsteps, other contributors such as Lass (1984), Traugott (1989), Bybee (2001), Croft (2000) and Michaelis (2004) expand and refine the theory of Lexical Diffusion. The theory accounts for how new words, meanings and pronunciations spread through a language, how the new words are adopted in the language and how they gradually replace the old words. The theory recognises that language has both the psychological (cognitive) and social (communal) sides. In making sense of this, we realise that although it is individuals who speak the language, they speak to other persons who in turn speak to several persons who speak the language in every group, circle, class and other socially defined groups of speakers. Similarly, each of these speakers spread the language within the psychological dimension of the language learning and acquisition and among generations of speakers (see Labov, 2007:346, Joseph, 2012:425). This theory affects all levels of linguistics and gives description on those areas such as language change, dialectology, language acquisition, language teaching, sociolinguistics and historical linguistics.

METHODOLOGY

Sources of data: Data were collected from the following sources: i. online chats and conversations of young adults aged between 15 and 30 years. This age bracket falls within the generation of speakers under study. ii. Social media survey where a post requested followers (most are below 40 years) to identify Gen-Z words and their meanings. These sources were helpful: first, over 80 different words were realised from the sources and second, this group of speakers is comfortable with the words which the older users are not conversant with either in form, meaning or both. This is confirmed in the Facebook comments where 'commenters' who admitted to be above 45 years of age could not identify or use the neologisms in sentences.

Sampling technique: A purposive non-probability sampling technique was used in selecting units to serve as the research data. The responses on the researchers' Facebook post elicited over 80 words which include repeated forms. However, 50 distinct words based on their concreteness were selected for this study.

Analytical procedure: This study requires a descriptive (qualitative) analysis; therefore it provides a morphological and semantic analysis of the neologisms, putting into consideration the possible sources or root of the neologisms. The focus is first on the morphological process(es) involved in the words and then, a semantic explanation is offered to support the words' existence. Every word that makes up the data is active in the language of Generation Z. Although they are not placed in any order, each of the neologisms passed a frequency test designed to find out the transmission and diffusion strength of the selected words.

Data presentation

In no particular order, below is a list of neologisms selected for study based on their formation processes.

- i. **Blending:** steeze, finsta, stan, vibecheck
- ii. **Conversion:** outside, slaps, gucci, snatched, giving, curve, ghost, woke (woke)
- iii. **Semantic shift:** sick, woke, breakfast, mad, thirsty, slay, plug, salty, ate, cap, drip, cringe, lit (woke)

- iv. **Compounding:** rent-free, hit differently, sleep on, hookup, lowkey, glow up, vibe check
- v. **Clipping:** fam, sus, simp, opp, cray, ment
- vi. **Affixation:** retweet, unfollow, unfriend
- vii. **Acronymisation:** FOMO, YOLO, GOAT, BRB, BTW, LOML, IMO,
- viii. **Borrowing:** savage, tea

Data Analysis

The words are categorised based on their formation processes. The analysis includes explanation of their formation processes and their attendant meaning where a word assumes a new meaning.

Blending

The first category of words, *steeze*, *finsta*, *stan* and *vibe-check* is formed using the morphological process of blending. These are a blend of the words where some of the words come with spelling modification.

Steeze = "style" and "ease": It encapsulates a way of being stylish in an effortless, authentic manner, in line with a generational philosophy.

Finsta = "fake" and "Instagram": It describes an alternative Instagram account which is different from the main or real Instagram account (Rinsta).

Stan = "stalker" and "fan": This refers to an enthusiastic fan or overzealous supporter.

Vibecheck = "vibration/atmosphere" and "check": This expression means to evaluate or check the atmosphere or emotional tone of people or environment. It is also discussed as a compound.

Conversion

The words found under this morphological process are *outside*, *slaps*, *gucci*, *snatched*, *giving*, *curve*, *ghost* and *woke*. These words exist in English; however, the new usage changes the class of these words.

Outside: This is previously a preposition. The younger generation assigns the word to the adjective class to denote a quality. The expression, "*David's wedding was outside*", means that the occasion was impressive, extraordinary or exceptional. In other usage, "*we're outside*" does not necessarily give information regarding "where" but "what" we are doing.

Slaps: This is a deverbal adjective. The new word has the plural form of *slap* as its root, *slaps* and it does not take affixes. The meaning moved from the verbal class of physical impact to the adjective class to mean exceptional, impressive, shocking or authentic. Example: "This country's situation today *slaps*."

Gucci: This is a name of a highly rated Italian designer brand. The new meaning of good, authentic or excellent is assigned to the word making it a denominal adjective. Example: "My mom's Christmas fried rice is *gucci*."

Snatched: Originally, *snatched* denotes a physical action of force and compulsion. This makes the word a verb. The new meaning assigned to the word qualifies it as a deverbal adjective since it is used to qualify noun as impeccable, fashionable or fit. Example: "Adrielle looks *snatched* in her wedding dress."

Giving: This is similar to *snatched* above as the participle form of the verb is also used as adjective complement of a subject noun as in "That car is *giving*" to express admiration of style, beauty or aesthetic qualities. *Giving* is also a deverbal adjective. It will be good to use it in a sentence.

Curve: The word, *curve* is both nominal and verbal, and they denote a sense of deviation from being straight. This sense is drawn metaphorically to express the action of rejecting, avoiding or ignoring someone either directly or indirectly with a change of behaviour. *Curve* is considered a deverbal verb since it changes its word class, nevertheless, it may also be considered a semantic shift. Example: I didn't want any discussion, so I curved her.

Ghost: The new word, "ghost" is a denominal verb similar in meaning to *curve*. We ghost people when we avoid them physically or virtually. However, actual ghosting is done when one avoids or does not respond to someone else's calls, messages or chats. Example: my ex-wife ghosted me for 6 months.

Woke: *Woke* which is the past tense of "wake" assumes a new word through the process of conversion. It is a deverbal adjective which means to be socially aware or enlightened. Example: Tatcher is a woke leader.

Semantic shift

The following neologisms are existing English word forms whose meaning changes either by extension, narrowing or a metaphorical extension, metonymy, pejoration or semantic bleaching. They include *sick, woke, breakfast, mad, thirsty, slay, plug, salty, ate, cap, drip, cringe* and *lit*. Below are the new meanings of the identified words:

I suggest that for each of the words listed below, the existing dictionary meaning should be given before stating the new meaning

Sick: **Conceptual meaning:** *Affected by physical or mental illness*

New meaning - Impressive or exceptional

Semantic shift type: Opposition and Meaning extension

Comment: Good health which is opposite in meaning to sick(ness) has its meaning extended to other aspects of life engagement that is exceptional (successful). Example: The grammar class was sick!

Woke: **New meaning** - Socially aware, enlightened

Semantic shift type - Meaning extension

Comment: *Woke*, past tense of wake is extended to mean being aware (awake) of social life activities and engagements. However, the neologism is used only in the past form and as an adjectival class. Example: Alex has become more woke after he was duped by his friend.

Breakfast: **New meaning** - End of a relationship

Semantic shift type: Metaphorical extension

Comment: Just like a meal, one serves breakfast to a partner when s/he expresses an intention to end an active relationship. Example: She will serve her fiancé breakfast if she gets to know his real personality.

Mad: **New meaning** – Impressive or exceptional

Semantic shift type: Opposition and Meaning extension

Comment: The new meaning is understood as the opposite of the original word, *mad*. One has to be sane to impress or be exceptional. In addition, the word refers to meaning beyond mental health to other human activities. Example: The concert attendance was mad!

Thirsty: **New meaning** - Desperate for attention or validation

Semantic shift type: Metaphorical extension

Comment: Thirst is a desire to drink something and it is often an urge one cannot ignore. There is an existing metaphorical expression, power thirst which means a strong desire for power. The word is a neologism used by young speakers to mean desperation to get people's attention or validation. It may also be used for a clingy person. Example: She's being thirsty about meeting the new Commander-in-Chief.

Slay: **New meaning** - Excel, dominate or exceptionally looking good

Semantic shift type: Opposition

Comment: The original sense of "slay" is a physical violence or destruction usually with an instrument. In the new sense, *slay* expresses an opposite meaning of excellence or looking gorgeous. The word is used in its different verb forms. Example: (1) The girl slayed the recitation. (2) Angel is slaying in her palazzo and crop top attire. (3) I'll slay in my friend's wedding.

Plug: **New meaning** - Connect, promote, Contact or provide

Semantic shift type: Meaning extension

Comment: The nominal and verbal senses of this word are extended to refer to a contact, an individual or group who is capable of providing goods or services. Example: (1) She plugged me to her hair vendor. (2) Mariata is my perfume plug.

Ate: **New meaning** - Totally impressed, outperformed or succeeded

Semantic shift type: Meaning extension

Comment: the neologism has the notion of consumption (eating) based on being impressed by a factor or outdoing oneself or another in a given situation. It also relays the sense of being successful. The present and participle forms are not used in the new meaning and context determines a given meaning within the same sense. Example: She ate her final exams like candy.

Salty: **New meaning** - Resentful, negative, loser or bitter

Semantic shift type: Metaphorical extension

Comment: In relation to taste, salty refers to excessive use of salt in food which gives out an unfavourable and displeasing taste. This suggests the meaning transference of salty to human behaviour or attitude to mean negativity, resentment or bitterness. Example: She's being unnecessarily salty about losing the contract.

Cap: **New meaning** - Lie, falsehood or exaggeration

Semantic shift type: Metaphorical extension

Comment: Embellishments, decorative frills and clothing accessories are perceived as fashion exaggerations or falsehood. Cap enhances (exaggerates) fashion and style, as such young generation of users extends the meaning of cap as an embellishment, dishonesty or falsehood (lie). Example: (1) Harry is capping because I've not seen him drive a car. (2) I mean what I said, no cap. (3) The auditor needs to cap the figures if he wants some returns.

Drip: **New meaning** - Style, luxury or confidence

Semantic shift type: Metaphorical extension

Comment: *Drip* is mostly used to describe a person's classy lifestyle, luxurious fashion and personality. An awesome and quality dressing is said to drip and a confident appearance drips as well. Example: Her jewelry

drips! It must have cost her a fortune.

Cringe: **New meaning** - Embarrassing or unacceptable

Semantic shift type: Meaning extension

Comment: The actual meaning of “cringe” is intact although it is used in adjectival sense rather than the original verbal feature. However, in the neologism, the feeling or the quality of *cringe* is extended from human EXPERIENCER to nonhuman and inanimate objects. Example: (1) Apocalypso is cringe; I couldn’t watch it till the end. (2) That soup cringe. No one ate it. (3) You’re being cringe, relax and feel at home.

Lit: **New meaning** - exciting or exceptional

Semantic shift type: Meaning extension

Comment: *Lit* here is past tense and past participle of “light”. The extended meaning of the neologism expresses excitement and fun activities. The verb is used in adjectival form in the new meaning. Example: This year’s Speech and Prize-giving Day was lit!

Compounding

This set of neologisms is formed using the compound rule. Just like other compounds, a unit is made up of two words. The peculiarities here are that first, these compounds have non-literal meaning, therefore functioning as metaphors or idioms. Second, the compound members already exist in English either as a single word or compound; however, the new usage qualifies them as neologisms. The new words are *rent-free*, *hit differently*, *sleep on*, *hookup*, *low key*, *glow up* and *vibe check*.

Rent-free – This is a transparent word whose usage is extended to a metaphorical meaning. The idea of an occupant paying rent for a space is transferred to objects, ideas or thoughts occupying a space in the mind or physical space. Example: The trending music is living rent-free in my head.

Hit differently – This phrase is used as a compound word to express a unique effect of a given action. This is considered a compound because none of the members can be replaced with their synonyms to mean the same. Example: It hits differently when the leader sings the song.

Sleep on: This compound presents as phrasal verb and it is an antonym of “sleep over”. To sleep on is to ignore, delay or underestimate someone or something. I have to sleep on her threat; she’s a toothless bulldog.

Hookup: This is another phrasal verb used as a compound word. It is used as verb, noun and adjective classes. The novelty lies in its usage to mean connecting or introducing one to another, assisting someone with something or have a casual sexual encounter, often for monetary gain. Example: (1) She does hookup for a living (noun). (2) They act like hookup girls (adjective). (3) Let’s hook up for a drink.

Low key: This compound is used to express a minimalist feeling, opinion or thought about something or someone. It often states one’s quiet, subtle or insignificant judgment of an action or person. It does not in any way expresses negation of an attribute. Example: I’m low key smart. This means that I am obviously intelligent but not loud about it, and not necessarily a suboptimal level of intelligence. This word is paired with “high key” as its antonym.

Glow up: This compound (also a phrasal verb) extends the meaning to a noun and adjective to mean an improved quality, becoming successful or confident. Example: (1) After her marriage, her glow up is startling (noun). (2) The minister has glowed up since he assumed office (verb). (3) What’s behind her glowed up confidence (adjectival)?

Vibe-check: “Vibration” and “check” are combined to form the word. It has been discussed as a blend based on its formation process of blending. This word is used to estimate the emotional tone or over all energy which

people or environment exudes. Example: My vibe check on the dancers shows they are high.

Clipping

The use of shortened word forms is a unique feature of Generation Z English users. This includes forming acronyms of phrases and clipping words. The following words are clipped from existing words: *fam*, *sus*, *simp*, *opp*, *cray* and *ment*. The meanings are almost the same with those of the original words with a slight modification in some of the words.

Fam – This is a short form of “family”. It is also used to address close friends.

Sus – It is a short form of “suspicious”. It is used to express skepticism or uncertainly.

Simp – This is clipped from “simpleton”. The word is used for someone who presses hard to impress someone else.

Opp – This is a shortened form of “opponent”.

Cray – It is formed from “crazy”. It maintains the same meaning of being intense or exciting.

Ment – It is cropped from “mentality” to express mindset or attitude. It also means crazy, wild or unbelievable. This qualifies as a neologism since it is also extended to inanimate things such as events. Example: The music night was ment!

Acronymisation

There is a large number of acronyms formed by this set of language user. They are profusely used on social media chats, posts and comments to fit their communication styles and cultural contexts. They include BRB (be right back), LOML (love of my life), BTW (by the way), FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), YOLO (You Only Live Once), GOAT (Greatest of All Time), IMO (In My Opinion)

Affixation

The advent of social media such as Facebook, Twitter (X) and Instagram from 2004 launched the following neologisms: retweet, unfollow, unfriend to suit the activities happening on the platforms. Here, the prefixes *re-* and *un-* are used in their original meaning; however, one striking feature is combining *un-* and a noun (*un* + *friend* = *unfriend*) to express action. The prefix *un-* is used with verb and adjective to form the corresponding negative words.

Borrowing

Borrowing is a common way of adding words to the vocabulary of a language. These two words were found in the data.

Savage: This is borrowed from older English slang but with a new connotation of being brutally honest or tough.

Tea: This is borrowed from drag culture, meaning gossip or news.

DISCUSSION

This is a morphosemantic study of 50 neologisms which were presented for this study. These new words were formed using existing morphological rules such as Blending (4), Conversion (8), Semantic shift (13), Compounding (7), Clipping (6), Acronymization (7), Affixation (3) and Borrowing (2). These words were produced from existing words in the English Language; however, they are used in a new form, and given a new meaning or a new context. This supports Booij’s (2012) notion of lexical innovation as against the notion

of lexical change since what actually happens in the language system is a revamp or reconstruction of the existing language and not necessarily a new creation of language. Thus, Saussure (1916) explains that this innovation moves from the point of reconstruction (an individual or group) down to other language users (social aspect).

Some words fall under more than one morphological process. For instance, *vibe check* is formed using both blending and compounding. Thus this group of users makes use of complex processes to form neologisms.

In the words formed using the conversion rule, for example, there are elements of intentionality and consciousness and this feature make these neologisms unique. This feature offers an explanation to the overlap between productivity and creativity as presented by Haspelmath and Sims (2010:116-7) and Bauer (2001). In essence, there is a third category in forming neologisms in language. This happens when the speaker intentionally and consciously uses existing morphological rule to form a new word which in turn may be opaque or transparent. Consider the new meaning of *outside*, *slaps*, *snatched*, *giving*, *curve* and *woke* in comparison to their earlier meaning, one would establish that the words are formed out of creative thought (metaphor) and reasoning.

The Semantic shift rule had more words (13/50) than other rules. Out of the existing types of Semantic shift rule mentioned earlier (meaning extension, narrowing, metaphorical extension, metonymy, pejoration and semantic bleaching) (Aronoff and Fudeman, 2010), these neologisms expressed meaning extension (5), metaphorical extension (5) opposition (1) and a complex rule of metaphorical extension and opposition (2). Apart from this particular rule, Generation Z neologisms are resplendent with opposite meanings which mark it out as a distinct language feature. Comparing the new meaning of *slay*, *sick*, *mad*, *slap* and *snatched* to the existing meaning indicates oppositeness.

Findings:

The following are the findings from this study:

- i. There are neologisms formed by Generation Z users of English which are innovations from the existing words in the language.
- ii. The neologisms are formed using productive rules, creative forms and a combination of both processes, this providing the third category in word formation.
- iii. Opposition is a new process found within Semantic shift rule.
- iv. Some neologisms are formed using complex morphological processes.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified and examined those neologisms which became active in the language in the last 15 years and it has noted that morphological processes of most of the new words are in line with the existing rules although a few are realised using complex processes. The novelty of some of these words lies both in the new meaning which they have acquired and in their usage. In essence, the Generation Z users of English have made a strong contribution to English lexicon both on social media and in everyday informal conversation. This has in turn established a variety of language that is common to young users and active social media users and this variety of language in a way divides speakers along social the lines.

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